



Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center
UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING



WYOMING
KIDS COUNT

How Wyoming Funds Public Schools

THE VALUE OF A GOOD EDUCATION



High quality education has long been a priority in the Equality State. The State's constitution guarantees an equitable education to all K-12 students, regardless of where they go to school.

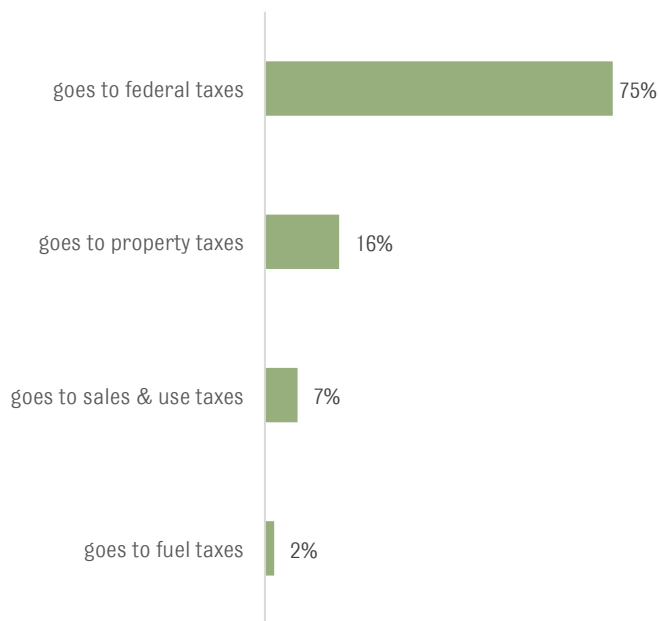
The School Foundation Program (SFP) is the main spending account for K-12 education in Wyoming.¹ Nearly half (49%) of funding for the SPF account comes from minerals.² A second account, the School Capital Constuction Account (SCCA), funds major operations and school construction and is supported by minerals, with no taxpayer contribution.³

How Is Your Tax Dollar Split?

Wyomingites do not pay a state income tax, but do pay federal taxes, property taxes, sales & use taxes, and fuel taxes. On average, Wyomingites pay around \$1,349 in property taxes annually,⁴ meaning they contribute about \$931 each year to K-12 education.

The Average Wyoming Property Owner Contributes Less Than 2¢ Per Student Per Year⁵

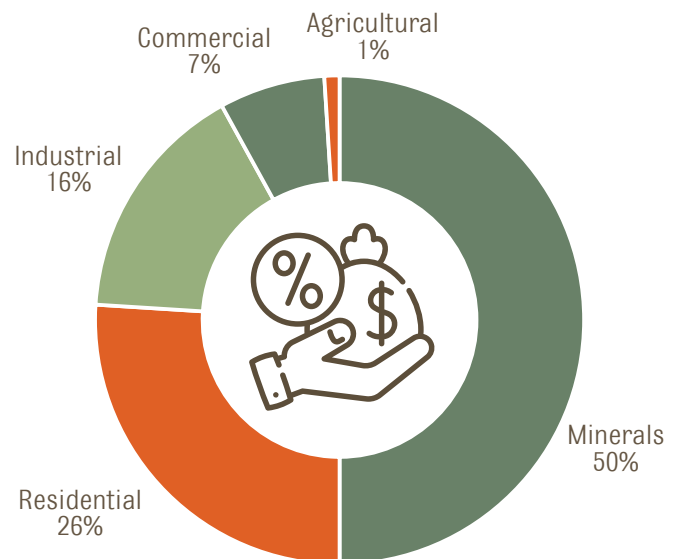
For every tax dollar you pay...



Wyoming tax burden is based on the average median earnings for a full-time, year-round worker in the state (\$48,707)¹⁵

Wyoming Property Taxes¹¹

Where they come from



69% of all property taxes go to public school funding

Where Does K-12 Funding Come From?

