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STATE SENATOR

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Welcome Back to School!

With the passing of Labor Day, it's hard to believe summer is almost over.

As September begins and fall sports start their seasons, students return to the classroom. I can still remember the excitement and anticipation of going back to school. To all of our students, welcome back to school!

While I'm sure you'll miss the warmth and freedom of summer, the new school year brings opportunities. Take this time to make new friends and find activities you will grow to love.

You'll find as you try new activities that some may go better than others, and that's okay.

For instance, when I was in high school, I attempted to play sports. It did not work out too well in baseball or basketball. So, I became the public address announcer, "The voice of the Mustangs," for all our school sports. It was fun! And importantly, it gave me opportunities to grow and be involved.

Your return to school also brings the opportunity to learn about new topics and find your passion. My love of history, especially local history, was first uncovered in middle school through a seventh grade class trip where I toured the Villa Louis in Prairie du Chien and learned about Fort Crawford. It was through high school agriculture classes, particularly FFA, that a teacher told me I had leadership potential. I was a sophomore, 16 years old, when I first read John Steinbeck and the novel *Of Mice and Men*.

As the cornerstone of our communities, schools allow students to grow, discover, and build character. Their importance goes beyond just education. We need to invest in our schools; we need to invest in our kids.

As a state, we have increased funding for schools over the past year, but there is more work to be done. As we all know, what's good for our kids is good for our state.

To prepare our students for their future, we need to focus on closing achievement gaps and improving reading scores. Getting students the dedicated, individualized help they need, coupled with support for school reading specialists can make a positive difference in a student's education journey.

We also need to acknowledge that no two students are alike; creating opportunities for students of all skills and interests will benefit our kids and our future workforce. By making university or tech college courses and apprenticeships more available to students, we give them the chance to learn outside of the typical course of education.

At the same time, it is vital that we find solutions to keep educators in the profession and recognize the challenges of becoming a teacher. Whether it is through compensation for student teaching or supporting new teachers through dedicated mentorship programs, we need to improve efforts to attract and retain teachers.

Parents act as the first teacher for any student, and it is important that we recognize the value of their input and thoughts as we address the challenges kids face in education.

To the teachers and parents who continue to help our children reach their full potential, we are grateful and thank you. To all the students, I'm confident that you will rise to the challenges and opportunities this school year brings. Have a great school year!

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Senator Brad Pfaff represents the 32nd Senate District, which includes La Crosse, Vernon, Crawford, and southern Monroe County.