

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2026 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

Senate Bill 555

**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; establishing the Essential
3 Personnel Bridge Grant Program; defining terms; establishing eligibility for grant awards;
4 setting grant application procedures; providing criteria for awards of grants; limiting use of
5 grant funds; requiring reporting by the Department of Education; and providing for
6 rulemaking by the state board.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 9A. PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPPORT.

§18-9A-27. Essential Personnel Bridge Grant Program.

1 (a) To provide counties with prioritized financial support necessary to fund certain essential
2 personnel positions, there is hereby established within the West Virginia Department of Education
3 the Essential Personnel Bridge Grant Program. The Department of Education shall utilize the
4 Essential Personnel Bridge Grant Program to provide targeted financial assistance to county
5 boards for necessary personnel who are employed in positions in excess of those fully funded by
6 the public school support plan under this article when such positions are demonstrated to be
7 essential to meet student needs and to maintain equity of services within the county.

8 (b) For purposes of this section:

9 (1) "Essential personnel" means professional or service personnel employed by a county
10 board in excess of state aid formula-funded positions and assigned to duties that are
11 demonstrably necessary to:

12 (A) Maintain minimum instructional programming and reasonable class sizes;

13 (B) Provide required special education or related services to students with disabilities;

14 (C) Provide mental health, counseling, or other student support services;

15 (D) Provide safe and effective transportation services; or

16 (E) Maintain compliance with state or federal mandates.

17 (2) "Bridge grant" means temporary or continuing state aid provided under this section by

the Department of Education to county boards to reimburse a portion of locally funded essential personnel positions.

(c) The Department of Education shall solicit annual applications for bridge grants from county boards, with such applications to be submitted to the state superintendent. County boards shall submit applications for funds to be used for personnel for the next fiscal year by May 1 of each year. Each application shall, at a minimum:

(1) Identify each essential personnel position for which grant support is requested;

(2) Demonstrate that the position is in excess of those fully funded by the public school support plan;

(3) Describe the student needs and services addressed by the position;

(4) Provide evidence of efforts to manage positions and budgets efficiently; and

(5) Provide any student outcome, service equity, or performance data that is requested by the Department of Education.

(d) Subject to appropriations by the Legislature, the state superintendent shall, on or before June 1 of each year, review all applications and award bridge grants on a prioritized basis, giving consideration to the following factors:

(1) Relative county wealth and capacity to raise local revenues;

(2) Percentage of personnel costs supported by local funds;

(3) Nature and severity of student needs and services served by the relevant position(s);

(4) Evidence of impacts of the position(s) on student outcomes or equity of access to services; and

(5) Efforts to consolidate, share, or otherwise use personnel efficiently.

Bridge grants may reimburse a share of eligible costs, not to exceed a percentage established by rule of the state board.

(e) County boards awarded bridge grant funds shall use such funds exclusively for state legally mandated salaries and benefits of the essential personnel position(s) identified in the

44 county's award. Subject to appropriations by the Legislature, the Department of Education may
45 establish multi-year bridge grant awards, and may phase out any particular grant over time as a
46 recipient county's local funding capacity improves or as the public school support plan is modified
47 in a manner that fully funds previously awarded essential personnel positions.

48 (f) On or before December 1 of each year, the Department of Education shall report to the
49 Legislative Oversight Commission on Education Accountability on the number of bridge grants
50 awarded, the counties to which grants have been awarded, the number of types of essentially
51 personnel positions supported, and demonstrable impacts on students outcomes and services.

52 (g) The state board shall promulgate legislative rules pursuant to §29A-3B-1 et seq. of this
53 code establishing bridge grant application procedures, award criteria, reimbursement rates, and
54 accountability measures.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to establish an Essential Personnel Bridge Grant Program within the West Virginia Department of Education. The bill provides for financial support to county boards of education for certain essential personnel not fully funded by the public school support plan. It establishes grant application procedures, sets award criteria, provides for the use of grant funds, requires reporting, and provides for rulemaking.

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