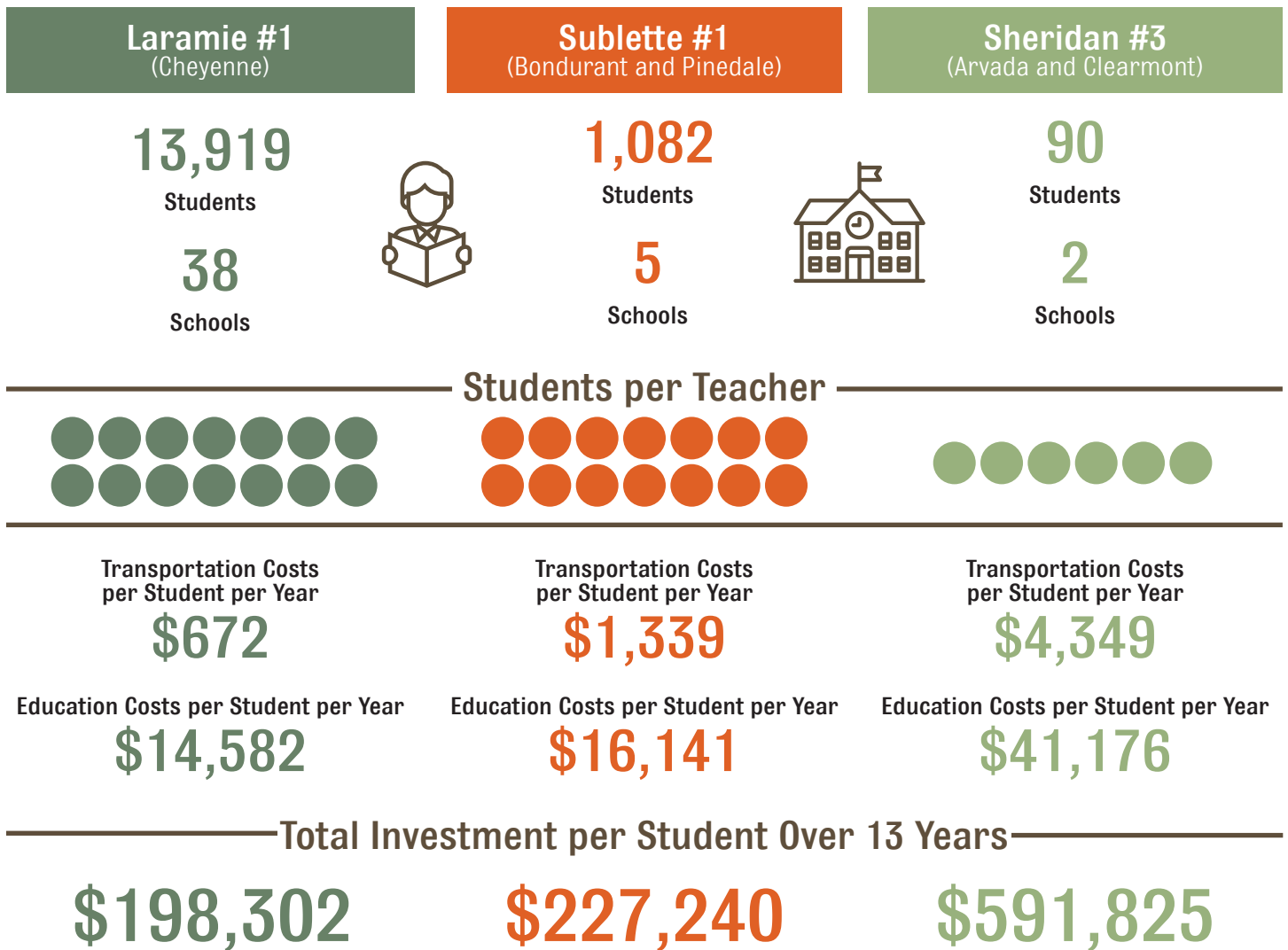
Most states, including Wyoming, use property taxes to fund public education. The Equality State takes a different approach to generating and distributing property tax revenue. Half (50%) of the property tax revenue generated in Wyoming comes from our mineral rich soil, and more than two-thirds (69%) of all property tax collected goes to K-12 schools.⁶ This arrangement allows Wyoming residents to enjoy some of the lowest property taxes in the nation.⁷ When the value and production levels of minerals fall though, so does funding for K-12 education. The current forecast for funding in the coming school year estimates a \$300 million dollar deficit.⁸ After July 2022, money coming from our federal coal lease bonuses will disappear.⁹ To make up the difference, Wyoming can dip into our “rainy day” reserve/savings fund,¹⁰ the Legislative Stabilization Reserve Account (LSRA), but that too will run out. Ultimately, Wyoming needs to seek a stable source of tax dollars as a means of supporting schools and communities.



