



# ***MEMORANDUM***

**To:** Members, Joint Education Interim Committee  
State Superintendent Jim McBride

**From:** Lawrence O. Picus, Allan Odden and Mike Goetz

**RE:** **ALE Funding Issues**

**Date:** October 12, 2006

The purpose of this memo is to provide background information on ALE programs that will be submitted to the Joint Education Interim Committee at its meeting on October 25.

## **Background**

One component of the new Wyoming School Funding Model is the allocation of resources for Alternative Learning Environments or ALE programs. When we prepared the recommendation for funding this program, we thought of ALE programs as being intensive very small programs for secondary school students with multiple emotional and behavioral issues who required special attention and could not be served in the traditional education environment. In general we assumed these programs would have no more than 50 to 60 students – and in most cases would be substantially smaller than that.

Within that framework, our recommendation was to fund these alternative schools with one assistant principal position and one FTE teacher position for every seven ADM students. It is assumed that these resources generate adequate funding to provide for all of the staffing needed in such alternative schools – teachers, counselors, administrators and clerical support – and that it is likely most people working in an alternative school will wear more than one hat.

The funding model passed by the Wyoming Legislature includes this recommendation for ALE funding. However, two factors have worked together to create some funding disparities that require attention and resolution. The first is the fact that Wyoming law allows a district to operate no more than one alternative school. The second factor – a possible result of the first – is that there are a number of alternative schools that are substantially larger than the maximum of 50 envisioned in our earlier work. The result is these larger ALE programs generate substantially more funding than we had intended when the model was developed.

Table 1 lists the ALE programs that exceed an enrollment of 49 students, the largest size for which regular program funding relies on the one assistant principal plus one teacher per seven students funding mechanism. Seven alternative schools have 80 or more students, while the remaining four schools have between 55 and 62.

Thus the problem that needs resolution is how to fund alternative schools?

### **Proposed Solution**

To clarify funding for ALE programs, we recommend the Wyoming Legislature take three actions:

1. Replace the restriction of one alternative school per district with a restriction of one alternative school per high school and middle school within the district.
2. Limit the size of alternative schools to fewer than 50 students and then fund them at the level of one assistant principal plus one teacher per seven students. Allow larger ALE programs to exist with the approval of the WDE, but fund those schools as if they are regular schools (i.e. middle or high schools) with 100 percent of the ADM classified as at-risk students.
3. Allow alternative schools to be situated on the campus of the secondary school they serve (at the present time, alternative schools must be housed in separate buildings).

The advantage of this model is it allows for the existence of alternative schools at each secondary school where local officials deem them necessary, and provides opportunities for students to move between the regular school and the alternative school (an extension of the struggling student strategy built into the current model) as their needs change. It also makes it possible for students enrolled in the alternative school to take advanced classes at the regular high school if they qualify without having to provide that curriculum directly at the alternative school and consequently is potentially more efficient.

Further, with a cap of 49 students per alternative school, even in a high school with 600 students<sup>1</sup> fully 1/12 or 8.3 percent of the students could be served through an alternative program.

The drawback to this recommendation is that it will reduce the revenue flowing to the districts with the larger alternative schools this year. However, in the case of Triumph school in Laramie #1, the current model generates 44 staff positions. Standard model funding of the school assuming all of the students are at-risk would generate approximately 35 positions, and Laramie #1 indicated that the school currently has approximately 26 staff members.

Because some districts may want to operate ALE programs with more than 49 students, we recommend this be allowed with approval from WDE and that they be funded as regular schools

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<sup>1</sup> There are only 4 high schools in Wyoming with more than 600 students.

with all ADM classified as at-risk students. We conducted a fiscal analysis of this proposal and the implications of funding for ALE schools. Our findings are described below.

For schools with 49 ADM or less, the funding for ALE schools is the same as the funding for small schools with one Assistant Principal and one FTE teacher per seven ADM, so there is no funding advantage or dis-advantage to being defined as an alternative school

At more than 49 ADM, the middle and high school minimum structures that “kick-in” are such that a regular school receives more funding than would an ALE program. However, since many ALE programs would be part of a regular school campus, there might be over-all fiscal advantages to a school to count the students in the alternative school as ALE and receive funding at one AP plus one FTE teacher per seven ADM, at least up to the 49 ADM level.

Finally, rather than place a strict cap on ALE program size in the legislation, we recommend WDE approval be required for programs with more than 49 ADM.

**Table 1**  
**Schools with ALE Enrollments exceeding 49: SY 2005-06**

<b>District</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>
Campbell #1	Westwood High School	100
Laramie #1	Triumph High School	300
Natrona #1	Roosevelt High School	176
	Rebound Program	189 (varies daily)
	Alternative 2 suspension	Varies
	Star lane Center	150
Sheridan #2	Ft. McKenzie HS	60
Sweetwater #1	Independence HS	104
Sweetwater #2	Expedition Academy	62
Teton #1	Western Wyoming HS	80
Unita #1	Horizon Jr. Sr. High	55

Source: Post, Kay Wyoming Department of Education, Alternative Schools Update to the Joint Education Interim Committee, September 20-21, 2006, Cody, WY