



SCOTT WALKER

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

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Every Student Matters: Rural K-12 Schools Win Big in Governor Walker's Budget Proposal

Sparsity, transportation aids reach all-time high in Governor Walker's plan

Madison - Governor Scott Walker today announced he will provide greater state support for Wisconsin's rural schools through sparsity and transportation aids in his state budget proposal. Under Governor Walker's plan, the funding for sparsity and transportation aids will reach an all-time high. Governor Walker also plans to increase investments in broadband and technology grants, make it easier for school districts to recruit teachers, and provide additional flexibilities. He will travel to Wauzeka-Steuben School District, Hilbert School District, and Crandon School District to make the announcement. Governor Walker also plans to visit Stanley-Boyd School District tomorrow afternoon to highlight these investments.

"Every student matters, and there's no doubt that Wisconsin's rural school districts face unique challenges," Governor Walker said. "Our reforms are working in Wisconsin, and it's because they are working that we are able to make greater investments into our education system. I call it the 'reform dividend.' This increase in funding will provide greater stability for our rural school districts. We also plan to provide a significant increase for all of Wisconsin's public schools in our budget, and the details on our total investment in K-12 education will be released soon."

INCREASED SPARSITY AID

- **Increase Sparsity Aid by \$20 million.** Governor Walker's budget increases Sparsity Aid by \$20 million (\$12.3 million more than DPI requested). This makes for a total investment in Sparsity Aid of \$55.4 million over the two-year budget. Governor Walker's budget will also increase the per pupil reimbursement rate for districts that previously qualified for Sparsity Aid to \$400 per pupil. Sparsity Aid is for small rural districts that have less than 745 pupils and a population density of less than 10 pupils per square mile of district attendance.
- **Expand Sparsity Aid.** Governor Walker's budget will create a new \$100 per pupil tier of Sparsity Aid funding for districts with 746-1000 pupils. This buffer will provide more stability for school districts that fall just outside the 745 pupil requirement.

INCREASED TRANSPORTATION AID

- **Provide 100% reimbursement for rural school districts in the High Cost Transportation Aid program by investing \$25.4 million over the two-year budget. This is an increase of \$10.4 million over the last budget.** Created in the 2013-15 State Budget, High Cost Transportation Aid provides additional transportation funding to school districts with a density of 50 pupils per square mile or less and per pupil transportation costs totaling more than 150% of the state average. The 2015-16 reimbursement rate was prorated at roughly is 60%.
- **Fully fund DPI's request for Pupil Transportation Aid.** Governor Walker's budget will provide \$92,000 over the two-year budget for pupil transportation and increase reimbursement rates for pupil transportation to \$365 for 12+ miles (currently this is \$300 per pupil), \$10 for 2-5 miles in summer school, (currently this is \$4 per pupil), and \$20 for 5+ miles in summer school (currently this is \$6 per pupil).

INCREASED BROADBAND INVESTMENT

- **Increase funding for Teacher Training Grants through Technology for Educational Achievement (TEACH) by \$22.5 million.** This will allow more school districts to apply for grants for allowable costs of training teachers to use educational technology.
 - The budget also will include a provision to allow districts to apply for TEACH grant funding for mobile hot spots on buses and mobile hot spots for students to take home. Access to high-speed internet is particularly challenging in rural areas. When combined with school laptop computers, taking mobile hot spots home allows students online access outside school hours for homework. **The hot spots can only be used for homework, and entertainment sites such as Netflix are blocked.** Wisconsin ranks third among all 50 states for use of mobile hot spots in schools, behind just California and Texas. 15 school districts in Wisconsin currently allow students to check out mobile hot spots to take the internet home. (Rick Barrett, "Schools Lend Out Mobile Hotspots To Get All Students Online," [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#), 4/10/2016)
- **Increase the Broadband Expansion Grant Program by \$13 million.** Access to fast and reliable high-speed internet remains out of reach for too many Wisconsin families and communities, and this continued state investment will help connect more rural communities.

INCREASED OPPORTUNITY TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN TEACHERS

- Rural districts often identify teacher recruitment and retention as an issue. **To address this, Governor Walker's budget will include a provision that requires the UW Flex Option to develop a program to train paraprofessionals currently working in schools (such as teacher's**

aides) to become full-time teachers. Wisconsin Fast Forward grant funding may be made available to allow districts to seek grants to help pay for tuition for paraprofessionals getting training to become teachers. The budget will also clarify state law to permit a district to compensate student teachers. Districts are not currently barred from doing so, but districts report uncertainty about paying student teachers.

INCREASED FLEXIBILITY THROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT SHARED SERVICES

- Bureaucratic mandates can be an extra burden for rural districts. Rather than requiring each school district to identify a specialist and person of contact for the following roles, **Governor Walker's budget will allow school districts to enter into agreements to share or jointly provide the following services or specialists:**
 - Reading Specialist
 - Bilingual-Bicultural Education Programs
 - Lifesaving Skill Instruction
 - Emergency Nursing Services
 - Attendance Officer
 - Guidance and Counseling
 - Technical Preparation Programs
 - Services for Gifted and Talented Pupils

INCREASED INVESTMENT FOR FABRICATION LABORATORIES (FAB LABS)

- **Double the state's investment for Fab Labs.** Governor Walker's budget will require the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation to allocate \$1 million total over the two-year budget for the Fabrication Laboratories Grant Program. The program supports hands-on science, technology, engineering, arts, and math education by helping public school districts with equipment purchases used for instructional and educational purposes in fabrication laboratories.
 - For more information on how Fab Labs are contributing to the success of Wisconsin public schools, please see [Wisconsin 'fab labs' boost high school tech ed](#) by Erin Richards of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

Details regarding the significant investment Governor Walker is planning for all K-12 public schools will be announced in the near future.

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