

SUMMARY *of* PROCEEDINGS



SELECT COMMITTEE ON SCHOOL FINANCE RECALIBRATION

COMMITTEE MEETING INFORMATION

June 17-18, 2025

Thyra Thomson State Office Building, Round House Conference Room, 3rd Floor, Room 3024
444 W Collins Drive
Casper, Wyoming

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Tim Salazar, Co-chairman
Representative Scott Heiner, Co-chairman
Senator Bo Biteman
Senator Evie Brennan
Senator Troy McKeown
Senator Chris Rothfuss
Senator Wendy Schuler
Representative Ocean Andrew
Representative John Bear
Representative Tom Kelly
Representative Chip Neiman
Representative Mike Yin

LEGISLATIVE SERVICE OFFICE STAFF

Tania Hytrek, Operations Administrator
Matthew Willmarth, Senior School Finance Analyst
Catherine Camarotte, Fiscal Analyst
Ashley Phillips, Legislative Editor

OTHERS PRESENT AT MEETING

Please refer to [Appendix 1-02](#) to review the Committee Sign-in Sheet
for a list of other individuals who attended the meeting.

The Committee Meeting Summary of Proceedings (meeting minutes) is prepared by the Legislative Service Office (LSO) and is the official record of the proceedings of a legislative committee meeting. This document does not represent a transcript of the meeting; it is a digest of the meeting and provides a record of official actions taken by the Committee. All meeting materials and handouts provided to the Committee by the Legislative Service Office, public officials, lobbyists, and the public are on file at the Legislative Service Office and are part of the official record of the meeting. An index of these materials is provided at the end of this document and these materials are on file at the Legislative Service Office. For more information or to review meeting materials, please contact the Legislative Service Office at (307) 777-7881 or by e-mail at lso@wyoleg.gov. The Summary of Proceedings for each legislative committee meeting can be found on the Wyoming Legislature's website at www.wyoleg.gov.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Select Committee on School Finance Recalibration (Select Committee) met to discuss the 2025 school finance recalibration effort, including outlining a plan for the rest of the interim and receiving information from the Legislature's school finance consultants. The Select Committee also heard testimony from parents and school district personnel regarding the recalibration effort. The meeting can be viewed on the Legislature's YouTube channel within the [Select Committee's playlist](#).

CALL TO ORDER (TUESDAY, JUNE 17, 2025)

Co-chairman Salazar called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM. The following sections summarize the Select Committee proceedings by topic. Please refer to [Appendix 1-01](#) to review the Meeting Agenda.

Adoption of Rules

The Select Committee affirmatively voted by a voice vote to operate under the Joint Interim Committee Sample Rules as adopted by the Wyoming House of Representatives.

REVIEW 2025 SCHOOL FINANCE RECALIBRATION WORK PLAN

Matthew Willmarth, Senior School Finance Analyst, Legislative Service Office (LSO), provided background information regarding the Select Committee and an overview of the work plan for the 2025 recalibration effort. See [Appendix 2-01](#). Mr. Willmarth outlined a timeline of what work has already been conducted, including the Management Council and LSO executing a contract with Picus Odden & Associates and Picus Odden & Associates conducting eight professional judgement panels (PJP), and work for the rest of the interim. He noted a meeting scheduled for July was cancelled by the Select Committee co-chairmen for better workflow. Mr. Willmarth indicated the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) and school districts have been and will continue supplying data to support recalibration. He stated the draft report from Picus Odden & Associates will be presented in October and draft legislation will be presented in January.

