



State of Wisconsin  
Department of Public Instruction  
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

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\*\*\*NEWS RELEASE\*\*\*

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CONTACT: Patrick Gasper, Communications Officer, (608) 266-3559

## 14 districts in northwestern Wisconsin to share more than \$449,000

*New sparsity aid program developed by Burmaster and her Rural Advisory Council*

MADISON—State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster joined State Sen. Bob Jauch (D-Poplar), State Rep. Gary Sherman (D-Port Wing), and school district administrators from northwestern Wisconsin at La Pointe Elementary School today to announce the distribution of new state aids for rural schools.

“The well-being of rural schools and communities is essential for our state’s future,” said Burmaster. “Investing in rural education will contribute to our economic development and helps fulfill our New Wisconsin Promise of a quality education for every child.”

Burmaster proposed the sparsity aid program, along with two other measures targeted to rural schools, in her 2007-09 budget request, after the State Superintendent’s Rural Advisory Council highlighted the need for new funding for rural districts. Gov. Jim Doyle and the state legislature approved the measures, with strong support provided by Jauch, Sherman, Sen. Kathy Vinehout (D-Alma), and Sen. Russ Decker (D-Weston).

Today’s announcement was made at La Pointe Elementary School on Madeline Island, part of Bayfield School District. After graduating from elementary school, Madeline Island students attend public school on the mainland, traveling by ferry, windsled, or ice road, depending on the season.

“High transportation costs are just one of the unique challenges faced by rural districts,” said Burmaster. “Economies of scale are often not possible. Many rural districts also experience both high poverty rates and rapidly rising property values.”

Since property “wealth” is central in the formula used to apportion state school aids, Burmaster and her advisory council advocating increasing the funding available to rural school districts.

(more)

Districts were eligible for sparsity aid if their 2007-08 enrollment was no more than 725 students, enrollment density was less than 10 students per square mile, and at least 20 percent of students qualified for free or reduced-price school meals. Payments are \$150 or \$300 per student depending on district poverty levels.

For the 2008-09 school year, \$449,409 in sparsity aid is being distributed to 14 qualifying districts in northwestern Wisconsin:

- Bayfield, \$60,789
- Birchwood, \$38,647
- Butternut, \$12,144
- Drummond, \$33,548
- Glidden, \$27,509
- Hurley, \$45,223
- Mellen, \$20,129
- Mercer, \$10,735
- Northwood, \$29,120
- Shell Lake, \$39,117
- Solon Springs, \$22,880
- South Shore, \$14,359
- Washburn, \$39,385
- Winter, \$55,824

District administrators from most of those districts participated in today's event.

State transportation aid was also increased, from \$180 to \$220 per child, for bus trips to school longer than 12 miles. Additionally, revenue limit flexibility was provided for low revenue school districts and those with declining student enrollment.

Today's announcement coincided with a La Pointe meeting of the 28-member State Superintendent's Rural Advisory Council, created by Burmaster in 2004, which regularly convenes in communities around Wisconsin to work on building strong rural public schools, libraries, and communities.

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