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Technology for Educational Achievement in Wisconsin (TEACH) Board

The Technology for Educational Achievement in Wisconsin (TEACH) Board was created by 1997 Wisconsin Act 27 to assist public school districts, as well as other educational agencies, 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. Through fiscal year (FY) 2000-01, TEACH Board expenditures have totaled \$201.0 million, almost all of which consists of aid programs for K-12 school districts and libraries. TEACH programs are included in the calculation of the State's two-thirds funding commitment to public school districts.

The TEACH Board is attached to the Department of Administration for administrative purposes, but it is an independent agency whose Executive Director is appointed by the Governor. In FY 2000-01, the Board had position authority for 6.0 full-time equivalent positions for TEACH Board duties.

TEACH Board Expenditures Totaled \$61.3 Million in FY 2000-01

In FY 2000-01, the TEACH Board's expenditures totaled \$61.3 million, including \$44.4 million in general purpose revenue (GPR). Almost all of the Board's expenditures supported four aid programs for local and regional educational agencies. The largest of these is the Educational Technology Block Grant program, which distributes block grants to school districts according to a formula that is based on property values and student population. In FY 2000-01, \$35.0 million in GPR was distributed as block grants, which averaged \$40.13 per student.

The Educational Technology Infrastructure Financial Assistance program (\$6.2 million in FY 2000-01) provides funding for school districts and public libraries to upgrade data and electrical wiring for high-speed data transmission. The Educational Technology Training and Technical Assistance Grant program (\$7.1 million in FY 2000-01) funds professional development training projects for school district and public library staff, and the Educational Telecommunications Access program (\$12.0 million in FY 2000-01) subsidizes telecommunications services and is funded primarily through the Universal Service Fund. Video link and data line services are leased from the Wisconsin BadgerNet Access Alliance, a consortium of private telephone companies and other telecommunications firms led by Ameritech, Inc., and under contract with the State. The video link contract guarantees the consortium a minimum of \$59.4 million in revenue and will expire in December 2005. At that time, vendor support for the current technology will also expire.

Limited Information Is Available on Program Effectiveness

School district officials with whom we spoke strongly support TEACH Board programs. However, despite the Board's efforts to increase reporting, limited information is available on how funds have been used and on program effectiveness.

For example, we found that through FY 2000-01, the Educational Technology Infrastructure Financial Assistance program helped to fund data and electrical wiring construction for 18,680 classrooms, or an estimated one-third of all K-12 classrooms in Wisconsin. However, information is not available to show how teaching methods have changed as a result of these wiring upgrades. Similarly, although approximately \$3.2 million was spent for the operation of 161 full-motion video links in FY 2000-01, comprehensive data are not available on courses offered over the statewide network created by these video links. The limited information available shows that a relatively small number of

students participate: an estimated 13,019 students were enrolled in at least one course offered via a video link in the 2000-01 school year.

The Legislature May Wish to Consider the Board's Future

The TEACH Board was originally presented to the Legislature as a five-year, \$500.0 million program, and it is currently in its fifth year of operation. As TEACH reaches its five-year anniversary, questions can be raised about the future of the Board and its programs, particularly as teacher and classroom experience with technology grows, the State faces a budget shortfall, and technologies that have been key in constructing the statewide video network are no longer manufactured and will be supported through 2005.

The Legislature may wish to consider what reporting requirements should be imposed on program participants, how new technologies should be assessed, and how TEACH programs should be funded and structured in the future. It has already identified alternatives to replace GPR funding for the Educational Technology Block Grant program in FY 2001-02. However, only limited amounts of these alternative funds will be available in FY 2002-03, so that GPR will be the primary source of funding. Because the Educational Technology Block Grant program is considered a categorical aid, the State could maintain its two-thirds funding commitment to public school districts by providing \$1 in general equalized aid for every \$3 of TEACH Board GPR funding eliminated. However, implementation of this option would likely be strongly resisted by K-12 school districts, which would receive less total funding from the State.

[full report, PDF file \(379KB\)](#)