

August 12, 2024



To: **WYOMING HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES**

- University of Wyoming Board of Trustees
- University of Wyoming Administration
- Albany County School District Board of Trustees
- Albany County School District Administration

CC:

- Joint Education Committee of the Wyoming Legislature
- School Facilities Committee of the Wyoming Legislature
- Chairman Nicholas and Senator Nethercott
- Governor Mark Gordon
- Superintendent Megan Degenfelder

Subject: Opposition to University of Wyoming Laboratory School Closure

We, the Albany County Legislative Delegation, are writing to express our profound concern and firm opposition to the recent decision by the University of Wyoming Board of Trustees to limit the extension of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) for the UW Lab School to a single year and to cease sponsorship of the school beyond July 2025. This decision has significant implications for our community, the University, and the state's educational landscape. We are committed to finding a long-term solution that ensures the continued operation of the UW Lab School as a K-8 public school of choice on the University of Wyoming campus. Despite our consistent communication of this priority to both the Albany County School District and the University of Wyoming administration, we are disappointed by the decision to limit the agreement to just one year. We will actively oppose this decision and work to secure a stable and sustainable future for the UW Lab School.

This decision goes beyond a simple agreement between the district and the university; it impacts the entire state's educational system. The UW Lab School is not just a local or university concern—it is a critical part of Wyoming's public school fleet and plays a vital role in our state's educator training program. As such, it falls under the purview of the Select Committee on School Facilities, the Wyoming School Facilities Commission, the State Construction Department, and the Joint Appropriations Committee, all of which are responsible for the careful planning and coordination of our K-12 school facilities. Additionally, the legislature has a vested interest in ensuring that the UW Lab School continues to facilitate high-quality educator training, which is crucial for our state's K-12 teachers and is a priority for the Joint Education Committee. Finally, the UW Lab School has been an integral part of the University and the Laramie community for nearly as long as the University has existed. Decisions regarding the future of the UW Lab School must be made with full consideration of their statewide impact and the broader educational framework of Wyoming.



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The UW Lab School holds a distinguished place in Wyoming's educational history, established in 1887 to serve as a cornerstone for teacher training and innovative educational practices. The school's unique integration with the University provides invaluable hands-on training for future educators, a benefit that extends far beyond the confines of the classroom. The longstanding collaboration between the UW Lab School and the UW's College of Education has produced countless skilled teachers who contribute to educational excellence throughout Wyoming.

Through our meetings and discussions over the past few months, we have identified several concerns that have exacerbated the situation:

- The abrupt nature of this decision has caused considerable distress among parents, students, staff, and school administrators. The community strongly supports the UW Lab School and greatly benefits from the additional educational opportunities it provides. Many families have chosen the UW Lab School for its unique educational approach, which includes outdoor-based learning and access to University resources. The potential displacement of students and the disruption of this educational model are significant concerns that need to be addressed thoughtfully and collaboratively.
- The decision-making process of the University of Wyoming Board of Trustees has raised serious concerns. The majority of discussions regarding the UW Lab School MOU were held in executive sessions, with minimal opportunity for public input. This lack of transparency and community engagement is troubling, especially given the profound impact this decision has on local families and the broader educational landscape of Wyoming.
- The Albany County School District has incrementally reduced the UW Lab School of its curricula autonomy, leading the university to perceive the school as merely a traditional public school on campus rather than a vital academic and teacher training program. Additionally, the University has taken the brunt of major maintenance, routine maintenance, and security funding. Due to statutory frameworks limiting who can pay for major and routine maintenance, disagreements regarding funding have contributed to a standstill in progress being made around components of the MOU agreements.
- Both parties have expressed frustration with each other, each blaming the other for the breakdown in communication. This situation has devolved to the point where personal conflicts seem to be overshadowing objective decision-making, which should be focused on the best interests of the state and the students at both the UW Lab School and the University.

All of these challenges are addressable, and it is important to remember that we had a highly functioning school serving the University, school district, and state for many years prior to this disagreement.



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We are drafting legislation to establish a clear statutory framework for the UW Lab School's operation within the University of Wyoming, requiring collaboration between the University and the school district on key issues such as school autonomy, integration with the College of Education, school-level funding, and facility maintenance and security. This legislation is essential to ensure that the UW Lab School continues to fulfill its dual mission of providing high-quality K-8 education and facilitating educator training for Wyoming's future teachers. We strongly urge the University of Wyoming Board of Trustees to reconsider the one-year extension and engage in good faith negotiations to secure a multi-year agreement that guarantees the UW Lab School's long-term stability.

We urge all parties to continue working towards a compromised long-term solution that addresses all the challenges raised. Specifically, we need to ensure longer-term stability for the UW Lab School beyond a one-year contract. We must address the concerns raised by the University to ensure the UW Lab School fulfills its mission rather than becoming just another public school on campus. A functional and accountable communication process between the parties is essential, and it must be transparent and open to parents, staff and the broader community. This decision has far-reaching implications for the entire state of Wyoming and cannot be made without engaging the legislature.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Chris Rothfuss in black ink.

Chris Rothfuss Senate Minority Leader Wyoming State Legislature

Handwritten signature of Karlee Provenza in black ink.

Karlee Provenza Representative Wyoming State Legislature

D.F.

Dan Furphy Senator Wyoming State Legislature

Handwritten signature of Ken Chestek in black ink.

Ken Chestek Representative Wyoming State Legislature

Ocean Andrew

Ocean Andrew Representative Wyoming State Legislature

Handwritten signature of Trey Sherwood in black ink.

Trey Sherwood Representative Wyoming State Legislature
