
Talking Points AB572/SB491

This legislation:

- **WOULD EXPAND USE TO LIBRARIES.** This bill adds language to expand the use of the WISEdata and WISEdash information system appropriations beyond K-12 schools to include applications of potential benefit to individual public libraries and Wisconsin's 16 regional public library systems. Additionally, it opens TEACH block grants, which are now available through the Department of Administration to small and rural schools, to their counterparts in education: small and rural libraries.
- **SEEKS NO ADDITIONAL FUNDING.** The bill involves no additional funding; it simply seeks to *broaden the impact* of the current WISE and TEACH programs appropriations building upon what has already been developed for the K-12 programs.
- **HAS NO NEGATIVE IMPACT ON SCHOOLS; CAPACITY EXISTS.** The DPI assures us that there is adequate capacity in both programs to include libraries without negatively impacting K-12 schools. In the case of WISEdata and WISEdash, some of the funding covers ongoing software and hardware costs but much of it is project based and project needs change year to year. Because public libraries represent such a small proportion of "libraries plus schools," the DPI is certain that library data projects can be slotted in without impacting school projects. In the case of TEACH funds, the block grants were started in the last biennium, using TEACH reserves to help small and rural schools with technology infrastructure upgrades (routers, access points, etc.) and technology training for professionals. The TEACH charter specifies that TEACH funds are for schools and libraries, so it makes sense to expand these technology grants to small and rural libraries faced with the same needs.

Extra information:

WISEdata funds cover hardware, software, and data gathering. Library data is currently gathered from a variety of sources and in a surprisingly manual way (e.g. annual report submissions, maintaining records of continuing education credits for library director certifications). WISEdata allows processes such as these to be more seamlessly automated, improving efficiencies and pulling together library data from across the state that libraries and regional public library systems can use in decision making. Beyond the local level, other examples of potential benefit to libraries include helping regional public library systems to merge their integrated library systems, creating a statewide discovery layer, and creating linked data to allow library resources to be found in general internet searches. WISEdash funds could be used to facilitate building "dashboards" that allow librarians to work with data more easily, and to support training in the use of data for librarians.

The Department of Administration's TEACH funds would be available to small and rural libraries. We know that one challenge to development in Wisconsin is a lack of connectivity in our rural areas. Just as TEACH funds have been used to add wifi to school buses in some areas, allowing students to use their long rides to accomplish homework, these funds can be used by local public libraries in connectivity-challenged areas to improve infrastructure to provide

citizens with greater access. Some public library systems have piloted circulating hotspots from local libraries, but lack funding to move forward. A recent survey conducted by DPI with school district IT staff indicates that the primary strategy they use to address the issue of lack of home access to broadband is to refer students and their families to the public library. TEACH funds could also be used to enhance the technology training for staff. Examples include helping parents with best practices in using technology for their small children, offering digital literacy instruction for late adopters of technology, or helping seniors safely and effectively use new voice-activated instruction or voice-to-text applications.

TEACH (Technology for Educational Achievement in Wisconsin) was created by 1997 Wisconsin Act 27 to assist public school districts as well as other educational agencies (including public libraries), in expanding and upgrading the educational technology needed to take advantage of the Internet and to train teachers and others in the use of educational technology. Block grants for public library technology improvement have not been offered by TEACH in recent years. We are certain that small and rural libraries can make excellent use of these funds to improve the technology status of their communities. By including regional public library systems in the language of the bill, the authors have recognized that small rural libraries may have difficulty applying for and using grants. Regional public library systems can provide the awareness, technical expertise, coordination, and guidance for their member libraries to take full advantage of the opportunity.

FAQ:

Q: Aren't you saying that the DPI has too much money available for WISE or DOA has too much money for TEACH? Shouldn't we be reducing that funding?

A: WISE funds have been expended each year. The DPI recognizes that the size of library projects compared with school data projects is so small that they can be added in without significantly affecting upcoming school projects. The addition of TEACH grants are intended to ensure the funds are being leveraged to maximum benefit of local communities in meeting broadband needs.