EVIDENCE-BASED MODEL AND RECALIBRATION ELEMENTS

Dr. Larry Picus, School Finance Consultant, and Michael Griffith, Consultant, Picus Odden & Associates presented an overview of the evidence based model (EB Model) and reviewed additional items slated for recalibration. See [Appendix 3-01](#), slides 1-11. Dr. Picus explained what recalibration is and recommended that all components of the education resource block grant model (ERBGM) be recalibrated. He stated the EB Model is the most utilized method for estimating school finance adequacy across the United States. Dr. Picus highlighted two ways the 2025 recalibration effort will differ from previous recalibrations: 1) consideration of the First Judicial District of Wyoming's recent court decision in *Wyoming Education Association v. State of Wyoming* and 2) engagement of additional experts for peer reviews on salaries and external and regional cost adjustments.

Dr. Picus outlined the EB Model's components, including staffing for core programs, dollar per pupil resources, additional support for struggling students, central office resources, and Wyoming specific factors, comparing the EB Model to the ERBGM. Dr. Picus reviewed aspects of staffing for core programs including teacher resources, other certified staff, school administration and support, and full-day kindergarten. He explained how class and school sizes are used to generate resources such as core and specialist teachers, support for struggling students, professional development, technology, and career and technical education (CTE) teachers. Dr. Picus provided recommendations regarding the areas that necessitate recalibration, calling attention to the number of core teachers for elementary schools and the deviation of the ERBGM as compared to the EB Model's recommendation. He also touched on the ERBGM's deviation from the EB Model recommendation for core and specialist/elective teachers for

secondary schools. Dr. Picus indicated the deviation in class sizes is attributable to the use of the class sizes in the ERBGM prior to the 2005 recalibration, known as the MAP model. There was significant discussion on the distinction between supervisory and instructional aides and appropriate use of instructional aides in lieu of certified teacher tutors. Dr. Picus stated the EB Model recommends the use of tutors to improve student performance and stated, if deployed appropriately, tutors can impact the performance of students at-risk of academic failure. Dr. Picus addressed the Select Committee's questions regarding teacher planning periods.

Dr. Picus went on to describe elements funded on a dollar per pupil resources, including gifted and talented programs, professional development, materials, technology, CTE equipment, and student activities. He noted the EB Model's allocation for student activities was designed to provide more funding per student for smaller school districts. In response to inquiries posed by the Select Committee, Dr. Picus discussed the use of technology in classrooms and agreed to provide more information regarding resources for student activities.

Dr. Picus discussed resources for struggling students, including those students served in special education, students qualifying for free and reduced lunch (FRL) programs, and students identified as an English language learner (ELL). He explained the reimbursement model for special education and strategies to provide services more efficiently. Dr. Picus indicated the ERBGM uses an unduplicated "at-risk" count of students qualifying for FRL programs, identified as an ELL, or are mobile in grades six through twelve, to derive the estimated resources necessary for struggling students. He discussed after-school and summer programs are resourced based on the number of at-risk students in a district, with Mr. Griffith noting that successful programs typically focus on learning and are open to all students. Dr. Picus mentioned the challenge of supporting ELL students and offered potential solutions for districts experiencing a rapid influx of non-English speaking students. He noted alternative schools are allocated resources in the EB Model in the same manner as small schools, noting though that the EB Model envisions alternative schools to not exceed 50 students. Dr. Picus also answered questions regarding out of state placements.

Dr. Picus also covered central office staffing, operations and maintenance, transportation, and food services, noting that while food service programs should be self-supporting, some states have moved towards providing free meals to all students. The Select Committee discussed using artificial intelligence to automate some central office functions and how changes at the federal level may impact state level resources.

Dr. Picus explained how salaries are calculated in the ERBGM, using a base salary that adjusts for each district's unique staff experience, education, and responsibility, where appropriate. He indicated that salaries are further adjusted by the regional cost adjustment (RCA), noting that the ERBGM uses either the Wyoming Cost of Living Index (WCLI), the hedonic wage index calculated in 2005, or the statewide average (a base value of 100). He stated that health insurance costs are based on the State of Wyoming's health insurance premium for its employees. The Select Committee asked about the relationship between the EB Model and the state's basket of goods, which Dr. Picus clarified was not directly tied to specific costs but rather aimed at providing adequate resources for a high-quality education. The Select Committee also discussed the need for more data on health benefits and retirement contributions from school districts.

