



MEMORANDUM

To: Representative Del McOmie, Co-Chair, Joint Education Committee
Senator Hank Coe, Co-Chair, Joint Education Committee

From: Lawrence O. Picus

RE: Groundskeepers in the Wyoming School Funding Model

Date: November 20, 2007

One of the issues you asked Lawrence O. Picus and Associates to consider is the allocation of funding for Groundskeepers in the Wyoming Funding Model. This memo outlines our findings and preliminary recommendations related to this issue.

Background

As reported by the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE), there are substantial differences in allocation of groundskeeper staff (and resulting block grant funding) among school districts in Wyoming. Specifically, because the number of FTE groundskeepers allocated to each school district depends to a large extent on the acreage owned by the district, districts with similar enrollments may receive substantially different levels of funding. Table 1 (attached to this document) provides data on the number of Groundskeeper FTEs generated for each school district through the model for both school year 2006-07 and school year 2007-08.

Table 1 shows this variation. For example, Laramie #1 generates a total of 64.86 groundskeepers while Natrona #1 generates 19.72 groundskeepers in 2006-07. This leads to a funding difference of over two million dollars a year.

The discrepancy appears to be the result of some school districts supporting more unused or underutilized sites than other school districts. The question this leads to is whether or not the formula accurately allocates groundskeeper resources to school districts, and if it does not, what might be done to more accurately do so?

Options Available to Wyoming

The question facing the Legislature is whether or not the differences in funding are of sufficient concern to change the model. The WDE memo states that changes to the distribution of the funding would require statutory changes and thus require Legislative action.

There appear to be three potential ways to resolve this issue:

1. Do nothing at present and wait for recalibration
2. Limit the acreage used to estimate the FTE groundskeepers in the model to the standards established by the School Facilities Commission for operating schools. These standards provide a minimum number of acres for a school site (which varies depending on the type of school) and increases the facility acreage as enrollment capacity increases. Groundskeepers would be provided for other district facilities, but not for vacant land and unused school sites.
3. Develop a “hybrid” model that provides some groundskeeper resources for vacant land and unused facilities, but at a rate substantially lower than used to generate groundskeeper FTEs for operating schools. A related question would then be which rate to use to support groundskeepers at other district sites (offices, transportation facilities, warehouses and maintenance and operations yards).

Option 1 is the simplest as it requires no action by the Legislature. At the JEC meeting in September, a number of districts argued for this option, at least one of them arguing that other maintenance and custodial functions are under funded in the model. However, our analysis of operations and maintenance personnel (custodians and maintenance FTE staffing) shows that similar size districts generate similar numbers of FTE personnel for these two functions in 2006-07 and 2007-08, and that when operations, maintenance and utilities are compared across districts, there is relatively little difference in resource allocations among similar size districts. When groundskeepers are added to this, the differences observed in the groundskeepers analysis reappear – apparently the result of differences in the way districts are treated only under the groundskeeper segment of the model.

Option 2 has a number of benefits including:

1. It is cost based in that the model provides resources based on need (as identified by school acreage), but limits funding to an adequate school facility size as determined by the School Facilities Commission. School districts electing to build larger facilities or have larger school sites would be on their own to finance the costs of groundskeepers beyond the model.
2. It ends the incentive for districts to purchase land to generate additional groundskeeper FTEs and thus more money.
3. It more closely links the costs of school site upkeep to actual needs as identified by the School Facilities Commission.

The arguments against option 2 include:

1. Districts could argue that they purchase land to accommodate future enrollment growth. However, if a district needs a new school, once approved, the School Facilities Commission will purchase the land for the new school site, eliminating any reason for school districts to incur the expense of maintaining vacant land for such a

- contingency. If districts are simply holding land for speculative purposes, it seems inappropriate for the state to pay for the upkeep of that land as it is assumed the costs of upkeep will be capitalized in the eventual sale of that land – and would thus not be a matter of state concern. If districts don't have resources to maintain the site, then the appropriate action would be to sell it, not ask the state to pay for its upkeep.
2. It does not provide for upkeep of sites maintained by districts for educational purposes that are not specific school sites. Examples of this might be the Agriculture Farm and Outdoor Education Facility in Laramie #1 which represent 644 of the 1,206 acres the district reports (the district appears to have about 400 acres in school and district sites in use, and 172 acres in vacant or unused school sites).

