

Good Afternoon, my name is Jim Dillin and I am the High School Principal for the Mauston School District. This will complete my 24th year coaching or teaching in public schools. I coached football while in college at my alma mater, Fort Atkinson High School. Since October of 1995, I have been an educator for the Mauston School District. For the first 17 years as a Social Science teacher, coach and advisor. I was honored to be hired as the Principal in August of 2012. This year my wife and I added a new hat. We are the proud parents of a Kindergarten with an outstanding teacher named Ms. Karry Reichs in the Mauston School District. My wife graduated from Mauston High School and currently serves as the Dean of Students and Athletic Director in the Necedah School District. I hope you enjoyed the tour of Mauston High School this morning. I am extremely proud of the students, staff, parents and community I have been a part of for most of my adult life.

I shared with you a little history about my family because we believe in public education and the possibilities that exist in rural schools. With the current state of finances, mandates at all levels, and in many cases an eroding lack

of local control, I believe the great things that are going on in our school district, and across the State, are in danger. The atmosphere and pride of being in education has taken, and continues to take, some major blows. I have written too many letters of recommendation in my last eighteen months as Principal for teachers who are looking for something else. As I try to recruit some of my students who I believe can be great teachers, I am met with “why would I want to do that.” When Mr. Kneiart, my 8th grade Science teacher approached me about entering teaching almost 30 years ago, I thought that was one of the greatest professions a person could enter. My father agreed as well even though he struggled to get through high school. The challenges facing all schools, especially rural schools demand creative people willing to discuss with all stakeholders, especially teachers and students, what is best for kids. We own our weaknesses and understand there is work to be done. We accept that. However, it is only by creating working partnerships with all stakeholders within the State of Wisconsin that we can continue to be leaders in education. I do not believe you can truly understand any career or job until you walk in the shoes of those that are in the field. I hope

I shared some of those stories today at Mauston High School and continue to share in this testimony.

My pride in our school is based on the fact that I think many in the State of Wisconsin overlook students in rural settings. Yet, data will suggest we have many students and teachers competing at the highest levels in many areas. Our students made it to the Academic Decathlon State Tournament last year for the first time in the history of the school. This accomplishment was reached despite competing against some schools that have resources that are unavailable to our students because of our location and limited resources. I have a dedicated staff member, Ms. Karen Hable, who uses every tool in her tool box to engage and enrich the students in this student organization which is composed of students with all types of grade point averages. I have a Band Director, Mr. Roger Spindler, who is one of the best in the State of Wisconsin. The support of the community, the numbers in his program and the accolades our program receives are comparable to high schools larger than ours. We have on our staff the 2010 State of Wisconsin Teacher of Year, Ms. Leah Luke. She employs cutting edge teaching

methods and students consistently perform well in placement tests at the college level. Her work has spanned the country in her role as a 2011 Teacher Fellow with the United States Department of Education. Mr. Chris Lavold, English Teacher, was a fellow at the Folgers Shakespeare Library Teaching Institute in Washington DC in 2010 and Mr. Carney Lentz, English teacher, just completed work as part of the Greater Madison Writers Workshop this summer. This is just a small sample from the high school level but I have seen this talent in all of our buildings. It began with a Principal a number of years ago hiring people who were willing to focus on kids, identify strategies to help pay for these programs and being able to support the program directly affects the learning of kids, long before the word data was en vogue. The problem I face today when teachers, students and parents want to discuss programming is I have no way to financially support what they would like to do for kids in many cases. As a lifelong educator, that hurts.

My fear is this. Boosters or larger districts with more resources will begin to recruit our teachers. Rural and smaller schools will train teachers only to see smaller

districts treated like minor leagues. Top talent will see more money and most rural school districts cannot afford this type of race.

With the best talent, teachers in any school can begin to focus on really individualizing the learning for students. Programs like our ILead Charter School, our ROADS program and the Freshmen Academy to name a few, all began because of the dedication of individual staff, localized control with our school board, and support from our community to analyze the needs of our students and families and develop programs which best fit the needs of those students. But once you break down the terms and details, it is all about the learning that takes place from great teachers. What may work for us, may not work for another district. It entails a commitment to being your best that entails financial sacrifice and long, long hours to ensure everyone has a quality education. Without the proper resources, eventually those types of efforts cannot be sustained for a number of reasons. As my son enters public education in Mauston, I see these efforts being promoted by administrators and teachers at all levels. The

improvement in services for our kids is due to dedicated professionals that put kids first. The tricky part is being able to attract, keep and retain high qualified professionals in areas, like math and science, that are one hour away from higher populated areas.

I would like to share the personalized approach we try to use as well as the struggles. First, math and science offerings and achievement are forefront when we look at preparing our students to compete with students from larger communities and a global marketplace. Trends show us that health related professions are in great demand so educating our kids in the basics of those areas is important. In rural districts, places for professional development such as universities make it difficult to attract and retain the best teachers in these high sought after areas. Last year, I lost an exceptional young teacher to a bigger district. Only three years into the profession, he was someone that changed lives and obtained high student achievement. With the budgets and the spending formulas set as they are and the rules of funding that are in place, I did not have any tools in order to keep him.