The Select Committee discussed challenges in CTE, including space constraints and funding adequacy in schools. The Select Committee explored the possibility of implementing a tiered funding system for different CTE programs, recognizing the varying costs and needs across different programs such as welding and nursing. The discussion also touched on the importance of community colleges and partnerships with private industry in providing skilled workers.

Dr. Picus briefly discussed the recalibration elements the district court required to be studied during the 2025 recalibration: consistent inflationary adjustments, teacher salaries, elementary school mental health counselors, school resource officers, school food service programs, and computers for every student.

Public Comment

Nate Martin, Executive Director, Better Wyoming; Matt Crabb, Natrona County resident; Robin Edwards, retired Johnson County School District Number One (Johnson #1) teacher; Robin Harriet, former rural school student; Brandy Maddox, Natrona County School District Number One (Natrona #1) certified tutor; Melissa Beringer, Wyoming parent; expressed support for K-12 public schools in Wyoming.

Mary Schmidt, Natrona #1 Board of Trustees, discussed the educational basket of goods and encouraged the Select Committee to consider being more specific when defining what belongs in the basket.

Rob Hill, Public Policy Director, Wyoming Association of Career and Technical Education, and Joseph Martinez, CTE instructor, Niobrara County School District Number One, provided comment on the importance of CTE programs in K-12 public schools and encouraged the Select Committee to consider all areas of CTE during recalibration.

Joey Correnti, Executive Director, Rural Wyoming Matters, expressed appreciation for the Select Committee and encouraged the Select Committee to carefully consider each policy decision.

Affie Ellis, Lobbyist, Wyoming Virtual Academy, encouraged the Select Committee to review how the ERBGM is applied to virtual schools and consider an alternative funding formula for these schools.

UPDATE ON PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT PANELS

Dr. Picus described the preliminary PJPs, composed of Wyoming school district educators and administrators and consisting of eight four-hour sessions, four online and four in-person, where Picus Odden & Associates gathered feedback on the EB Model and the current ERBGM's effectiveness. See [Appendix 3-01](#), slides 12-25. He reported PJP participants generally found the ERBGM worked well, though they highlighted areas for improvement. Dr. Picus noted updates to the presentation, added responses from the last two online and last two in-person PJPs, are identified by blue text in [Appendix 3-01](#).

During the PJPs, Dr. Picus said participants expressed strong support for the ERBGM, which provides flexibility for local spending decisions and predictable formula-based funding, while opposing categorical grants. Participants emphasized the ability to respond to student and community needs may be impaired if funds were allocated or limited to categorical grants. He also heard concerns from participants that the ERBGM's salaries are too low, and school districts are struggling to attract and retain quality teachers, particularly due to lower salaries compared to surrounding states, and questions were raised about the University of Wyoming's ability to produce enough new teachers.

Dr. Picus stated participants emphasized the desire to maintain the current ERBGM's student to teacher ratios of 16:1 for elementary schools and 21:1 for secondary schools as opposed to the EB Model's ratios of 15:1 in grades kindergarten through grade three and 25:1 in grades four through twelve. He described challenges reported by participants, including how the ERBGM allocates staff on a fractional basis. Dr. Picus explained external cost adjustments (ECA) to the ERBGM are applied to both base salaries and staff adjustments for experience, education and responsibility, and fractional staff occur due to uneven student enrollment. He reported that PJP participants indicated additional nurses and mental health counselors for students and staff are necessary. Dr. Picus agreed to explore shared services for these requested positions.

Additionally, Dr. Picus said participants identified additional funding needs for instructional aides or paraeducators, particularly in early grades. Dr. Picus reviewed the resources allocated for ELL students through the EB Model and potential solutions to support these students and school districts where there is a large population of ELL students. Dr. Picus reported participants acknowledged the inefficiency of very low-enrollment schools but noted strong community resistance to closing local schools because the school often doubles as a community center. Overall, participants prioritized keeping small schools open when possible and using the flexibility of the block grant to handle small class sizes, rather than any mandated consolidation.