A Closer Look at Per-Student Spending

During the 2019-2020 school year, Wyoming spent about \$15,844 for each of its 92,425 students.¹² Wyoming's overall ruralness—a result of our great size combined with our small population—means that schools in remote areas are simply more expensive. One noticeable expense can be found in transportation costs; even more so in schools in remote locations. These costs help explain why per-student spending varies widely from district to district.

Wyoming's least populous school districts require more than double the funding of larger districts.



Numbers are from the 2019-2020 school year.¹³ Cost of transportation per student is calculated by dividing the total cost of transportation services for a district by the total number of enrolled students. Total investment represents the cost of a K-12 education (13 years of school) for one student, in current dollars.

Addressing the Loss of School Funding

In 2020, to address the current budget crisis confronting Wyoming, Governor Gordon proposed eliminating 10% from the state budget.¹⁴ This would be equivalent to cutting:

1. All School Administration 
2. Consumer & Home Economics Classes
3. Dual Enrollment in College Courses
4. Career Guidance 
5. School Library Services 
6. Crossing Guard & Building Alarms
7. Assistance for Visually Impaired Students
8. Distance Learning 
9. Funding for At-Risk Youth
10. Health and Media Services 

Conclusion

Wyoming's reliance on mineral income is not stable. Our ability to use property taxes and minerals to fund nearly 7 of every 10 dollars spent on K-12 education is approaching a cliff. Wyoming's emphasis must be on generating new revenue and considering some strategic funding cuts—to ensure our children get the high-quality education they deserve.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Wyoming Legislative Service Office. (2021). 2021 Budget fiscal data book. <https://bit.ly/2SmV25w>
- 2 Ibid
- 3 Ibid
- 4 Tax Proper. (2021). Wyoming Property Taxes. <https://bit.ly/3pA4eA0>
- 5 Wyoming Tax Payers Association. (2020). Wyoming Property Taxation: 2020. <https://bit.ly/34Z1SB1>
- 6 Wyoming Tax Payers Association. (2020). Wyoming Property Taxation: 2020. <https://bit.ly/34Z1SB1>
- 7 Foulk, G. (2021). Structural deficits present a challenging outlook for Wyoming's K-12 education funding. Wyoming News Now. <https://bit.ly/3uYm7JP>
- 8 Wyoming Legislative Service Office. (2021). K-12 funding background information. <https://bit.ly/3goANwC>
- 9 Ibid
- 10 Ibid
- 11 Wyoming Tax Payers Association. (2020). Wyoming Property Taxation: 2020. <https://bit.ly/34Z1SB1>
- 12 Wyoming Department of Education. (2020). 2019-20 Wyoming school districts' financial reporting and profile. Statistical Report Series No. 3. <https://bit.ly/3gyw0ZB>
- 13 Ibid
- 14 State of Wyoming. (2020). Governor calls first 10% state budget cuts “devastating but necessary.” <https://bit.ly/3pz6RSD>
- 15 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey. Earnings in the Past 12 Months (In 2019 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) (2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table S2001). <https://bit.ly/34W5a8e>

The Wyoming Community Foundation is the Wyoming KIDS COUNT partner of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. This research was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and produced by the Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center at the University of Wyoming. We thank the Casey Foundation for their support but acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Casey Foundation.