In many discussions with him, his professional goals included adding Advanced Placement courses. Our budgets as well as mandates from the state and federal government did not allow for these types of courses to be created. If rural schools want to give our kids the best opportunity to compete for entrance in top tier universities, these types of offerings must be available. The JEDI Virtual School and our distance learning network give us options but at an additional cost to the district. When you get to certain parts of our county, high speed or, internet at all, is not possible. This would limit some students from accessing the necessary tools they need to be successful in the evening. I will also argue that when students are given the opportunity to learn with a teacher in a classroom, the results for many improve due to the relationship that is built. A number of years ago, Mauston High School joined a consortium of schools, including the Royall School District, to offer Advanced Placement classes over a cable network. As the technology has advanced, the replacement of the equipment is needed in order to continue to facilitate these opportunities for our students. This is an additional

cost that will not go away. The goal is really to have these types of opportunities in the school.

Ms. Laura Taake, our AP Psychology teacher, has grown her program from 7 students three years ago to 16 students this year. Our plan is to encourage students taking online Advanced Placement courses until we can financially support the class with a teacher in the building. Seven students in a class can not be sustainable given the other demands for graduation but we needed to start somewhere to see if we could work it out.

According to the DPI website for the 2011-2012 school year, Mauston had 11 of 17 tests scored with a 3 or above. This was with only 2 classes taught in the building: AP Calculus and AP Psychology. The majority of the students were in online or distance learning offerings.

This coming spring we will be offering an additional class in AP English Literature. In the spring of 2012, Mauston High School had one of only four students in the world to earn a perfect score on the Advanced Placement Exam in Government and Politics, 2012 alum Mr. Brock Huebner. He is currently a sophomore at the University of Chicago. Mauston High School would like to offer more Advanced

Placement classes or build more articulated class offerings with area technical colleges and two year colleges so college credit can be earned while still in high school.

Here is the catch. Many staff use secondary jobs in the summer for financial support. They cannot give up supporting their families in order to get the training in order to teach a class they know will benefit kids. This kind of dilemma is something teachers and administrators struggle with a daily basis. It is a constant point of discussion with our staff as they want to offer more things to kids because they know they need it but have responsibilities at home as well. Although, once again, we continue to move forward.

At Mauston High School, we pride ourselves in having many pathways for graduation. Beginning with our Freshmen Academy, a team of teachers, administration and staff in partnership with families begin to examine data and discuss with each other how each student will be the most successful in their secondary education. The Freshmen Academy consists of teachers in social science and English that work together with a group of freshmen

for the entire first semester. A special education teacher may be used in this team to support all students in a Co-teaching model. Every freshman is in this model.

For the majority of our students, a general diploma may be what best serves them as they begin their life after high school. Within that general diploma, our students may choose to follow a trade route. We are proud of the Construction class that Mr. Randy Fabian, area contractors and businesses, and local individuals have created to allow our students to build or remodel a house each year. We are now partnering with Habitat for Humanity and building a house that will help a family in need. The costs for this very worthwhile project do not lessen each year. Yet, how many times has someone wished, “if I could only fix this, I would not have to spend more money.” ILead Charter school may be an option when the students needs are based in more project based learning. Our competency based ROADS program may be used when student needs dictate an alternative based program while still meeting the curriculum of the general population. We may work the family to engage the student in entering the Challenge Academy located

on Fort McCoy for those students who have struggled with personal issues, academic performance or attendance. GEDO II, or General Equivalency Diploma option II, allows us to support students who may be looking to drop out or we have brought back after dropping out. Our latest program to meet the needs of our students is the Mauston Virtual School supported by JEDI from CESA 2. This program supports our students who look towards online learning as way to reach their post secondary goals. It also supports many of our Advanced Placement students as well as individualized learners in areas we can no longer staff. This unique approach to education allows us to continue to strive towards our goal of a 100% graduation rate from Mauston High School while following the State mandated guidelines for graduation and any state testing that must given for that particular group.

We offer a great education for many of our students and we work every day to improve what we do. The struggle we have is trying to maintain this well rounded programming so the needs of each individual student can be offered options. We cannot continue to say

education needs to address the needs of all students but then not support the resources and ideas that make that happen.

I have often heard an answer like this: “decisions have to be made because you cannot have every educational opportunity for your kids.” That answer strikes at the very core of who I am as an educator and a father of a 5 year old and two and half year old. My parents believed in a simple goal that they wanted my life a little better for me than they had. This all begins with a great public education, staffed with highly trained professional teachers like I had in the Fort Atkinson School District and I believe my kids will have in the Mauston School District. I believe that rural education offers those opportunities. Without a complete commitment to the value that every student deserves this opportunity, I am afraid of what the future will hold for my kids. I would like to thank you for your time today.

Does anyone have any questions for me?