Dr. Picus reported on various financial concerns and challenges brought by participants, including the RCA and the allocation of the school year 2025-26 ECA. Participants discussed how the ECA will be budgeted, which may not translate to raising teachers' salaries, but rather covering increases to health insurance premiums. Dr. Picus reviewed options previously recommended for the RCA. Dr. Picus described some of the challenges small schools face with the ERBGM, particularly with regard to changing enrollments and potential cliff effects. He explained small schools are funded differently in the ERBGM and stated the difference may substantially impact a district's allocation.

Participants also discussed health insurance policies during the PJPs. Dr. Picus said the ERBGM is tied to the State of Wyoming's health plan's premium rates. Participants expressed concern the State plan's premiums have been flat for four years, not keeping up with rising healthcare costs, and do not fully meet the needs of district staff. The Select Committee discussed the possibility of requiring all school districts to participate in the State's health insurance plan, noting Natrona #1 is currently the only district participating. The Select Committee also considered what other aspects of school district operations could be consolidated or centralized.

Dr. Picus informed the Select Committee that participants appreciated the reimbursement models for special education and transportation, but requested the reimbursements be paid out sooner. School districts expressed a preference for keeping general fund cash reserve levels at 30 percent of the School Foundation Program amount rather than returning to 15 percent, stating delays between spending and reimbursements create budgeting challenges, sometimes over multiple fiscal years. Dr. Picus also reported that participants feel routine maintenance is underfunded in the ERBGM. Dr. Picus stated he plans to consult current experts and State Construction Department staff as part of the recalibration of routine maintenance funding. He also mentioned possibly coordinating the routine maintenance funding with the separate major maintenance program to encourage good upkeep practices.

Public Comment

Charles Auzqui, Superintendent, and Travis Pearson, Board of Trustees, Johnson #1, described the challenges Johnson #1 faces regarding staffing, including teacher salaries, CTE positions, and bus drivers. Superintendent Auzqui explained other initiatives Johnson #1 has undertaken to improve student outcomes.

Gillian Chapman, Superintendent, and Kristen Mayo, Executive Director of Resources, Teton County School District Number One (Teton #1), spoke to the unique economic conditions in Teton County and how they affect education, noting the growing tourism industry, low wages, and high cost of living. Superintendent Chapman noted the large ELL population in Teton #1 and encouraged the Select Committee to keep in mind the difference between communities. Ms. Mayo encouraged using an automatic renewal system for RCA indices and emphasized the importance of considering the entire funding model rather than individual components. Ms. Mayo also informed the Select Committee Teton #1's liability insurance had increased to cover cybersecurity and firearms.

Chase Christensen, Superintendent, Sheridan County School District Number Three (Sheridan #3); Annie Griffin, Superintendent, Washakie County School District Number Two; and Shane Ogden, Superintendent, Park County School District Number Sixteen, expressed concerns about fractional positions in the ERBGM, particularly for instructional facilitators and guidance counselors, and requested a minimum funding of one full-time position for these components.

MEETING RECESS

The Select Committee recessed at 3:58 PM.

CALL TO ORDER (WEDNESDAY, JUNE 18, 2025)

Co-chairman Heiner called the meeting to order at 8:36 AM.

FOLLOW UP INFORMATION

Dr. Picus presented data on student activities funding, noting it totals roughly 3 percent of state funding for Wyoming's K-12 public schools when combining the transportation reimbursement, about \$10–11 million annually, and the ERBGM allocation, about \$38–47 million. He explained this proportion has been fairly steady since 2008. Dr. Picus indicated student activities will be recalibrated and will explore alternative approaches. Mr. Griffith then outlined several comparative analyses he will prepare at the Select Committee's request, including how other states fund student activities, approaches to extended learning and summer programs across states, the number of teacher professional development days funded elsewhere, and examples of state-level insurance pooling for school facilities and employee health plans. Mr. Griffith said he would focus on states regionally to Wyoming and any others with notable policies. Select Committee members suggested including North Dakota and Alaska in the comparisons due to similar rural and mineral revenue contexts. The Select Committee requested additional information on school districts' insurance premiums versus claims made to explore if a self-insurance model would be practical, and research how other states handle homeschool students in student activities.

