



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #576

Delete Personal Electronic Computing Device Grants (DPI -- Categorical Aids)

[LFB 2019-21 Budget Summary: Page 327, #15]

CURRENT LAW

School districts, independent charter schools, private schools, and tribal schools are eligible to receive grants equal to \$125 per ninth grade pupil, if they provide equal matching funds. Grants can only be used for the following purposes: (a) to purchase personal electronic computing devices; (b) to purchase software for personal electronic devices; (c) to purchase curriculum which includes content that may be accessed on a personal electronic computing device; or (d) to train staff on how to effectively incorporate personal electronic computing devices into a classroom and into a high school curriculum. Grants under the program will be awarded beginning in the 2018-19 school year and will be awarded in each of the next four years. No moneys may be encumbered from this appropriation after June 30, 2023.

GOVERNOR

Delete \$9,187,500 GPR in 2020-21 and repeal the personal electronic computing device grant program that was created in 2017 Act 59, effective July 1, 2020.

In addition, for grants distributed in 2019-20, modify the pupil count that would be used in calculating the grant for each school district from the number of ninth grade pupils included in membership to instead be the number of ninth grade pupils enrolled in the current school year.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. The personal electronic computing device program was created under 2017 Act 59.

Under Act 59, \$9,187,500 GPR was providing beginning in 2018-19 for grants for personal electronic computing devices, defined as devices that meets all of the following criteria: (a) are mobile; (b) are assignable to an individual pupil to be used solely by that pupil; and (c) may be used to access the Internet. Public school districts, independent charter schools, private schools, and tribal schools are eligible for funding under the program.

2. Under the program, grants may be awarded for the following purposes: (a) to purchase personal electronic computing devices; (b) to purchase software for personal electronic devices; (c) to purchase curriculum, including any related educational content or materials, a portion or all of which includes content that may be accessed on a personal electronic computing device; or (d) to train professional staff on how to effectively incorporate personal electronic devices into a classroom and into a high school curriculum.

3. Applicants must provide equal matching funds as a condition of receiving a grant. DPI indicates that expenditures that may be counted as matching funds include the following: (a) the purchase of mobile devices, software, curriculum or professional development related to electronic devices; (b) computers and servers; (c) network infrastructure, such as routers, firewalls, or access points; (d) systems and consultations related to data privacy and security; (e) mobile hotspots for pupils to use; and (f) other equipment or services related to digital learning.

4. Grants are equal to \$125 per ninth grade pupil. For a public school, the pupil count is defined as the number of ninth grade pupils included in the school district's membership in the prior school year. For an independent charter, private, or tribal school, the count is based on the number of ninth grade pupils in the school in the current school year.

5. Under the Governor's proposal, the pupil count for public schools would be modified to be the number of ninth grade pupils enrolled in the current school year, rather than the number of ninth grade pupils included in the district's membership in the prior school year. DPI indicates that membership data is not available by grade level, and also includes pupils to whom the district is not directly providing an education such as resident pupils who are attending school in another district through the open enrollment program. As a result, open enrollment pupils are counted by the district in which they live, not the district in which they attend school. DPI indicates that current year enrollment would provide a more accurate count of ninth grade pupils being educated by the district, and also would be more consistent with the current year data used by private, charter, and tribal schools.

6. The first aid under the program will be paid in the 2018-19 school year. Grant awards have not yet been made, so it is not yet known how many districts and schools will qualify for funding, or whether payments under the program will be prorated.

7. Other state programs provide funding to school districts, charter schools, private schools, and other education organizations for technology infrastructure and curriculum. The Technology for Educational Achievement (TEACH) program under the Department of Administration provides eligible entities access to the Internet and two-way interactive video services through rate discounts and subsidized installation of data lines and video links, as well as curriculum grants to a consortium of school districts to develop and implement a technology-enhanced high school curriculum.

Consortia of rural districts (defined as districts whose membership divided by area in square miles is 13 or less) can also apply for grants for training teachers on the use of educational technology. Infrastructure grants totaling \$7.8 million were awarded to 251 school districts in 2017-18. Technology training grants totaling \$1.5 million were awarded in 2017-18 to 27 consortia representing 201 rural school districts. In 2017-18, one curriculum grant of \$24,984 was awarded to the Embarrass River Valley Instructional Network Group, which consists of eight school districts. Additionally, the program subsidized video links and data lines in 2017-18 for 277 public school sites.

8. It could be argued that the TEACH program provides support for expenses related to technology in schools, and additional state funding for this purpose is not necessary. Additionally, some have argued that a large number of districts and schools have already purchased laptops or other personal electronic devices, and therefore the state does not need to provide financial support to encourage these purchases. On the other hand, funds can also be used for software, curriculum, and professional development related to personal computing devices, so even those districts or schools that already have such devices can benefit from these funds.

9. The Department of Administration indicates that the program would be eliminated under the bill so that the funding can be redirected to other priorities, particularly closing achievement gaps. The bill provides \$9,850,000 GPR in 2020-21 (a total of \$14,700,000 GPR over the biennium) for programs for urban school districts to address achievement gaps. On the other hand, the amount of funding for personal electronic devices is small relative to the overall increase in funding under the bill. Over the biennium, the bill provides an increase of \$1.4 billion in GPR school aids compared to the base year doubled. It could be argued that the cost savings from eliminating this program would not be significant in the context of the overall DPI budget.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Delete Personal Electronic Computing Device Grant

a. Approve the Governor's recommendation to delete \$9,187,500 in 2020-21 and repeal the personal electronic computing device grant program that was created in 2017 Act 59, effective July 1, 2020.

ALT 1a	Change to	
	Base	Bill
GPR	- \$9,187,500	\$0

b. Take no action.

ALT 1b	Change to	
	Base	Bill
GPR	\$0	\$9,187,500

2. Pupil Count Used for Aid Calculation

- a. Approve the Governor's recommendation to modify the pupil count that would be used in calculating the grant for each school district from the pupil count used in calculating per pupil aid to instead be the number of pupils enrolled in the district.
- b. Take no action.

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