

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2026 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

Senate Bill 552

**FISCAL
NOTE**

By Senator Woelfel

[Introduced January 21, 2026; referred
to the Committee on Education; and then to the
Committee on Finance]

1 A BILL to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding a new section,
2 designated §18-9A-27, relating to public school support; authorizing county boards of
3 education to designate schools as rural anchor schools; setting eligibility criteria; providing
4 for state aid formula treatment for designated rural anchor schools; establishing limitations;
5 providing for use of additional state aid funding provided to rural anchor schools; requiring
6 reporting by county boards; and providing for rulemaking.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 9A. PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPPORT.

§18-9A-27. Rural anchor schools designation.

1 (a) Beginning with the 2026-2027 school year and for each school year thereafter, each
2 county board may, with the approval of the state board, designate one or more schools within the
3 county as a "rural anchor school" within the meaning of this section.

4 (b) To be eligible for designation as a rural anchor school, a school must meet criteria to be
5 established by the state board in legislative rules, which criteria shall include, at a minimum, the
6 following:

7 (1) The school serves a community designated by the state board as predominantly rural;
8 (2) The school serves as the primary neighborhood school for its attendance area;
9 (3) The school's enrollment is below the statewide average for schools of the same grade
10 configuration or below another threshold established by the state board to identify schools that are
11 both low-enrollment and geographically isolated;

12 (4) The school's closure or consolidation would create unreasonable transportation
13 burdens, safety concerns, or access barriers for students; and

14 (5) The county board has considered alternative support mechanisms for the school and
15 has incorporated the school into its 10-year countywide facilities plan.

16 (c) For purposes of state aid calculations under this article, a designated rural anchor
17 school shall be funded at not less than a minimum enrollment of 150 students, regardless of its

actual enrollment, for the limited purpose of recognizing fixed operating and core staffing costs.

The state board shall determine the method by which this minimum enrollment figure is recognized in the state aid formula, which may include:

(1) An additional allowance for professional and service personnel;

(2) A small-school fixed-cost allowance; or

(3) Another mechanism that reflects fixed operating costs while maintaining statewide state aid formula integrity.

Nothing in this section shall be construed to alter actual enrollment counts for any purpose other than the calculation of state aid under this section.

(d) A rural anchor school designation approved pursuant to this section shall be for a term of five years, subject to annual reporting required by subsection (g) of this section. Upon expiration of the five-year term, the county board may apply for renewal of a school's rural anchor school designation.

(e) The state board may revoke a rural anchor school's designation prior to the end of the five-year term provided in subsection (d) if:

(1) Eligibility criteria are no longer met;

(2) Additional state aid generated under this section is not used as provided in subsection (f); or

(3) The county board fails to comply with the reporting requirements set out in subsection (g).

(f) Any additional state aid generated by the minimum enrollment treatment and provided to a rural anchor school may be used by the school exclusively for:

(1) Fixed operating costs of the designated school, including utilities, maintenance, and transportation services associated with the school's attendance area;

(2) Core staffing necessary to provide a basic instructional program and required services; or

- 44 (3) Program adequacy, including access to core academic offerings.
- 45 (g) Each county board with designated rural anchor schools shall report annually to the
46 state board on actual enrollment figures and staffing levels at each rural anchor school, student
47 attendance and performance indicators, and use of additional state aid generated under this
48 section.
- 49 (h) The state board shall promulgate legislative rules pursuant to §29A-3B-1 et seq. of this
50 code necessary to implement this section, including detailed rural anchor school eligibility criteria,
51 application procedures, funding mechanisms, and accountability measures.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to authorize county boards of education to designate certain schools as "rural anchor schools" and to provide for specialized treatment of rural anchor schools under the public school support plan. The bill sets eligibility criteria, specifies funding treatment, provides for the use of funds, and requires reporting by county boards.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.