Option 3 represents a compromise. It does not continue the substantial differences among school districts that appear to exist at present, but allows districts to maintain the land they current own at some reasonable level. The questions that would need to be answered if option 3 were considered are:

1. Would the state establish one category of “non-school” site land?
2. If the answer to question 1 is no, then what categories would need to be established? Examples include:
 - a. District office facilities
 - b. District transportation and maintenance yards
 - c. Vacant land
 - d. Land used for other educational purposes such as camps, farms, etc.
3. If variable land uses were established, what are appropriate grounds keeping costs for each site type?
4. Overall, groundskeepers represent total resources of about \$20 million or two percent of the total. Changing the computations would redistribute or eliminate some fraction of that figure, leading to the question of whether or not the work to modify the model is worth the effort.

Recommendation

Lawrence O. Picus and Associates recommend option 2 as the best approach to dealing with this issue. It represents a fair solution to this situation without adding undue complexities to the Wyoming School Funding Model. Specifically, we recommend that the Legislature enact statutory language enabling the WDE to implement Option 2, and that the WDE then enact regulations to implement the following actions related to the computation of groundskeepers in the model:

- Acreage computations used to generate FTE groundskeepers for open schools are limited to the SFC allowable acreage for schools, or the actual school acreage, whichever is less. This is the same logic as used for custodians and maintenance workers.

- For schools with multiple levels (i.e. elementary, middle, and/or high schools on one school site), the acreage will be based on the highest level as is currently done for custodians and maintenance workers.
- Closed or mothballed schools would be resourced at 10% of what they would generate if they were opened – the same logic as used for major maintenance funding by the SFC.
- District office buildings would be the only other sites that generate groundskeeper resources, and only if the office is not co-located with a school building.
- No other sites will be resourced with groundskeepers.

Table 1
FTE Groundskeepers and Related District Funding
School Years 2006-07 and 2007-08

SD Name	2006-07		2007-08	
	FTE	Compensation	FTE	Compensation
Albany #1	10.17	487,492	10.17	516,977
Big Horn #1	4.91	225,753	3.16	151,514
Big Horn #2	6.39	295,197	6.39	314,438
Big Horn #3	2.37	106,268	2.27	108,304
Big Horn #4	1.79	80,827	1.82	87,337
Campbell #1	22.60	1,102,297	22.98	1,187,411
Carbon #1	5.89	261,836	5.99	280,958
Carbon #2	13.57	629,570	13.81	684,921
Converse #1	13.50	620,119	13.50	655,172
Converse #2	3.06	141,376	3.15	155,492
Crook #1	6.74	311,146	6.74	330,749
Fremont # 1	20.24	968,236	20.24	1,019,448
Fremont # 2	2.32	105,617	2.97	139,739
Fremont # 6	5.07	230,644	5.07	246,966
Fremont #14	9.89	462,554	9.89	493,071
Fremont #21	3.23	143,411	3.23	160,371
Fremont #24	2.42	116,574	2.42	120,055
Fremont #25	8.08	381,611	11.44	577,744
Fremont #38	10.79	484,575	10.79	516,348
Goshen #1	11.14	518,241	10.62	523,362
Hot Springs #1	2.84	136,692	3.59	181,526
Johnson #1	14.58	669,519	14.61	710,724
Laramie #1	64.86	3,184,059	64.63	3,335,762
Laramie #2	4.22	196,065	5.61	279,239
Lincoln #1	6.07	276,742	6.07	297,443
Lincoln #2	16.57	822,652	17.08	877,014
Natrona #1	19.72	972,553	20.01	1,040,161
Niobrara #1	3.10	143,293	3.10	153,649
Park # 1	5.51	267,107	5.97	308,022
Park # 6	7.00	331,318	7.00	352,904
Park #16	1.31	55,461	1.31	59,111
Platte #1	4.32	200,020	4.63	223,573
Platte #2	2.08	92,818	2.08	98,594
Sheridan #1	5.09	244,625	5.13	262,787

Table 1 (Continued)
FTE Groundskeepers and Related District Funding
School Years 2006-07 and 2007-08

SD Name	2006-07		2007-08	
		Compensation	FTE	Compensation
Sheridan #2	8.85	428,556	8.58	437,253
Sheridan #3	0.67	31,986	0.67	33,895
Sublette #1	3.96	186,841	6.56	337,985
Sublette #9	1.07	50,012	1.07	55,248
Sweetwater #1	16.71	811,246	22.36	1,154,045
Sweetwater #2	9.03	423,867	9.03	448,700
Teton #1	16.42	947,457	10.98	661,495
Uinta #1	12.17	554,742	12.17	594,985
Uinta #4	4.32	196,967	4.32	208,073
Uinta #6	5.87	275,891	5.87	295,208
Washakie #1	7.01	318,261	7.01	341,058
Washakie #2	0.25	10,796	0.25	11,573
Weston #1	7.41	347,917	5.24	255,743
Weston #7	2.93	134,552	2.93	137,511
State Totals	418.12	19,985,356	424.55	21,423,654

Source: WDE