

9/18/2020

Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from interim work of the Wyoming Legislature. On September 8 and 9, the Select Committee on School Finance/Recalibration met to continue discussion of K12 school finance. I am co-chairman of this committee.

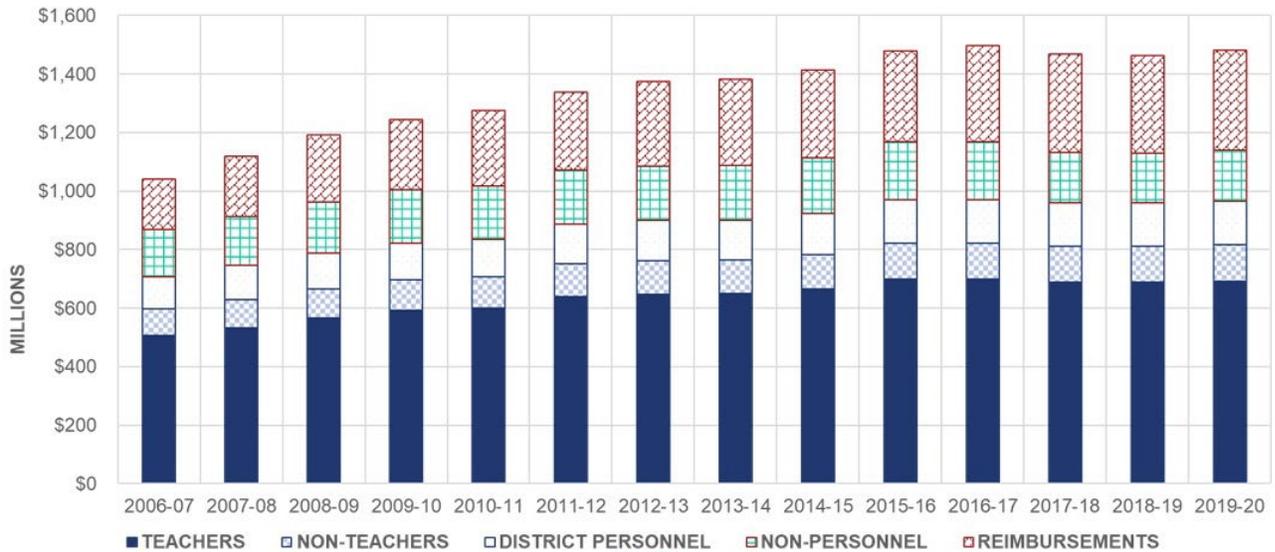
Based upon the most optimistic revenue forecast from the May Consensus Revenue Estimating Group (CREG) Report, K12 education has a revenue shortfall of \$450 million in the 2021/22 biennium and the shortfall is projected to almost double at \$855 million in the 2023-24 biennium. This is the challenge that the Select Committee on School Finance faces. The recommendations we make to the full Legislature could affect all of the citizens of Wyoming, through either cuts to education, education jobs, or new taxes.

The shortfall in education funding is from three distinct areas: funding to school districts for the general operations of educating kids; funding for capital construction and major maintenance; and funding for a portion of the Wyoming Department of Education's budget.

By far the biggest expenditure of school foundation dollars is through the general operations of K12 education, and consequently that is where the largest shortfall lies. The biggest categorical expense in the general operations of K12 education is teacher pay, followed by reimbursements like the costs of special education and transportation.

The graph pictured on the next page shows the breakdown of the cost of the K12 education "guarantee" per year, over the last 14 years. The Non-Teacher category includes school level administrators and staff. Non-personnel would be such expenditures as supplies, activities, and utilities. Examples of District Personnel would be superintendents, business managers and their clerical staff.

Historical “Guarantee”



Wyoming Legislative Service Office



July 13-14, 2020
Joint Appropriations Committee

Five Wyoming Supreme Court decisions have largely dictated how Wyoming funds education, ending with the Campbell IV decision in 2008. The Supreme Court decisions required the Legislature to recalibrate the K12 funding model every five years to ensure that the model remains cost-based and provides an adequate and equitable education to every child in Wyoming. In order to determine what constitutes an adequate and equitable education, the Legislature hires school finance consultants to provide Wyoming with a K12 funding model.

On September 8 and 9, the Select Committee received a report from our school finance consultants that detailed the personnel needed to provide an adequate, equitable education in Wyoming. The 2020 version of the Picus and Odden Evidence Based Funding Model generates 12,947 personnel statewide, which was four fewer positions than their 2015 version, when based upon the same number and type of students. We are still waiting for the report that costs out salaries for Wyoming teachers and administrators.

Based upon the report received on September 8-9, I assume that the consultants' cost of education will be very similar to their model in 2015. Picus and Odden state in their written report, "And by extension, our team of researchers have searched for the most cost-effective options to provide the elements of the basket of goods and services."

Recalibration is a process to determine the cost of an adequate, equitable education for every child in Wyoming. However, it appears that the consultants are unable to provide us a model that costs much less than our current funding model, which means Wyoming still has an enormous shortfall in funding education.

If we cut education funding substantially below the consultant's recommendation, we risk not holding up our constitutional requirements as mandated by the Supreme Court, which could result in a lawsuit brought by school districts or parents.

The Select Committee on School Finance will likely examine a combination of cuts, taxes, and the State's savings to solve this enormous fiscal challenge. We will know more in October, when we hear from our consultants on salary levels. I can be reached at albert@albertsommers.com with questions or concerns.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the employees and school board members of School Districts #1 and #9 for their tireless work to educate Sublette County's children, especially under the very difficult circumstances created by this pandemic. Sublette County folk, when you get a chance, thank a teacher.