

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2026 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

House Bill 4861

By Delegates Dillon, Dean, Bridges, and Vance

[Introduced January 28, 2026; referred to the

Committee on Education then Finance]

1 A BILL to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding a new section,
2 designated §18-9A-30, relating to public school finance; authorizing county boards to
3 designate rural anchor schools; providing criteria, funding treatment, and accountability.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 9A. PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPPORT.

§18-9A-30. Rural anchor school designation.

1 (a) Purpose. — The purpose of this section is to preserve, in limited circumstances and
2 with clear guardrails, the continued operation of isolated rural schools in each qualifying county by
3 recognizing minimum fixed operating costs in the state aid formula.

4 (b) Authority to designate. —

5 (1) Beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, each county board may, with the approval of
6 the State Board, designate one or more school(s) within the county as a "Rural Anchor School" for
7 purposes of this section.

8 (c) Eligibility criteria. — To be eligible for designation as a rural anchor school, a school
9 shall meet criteria established by legislative rule, which shall include at a minimum:

10 (1) Geographic isolation. —

11 (A) The school serves a community that is rural;

12 (B) The school serves as the primary neighborhood school for its attendance area.

13 (2) Enrollment. — The school's enrollment is below the statewide average for schools of
14 the same grade configuration or below another threshold established by the State Board to identify
15 small, isolated schools.

16 (3) Need and planning. — The county board demonstrates that:

17 (A) Closure or consolidation of the school would create unreasonable transportation
18 burdens, safety concerns, or access barriers for students; and

19 (B) The county has considered alternatives and incorporated the school into its 10-year
20 countywide facilities plan.

21 (d) Funding treatment. —

22 (1) For purposes of state aid calculations under the Public School Support Program, a
23 designated rural anchor school shall be funded at not less than a minimum enrollment of 150
24 students, regardless of its actual enrollment, for the limited purpose of recognizing fixed operating
25 and core staffing costs.

26 (2) The State Board shall determine the method by which this minimum enrollment is
27 recognized in the formula, which may include:

28 (A) An additional allowance for professional and service personnel;
29 (B) A small-school fixed-cost allowance; or
30 (C) Another mechanism that reflects fixed operating costs while maintaining statewide
31 formula integrity.

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

34 (e) Guardrails and accountability. —

35 (1) Term. — A rural anchor school designation shall be for a term of five years, subject to
36 annual reporting as provided in this subsection. A county board may apply for renewal.

37 (2) Use of funds. — Any additional aid generated by the minimum enrollment treatment
38 shall be used for:

39 (A) Fixed operating costs of the designated school, including utilities, maintenance, and
40 transportation associated with its attendance area;

41 (B) Core staffing necessary to provide a basic instructional program and required services;
42 and

43 (C) Program adequacy, including access to core academic offerings.

44 (3) Reporting. — The county board shall report annually to the State Board on:

45 (A) Actual enrollment and staffing at the rural anchor school;

46 (B) Student attendance and performance indicators; and

47 (C) Use of funds generated under this section.

48 (4) Revocation. — The State Board may revoke a rural anchor school designation prior to

49 the end of the five-year term if:

50 (A) Eligibility criteria are no longer met;

51 (B) Funds are not used in accordance with this section; or

52 (C) The county fails to comply with reporting requirements.

53 (f) Rulemaking. — The State Board shall promulgate a legislative rule pursuant to §29A-3-

54 1 *et seq.* of this code to implement this section, including detailed eligibility criteria, application

55 procedures, funding mechanisms, and accountability measures.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to authorize county boards to designate rural anchor schools.

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