SCHOOL DISTRICT INSURANCE POLICIES

Brian Farmer, Executive Director, Wyoming School Boards Association (WSBA), testified about how school districts obtain and manage insurance and highlighted current cost pressures. He explained that districts secure health, property, and liability insurance through various avenues: some join statewide insurance pools, including WSBA-administered pools for employee health coverage and the School Risk Retention Program (SRRP) for property and liability insurance, while others purchase private policies or self-insure. Mr. Farmer noted several growing cost drivers, like cybersecurity insurance, and Wyoming's recent repeal of "gun-free zones" in schools being especially impactful on liability coverage. He pointed out the SRRP has chosen not to charge extra for firearms coverage, whereas other insurers may charge districts tens of thousands of dollars more per year for that added risk protection.

On legal liability, Mr. Farmer discussed Wyoming's Governmental Claims Act (governmental immunity) and cautioned that while it can shield school districts from certain lawsuits, it is "not a get out of jail free card." SRRP asserts governmental immunity as a defense whenever applicable, potentially limiting or barring liability. However, he stressed that districts still face litigation costs, so even if a claim is ultimately dismissed or capped, school districts must endure the legal process and expenses. In response to the Select Committee questions about WSBA's dual role in advocacy versus insurance administration, Mr. Farmer emphasized that these functions are kept separate. WSBA's advocacy agenda is driven by its member school boards, through a delegate assembly, rather than unilaterally set by staff. Meanwhile, insurance services are handled through distinct entities – for example, the SRRP is a joint powers board with its own directors – and each district independently decides whether to participate in those programs. He explained that any

model policies or guidance WSBA provides are offered only as optional recommendations to help districts reduce liability exposure.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Dicky Shanor, Chief of Staff, WDE, testified about past efforts to centralize costs and implement statewide information systems, noting that while progress has been made, local autonomy remains a challenge. The Select Committee discussed concerns about reporting requirements and federal funding, with Mr. Shanor explaining that efforts are underway to streamline these processes.

Shad Hamilton, Special Education Director, Unita County School District Number Four, testified in support of changes to the special education funding model. Mr. Hamilton emphasized the need for greater flexibility in delivering services, noting that the current model creates challenges for rural districts in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. He highlighted how the categorical funding mechanism and personnel requirements do not align with actual service delivery realities, especially in smaller districts. Mr. Hamilton urged the Select Committee to consider models that support outcomes and provide predictable funding, particularly in light of staff shortages and student needs.

John Williams, Chief Financial Officer, Unita County School District Number One, testified about the district's experience implementing a concealed carry policy. He explained the district adopted a policy in 2017 and went through several procedural iterations before finalizing implementation. Mr. Williams emphasized the policy is still active and noted its significance for school safety in his district.

Jed Cicarelli, Chief Financial Officer, Laramie County School District Number One; Jeremy Smith, Business Manager, Sheridan County School District Number One (Sheridan #1); Damien Smith, Superintendent, Unita County School District Number Six (Unita #6); Mitch Revelli, Business Manager, Unita #6; and Alex Ayers, Superintendent, Campbell County School District Number One, discussed ERBGM salaries and compared them to school district base salaries and how base salaries may change due to an ECA or an RCA. Mr. Jeremy Smith also shared examples of how districts may trade off instructional resources to cover services like school resource officers, and recommended operational changes like more frequent special education reimbursements to help districts manage cash flow for high-cost placements. Superintendent Damien Smith highlighted the need to recalibrate salaries to ensure small and border-area districts can compete in the educator labor market. Mr. Revelli detailed that despite paying above the ERBGM salaries, the district still had seven unlicensed teachers last year and faced a \$20,000 shortfall per teacher when benefits are included.

