



ROB SWEARINGEN

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 34th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Office: (608) 266-7141
Toll-Free: (888) 534-0034
Rep.Swearingen@legis.wi.gov

Room 19 North
P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708-8953

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CONTACT: STATE REPRESENTATIVE ROB SWEARINGEN

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(608) 266-7141

Joint Finance Committee Advances Educational Technology Initiatives

Local schools will benefit from reinvigorated program to bring technology to the classroom.

Madison, WI – Rep. Rob Swearingen (R - Rhinelander) released the following statement after the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) supported a budget motion to expand digital learning, educational technology, and broadband expansion for underserved schools throughout Wisconsin. The initiative was recommended by the Speaker’s Task Force on Rural Schools, that Rep. Swearingen chaired last session.

The TEACH (Technology for Educational Achievement in Wisconsin) program was originally created under the Governor Tommy Thompson administration in 1997. TEACH was created to help schools integrate modern technology to provide digital learning practices. Currently, the TEACH program, administered by the Department of Administration, is no longer sufficiently funded. Representative Mary Czaja (R-Irma), a member of the JFC and Task Force on Rural Schools, introduced a motion to reinvigorate the TEACH program, which expands educational opportunities to rural Wisconsin regions that are lacking modern technology.

“This is great news for schools in the Northwoods. Students will benefit from the expanding digital learning and technology. This was the result of more than a year of collaborations with stakeholders, legislators and the Governor, and our rural schools stand to benefit greatly,” said Rep. Swearingen.

The motion includes funding to support a state digital learning collaborative, increased access to broadband, educational technology block grants, and teacher training grants for school districts. In addition, the motion specifies that schools with a high percentage of students enrolled in free or reduced price lunch will receive priority in block grant appropriations.

“Blocks grants for increased technology will allow our students in northern Wisconsin to interact on a state, national, and global level with other schools. For instance, digital learning allows students to partake in courses that may not be offered in their schools. Technology continues to expand and modernize around the globe, our students deserve the same access. I would like to thank Rep. Mary Czaja for taking this issue head-on, and working across the aisle to bring home a win for rural Wisconsin students,” finished Rep. Swearingen.

The motion received unanimous, bipartisan support on Thursday, May 14. The budget deliberations will continue throughout May and June. Final passage will occur before the start of the next fiscal year, July 1, 2015.

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