



Budget Briefs from the Legislative Reference Bureau

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TEACH WISCONSIN

The biennial state budget act (1997 Wisconsin Act 27), passed by the legislature and signed by Governor Tommy Thompson on October 11, 1997, created the Technology for Educational Achievement in Wisconsin (TEACH) program to develop an educational technology network that will provide distance education, communication, and professional development programs across Wisconsin. This new initiative consists of block grants and loans to enable schools to access the Internet and utilize distance education and to fund other educational technology programs.

I. EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY BLOCK GRANTS

Act 27 appropriated \$25 million in 1997-98 and \$35 million in 1998-99 in block grants to all public school districts to help them meet their technology needs. Part of the grant money will be distributed on the basis of the school district's census of 4- to 20-year-olds, part on the basis of the district's equalized value per member relative to the state average, and part as a flat grant of \$5,000 to each district. An additional \$2 million in supplemental grants will be available in 1997-98 for districts that have both a property value per member below the state average and initial block grants below \$25,000.

The block grants are not automatic. Each school board must pass a resolution requesting its allocation. Funding may be used for any purpose related to educational technology except salaries or benefits to school district employees. For example, funds may be used to pay wiring loans, purchase hardware or software, pay for consulting or planning services, or provide professional development for district employees. Block grants are considered categorical aid and are not included under school district levy limits.

II. EDUCATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACCESS PROGRAM

Each school district may request either a data line capable of accessing the Internet or a two-way full motion interactive video link for telecommunications access. Maximum charges are set at \$100 or \$250 per line per month depending on the capacity of the lines and links. A total of \$9.9 million is available over two years (1997-98 and 1998-99) to provide new lines or links and support contracts in effect on the effective date of the 1997-99 budget (October 14, 1997), but grants for existing contracts are not permitted after June 30, 2002. If a district requests an annual grant for an existing contract, it will not be eligible for additional grants to cover new lines or links. The TEACH Board, the Department of Administration (DOA) and the Public Service Commission (PSC) will cooperate to set criteria and contract with the telecommunications providers for installations.

As an added feature of the TEACH program, private schools, private colleges (including tribal colleges) and public library boards may request access to either one data line or one video link with the same maximum charges as public schools. Chapter 27 appropriates \$2.4 million for these requests in the 1997-99 biennium.

III. TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GRANTS

Act 27 appropriated \$6 million in the 1997-99 biennium for grants to Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs) or consortia of school districts, CESAs and public libraries

to provide technical assistance and training in the use of educational technology. The TEACH Board will award the grants on a competitive basis, ensuring, to the extent possible, that they are equally distributed statewide.

IV. LOANS FOR ELECTRICAL AND COMPUTER WIRING

Act 27 authorized general obligation bonding to support loans for electrical and computer wiring in public school districts (\$100 million) and public libraries (\$10 million). Electrical wiring was included because many existing buildings needed upgrading to support computer networks. The maximum term of the loans is 10 years and loan recipients are responsible for 50% of the total debt service (principal plus interest).

V. THE TEACH BOARD

Act 27 created the Technology for Educational Achievement in Wisconsin Board (TEACH Board) to administer the TEACH program. The 9-member board includes the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Secretary of the Department of Administration; representatives from the UW Board of Regents (appointed by the president of the board); the Technical College System Board (appointed by the president of the board); and a member of the Educational Communications Board and four public members appointed by the governor. In addition to administering the grant and loan programs, the board will work with DOA to assist educational organizations in the procuring, purchasing, or leasing of educational technology services and equipment. It also will assume all responsibilities of the previous Educational Technology Board, including the Pioneering Partners Grants program, which will be phased out in 1997-98.

VI. FOR MORE INFORMATION

For copies of relevant sections of 1997 Wisconsin Act 27, relating to the TEACH program, contact the Legislative Reference Bureau at (608) 266-0342. For more detailed information on the program, contact the Department of Administration, Bureau of Technology Policy and Planning at (608) 264-7651.