Kate Mead, Teton #1 Board of Trustees, underscored the importance of maintaining high standards and strong public investment in education to ensure families continue to view Wyoming schools as a reason to stay, return, or invest in the state.

Jeff Jones, Superintendent, Sheridan #1, cautioned the Select Committee against making broad statewide policy changes in response to isolated incidents involving school counselors or staff. Dr. Jones emphasized the importance of maintaining trust between local school districts and policymakers, encouraging transparency and dialogue without overgeneralizing problems that may be specific to individual cases.

Jenifer Hopkins, Natrona #1 Board of Trustees, urged the Select Committee to focus on student mental health and developmental needs, warning against a system that emphasizes early academics at the expense of emotional well-being. She advocated for more balance and parental choice, emphasizing that children's developmental needs have not changed even as academic expectations have intensified.

Ms. Schmidt, Natrona #1 Board of Trustees, offered comments about the evolving role of school libraries. She observed that many teachers now rely on digital tools and resources for classroom instruction and research and questioned whether traditional library investments are still meeting student needs.

Fred Hollingshead, Director, Cowboy State Virtual Academy, Sheridan #1, provided testimony about Wyoming's growing landscape of virtual education. He encouraged the Select Committee to consider how recalibration could equitably support virtual education and ensure students and families utilizing this modality receive comparable resources.

Theresa Chaulk, Superintendent, Lincoln County School District Number One, testified that the ERBGM does not reflect the actual costs districts face, particularly for teacher salaries. She explained that while the ERBGM includes allocations for positions to support struggling students, those funds are often diverted to cover classroom teacher pay, exceeding ERBGM assumptions. She described the increasing difficulty of retaining teachers and managing classrooms, urging the Select Committee to fully fund all components of the ERBGM and take consultant recommendations seriously.

Lee Zimmer, Curriculum Director, Sheridan #1, testified about the evolving and demanding nature of teaching today. Ms. Zimmer emphasized that educators go far beyond delivering lessons; they unpack State standards, write and refine assessments, deliver targeted interventions, undergo additional professional training, and adapt to emerging technologies. She pointed out teachers are performing the equivalent of 12 months of work within a 10-month contract, often continuing duties after the school year ends. She urged the Select Committee to recognize this scope of responsibility and consider competitive compensation, stating investing in teachers is directly tied to improving student outcomes and securing the future of public education.

Boyd Brown, Executive Director, Wyoming Association of School Administrators, emphasized the ERBGM is not broken, it only needs adjustments. He advocated for maintaining block grant flexibility to allow local control and praised the state's strong educational outcomes, including national rankings in the National Assessment of Educational Progress and American College Testing scores. Dr. Brown also highlighted the value of CTE and noted growing challenges in teacher recruitment, urging competitive salaries to keep Wyoming schools strong.

Superintendent Christensen, Sheridan #3, encouraged the Select Committee to use existing state data to guide recalibration decisions. He emphasized teachers work long hours and should be compensated accordingly. He also clarified the structure of the State pension system.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Select Committee moved into executive session to discuss matters confidential by law at 12:56 PM. The Select Committee moved out of executive session at 1:53 PM.

MEETING ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Co-chairman Heiner adjourned the meeting at 1:54 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Senator Tim Salazar, Co-chairman

Committee Meeting Materials Index

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1-01		Agenda	Legislative Service Office
1-02		Sign-In Sheet	Legislative Service Office
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3-01	Evidence-Based Model	UPDATED 2025 School Finance Recalibration PowerPoint	Picus Odden & Associates
7-01	Review Recalibration Elements	2025 School Finance Desk Audit	Picus Odden & Associates