



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

**GUEST EDITORIAL ON
ADVANCING RURAL WISCONSIN**

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**Governor's education budget supports
Advancing Rural Wisconsin Initiative**

State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster

In his 2005-07 budget, Gov. Jim Doyle presented a number of proposals that will support Wisconsin's rural schools, which serve 44 percent of the state's students. As the foundation of Wisconsin's educational history, our rural schools are vital to our state's prosperity.

It was just over a year ago that I joined educators, community leaders, and legislators serving our state's rural areas to develop a policy agenda to strengthen Wisconsin's rural schools and communities. Those who live, work, and educate their children in Wisconsin's small schools and rural communities are closest to the issues and understand the strong relationship between good schools and thriving rural communities. They know best what is needed to succeed in rural Wisconsin.

Rural schools are more than community centers for education and social activities; they are the community's largest investment, one that too many of our state's 337 small school districts struggle to support. My Advancing Rural Wisconsin Initiative recognized that the cost of busing students to and from school is one of the top issues facing rural schools. Transportation costs have escalated dramatically, pulling resources for academic instruction out of rural education budgets. The governor's proposal will provide an additional \$16.4 million for transportation aid over the biennium. Additionally, he will increase the reimbursement rate for children who travel more than eight miles to school, freeing up vital funds for student instruction.

A proposed increase in state aid of \$700 million over the biennium will help all school districts hold down local property taxes. An additional \$150 million for an equalized school levy credit will provide direct relief to local property taxpayers, benefiting areas of the state with lower relative property values.

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This \$850 million investment in education reflects the priorities of Wisconsin's citizens: our children and their future.

The governor's budget also includes provisions from my Advancing Rural Wisconsin Initiative to help districts better manage local finances and cushion the impact of declining enrollments.

Other provisions from the education budget I submitted last year that will help many rural school districts were included in the governor's budget. Those include: increased aid and expansion of the Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) class-size reduction program; grants to school districts starting 4-year-old kindergarten; increased reimbursement for school breakfast; funding for mentors to support beginning teachers; and increased funding to reimburse special education costs, including a provision to reimburse expenses for students who have exceptionally high-cost special education needs.

The governor has proposed sound educational investments that prioritize both high-quality education and property tax relief. This investment in education will help ensure that all children become educated adults who participate in our democracy and contribute to Wisconsin's long-term economic security.

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Elizabeth Burmaster is the elected state superintendent of public instruction.

NOTE: The 2005-07 budget now goes to the Joint Finance Committee where legislators will debate the merits of the governor's proposals. Both houses of the Legislature also will have the opportunity to change the governor's budget proposals and present their own initiatives. The final budget, as crafted by the Legislature, will require the governor's approval before it is enacted.

NOTE: To download a high resolution photo of the state superintendent, visit the Department of Public Instruction "Media Contacts and Resources" webpage at < <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/sprntdnt/media.html> >.