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Virtually educated makes grade

By Karl Peterson, Superior Telegram

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For those of you who may have missed it, the Wisconsin Legislature's auditors recently issued a report that, we believe, is an incredible step forward in supporting Wisconsin's public education system.

The auditors concluded that Wisconsin's online education system is working well; it is a great value for taxpayers; and parents highly approve of our online schools.

At Insight School of Wisconsin, we're extremely encouraged by the report. It allows our lawmakers, educators, school board members, parents and students to see online schools for exactly what we are: An enormously important addition to Wisconsin's education system and a viable option for students who need a high-quality, flexible learning experience.

Insight School of Wisconsin is an accredited online school that offers students more than 120 online courses, ranging from German to AP Calculus. Our students, working from home at their own pace and place, are provided with a computer and a personal mentor as well as daily online access to our state-certified teachers.

We know online education isn't for everyone. The Legislative Audit Bureau's report shows we're educating less than one-tenth of one percent of Wisconsin's school children and for that reason we're certainly no threat to traditional schools.

But it is a wonderful alternative for students who need greater flexibility, whether pursuing careers in athletics or the arts or balancing family commitments. It's also an option for students who have struggled socially in a traditional school or who can't attend school due to a physical condition or illness.

With technology exploding and the use of electronic communication skyrocketing, the world is now our classroom.

Kids are comfortable with the latest technology and are accustomed to communicating and learning online. In fact, data suggests that about 50 percent of courses in 2019 will be delivered online. That's one of the reasons state auditors predict that Wisconsin will reach its 5,250-pupil statutory limit on virtual schools within the next few years.

The report also found:

I Parents strongly support online education. Nine in 10 parents said they approved of the job we're doing.

I Our teachers are certified by the state – and as qualified to teach as our public brick and mortar professional peers.

I Our students succeed at rates equal to public schools, scoring higher in reading and comparable in math.

I We're a good value for taxpayers. Online schools are significantly more efficient and flexible than a traditional brick and mortar school.

The audit called for a number of recommendations including more analysis of online curriculum and continued evaluation of student performance. We welcome those recommendations. We want parents to be able to fully compare what our schools can do for their children compared to other schools.

We know a virtual education is an excellent alternative for some students. It is an added tool, not a threat, for public schools. It is something heavily favored by President Obama and the U.S. Secretary of Education.

We are encouraging lawmakers, school officials, parents and school boards to embrace online education as a wonderful educational addition in a state that prides itself on its educational quality.

Karl Peterson is executive director of Insight School of Wisconsin, a full-time, diploma-granting online public high school that works in partnership with the Grantsburg School District. To learn more, call 866-800-0027 or visit www.insightwi.net.

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