

Sen. Marklein: Rural School Funding Bill Signed Into Law

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CONTACT: Sen. Howard Marklein, [608-266-0703](tel:608-266-0703)

At least \$1 Million more for small, rural public schools in the 17th Senate District

MADISON – State Senator Howard Marklein’s rural school funding bill, Assembly Bill (AB) 835, was signed into law by Governor Scott Walker today at Riverdale High School in Muscoda to become Act 141.

Sen. Marklein (R-Spring Green) is the Senate author of this legislation with Rep. John Nygren (R-Marinette). He led the charge to increase sparsity aid funding for small rural schools and the revenue limit ceiling for low spending school districts with an amendment to enable the Darlington School District to benefit from the legislation.

“I am incredibly proud of Act 141 and am honored that the Governor signed the bill at Riverdale High School!” Marklein said. “I have been working on this issue for more than a year in partnership with Governor Walker, Rep. Nygren, Rep. Mursau and my legislative colleagues. Small, rural schools are very important to our communities. Our kids, their teachers and school leadership deserve our support and this law will go a long way to providing more needed funding and flexibility.”

“The Riverdale School District is a great example to demonstrate the benefits of this law,” Marklein said. “The district will receive \$72,124 more in Sparsity Aid for the 2018-19 school year. They are also eligible to increase their levy limit if the school board decides to do so. Riverdale currently spends approximately \$9,200 per pupil. They are eligible to increase their levy to \$9,400 per pupil, an increase potential of \$138,800. The total potential impact of this law for Riverdale is approximately

\$210,924.”

“Overall, small, rural public school districts in the 17th Senate District will see a total of \$1,066,953 more for the 2018-19 school year due to the increase to Sparsity Aid,” Marklein said. “There is potential for another \$494,960 if local school boards decide to increase their levy limits in order to spend more per pupil.”

“Some residents have expressed concerns about raising taxes, but I think it is important to note that the local school boards that are eligible to increase their levy limits have also been spending far less than other schools in Wisconsin,” Marklein said. “Many low-spending districts have been locked into very low per pupil limits since 1993. This law will enable them to slowly catch-up and compete with other schools financially. Ultimately, this will be a local decision.”

AB 835 and Senate Bill (SB) 690 were introduced on January 10, 2018 with strong support in both houses of the legislature. The Senate version passed the Joint Finance Committee on February 8, 2018. The Assembly passed AB 835 on Tuesday, February 13, 2018. It is coauthored by Representative John Nygren (R-Marinette). Governor Scott Walker has also championed the legislation.

The law will increase sparsity aid from \$300 to \$400 per pupil for the 2018-19 school year, an estimated \$6 million boost for rural schools. In addition, this proposal also increases the low revenue ceiling from \$9,100 to \$9,400 for the 2018-19 school year, with the low revenue ceiling rising by \$100 per year thereafter up to \$9,800 by the 2022-23 school year. School districts who have had a failed referendum within the last three years would be ineligible for the low revenue ceiling increase.

In the 17th Senate District, 22 of the 33 school districts with fewer than 745 students and less than 10 pupils per square mile will receive a \$1 million increase in Sparsity Aid. The change to the low revenue ceiling will impact six school districts in the 17th Senate District as well, including one district that does not qualify for sparsity aid.

“Act 141 enhances the historic \$11.5 billion investment in K-12 funding in the biennial budget by providing additional support for rural schools,” Marklein said. “I am proud to champion good policy on behalf of the school districts I serve.”