

Gardiner Public Schools FAQs

Gardiner Schools budget has declined greatly due to decreasing enrollment and statewide budget decisions. We are using money in reserve to maintain operations at our current level and cannot continue to do so. If nothing changes, Gardiner will deplete its cash reserves in less than 3 years. It has already spent >\$400,000 more than the State's allocated funds in 2016-2017 and will again this year at current staffing levels.

1. Q: Gardiner recently purchased a new bus for activities and athletics; how can they spend all that money when the budget is in trouble? A: Unlike a family budget with one, unrestricted pool of money to pay bills, the school has several restricted funding sources and they are legally bound (by the State) as to how it can spend that funding. In this case, the bus was purchased with restricted "Bus Depreciation Fund" monies that can be used for transportation only, despite the school's desire/need to use that money elsewhere. Also, the "new" athletics bus was purchased as a 'used vehicle' and is fact older than the one it replaced—this was done to prevent health and safety issues and the escalating repair issues with that previous bus.
2. Q: Is there a problem with the school's roof? A: Yes, look up as you walk in through the main entrance. There are places where the sheetrock is sagging and pulling away from the beams along the ceiling. The roof is now leaking in this crucial spot and potentially causing more costly damage to the school in the near future if things aren't fixed. This is not a small repair and a new roof will likely cost >\$555,000.
3. Q: Is it true the school's boilers need to be replaced too? How much would that cost? A: Yes, they are near the end of their life—and quite literally, the heat could go out in the school next week and there would be no back up. This is no small expense either: new, efficient boilers and boiler-related infrastructure upgrades will likely cost ~\$650,000.
4. Q: Gardiner Schools received money from Wyoming for the students from Mammoth, can't that offset some of the budget issues and infrastructure upgrades? A: No. In the past, the school got money from the National Park Service (NPS) AND Montana—that dual funding is not available for the Mammoth students anymore. This allowed the school to build up a significant cash reserve (which may run out in <3yrs if nothing changes) and was able to spend liberally on programs, staff and resources. The NPS no longer provides funding; the state of Wyoming has picked up that responsibility for the students who reside inside the Park in Wyoming. Because another state is providing money, Montana now deducts that amount from the funding they provide to Gardiner Schools. The money from Wyoming goes into Gardiner School's general fund reducing local taxpayers funding obligation (mills) by nearly 50% while maintaining the General Fund's maximum budget allowed by the State.
5. Q: Will my taxes go up? A: Taxpayers may see increases to support a variety of district funds, however, the school board has worked diligently to protect local taxpayers for the 2017-2018 school year. The school board felt strongly that placing the Wyoming funds into the General Fund (as opposed to setting them aside in a separate, unrestricted account) was important to protect our local taxpayers from an increase.
6. Q: Why can't the school just make some cuts to balance the budget? A: "Some cuts" won't fix a \$400,000 deficit. At present, the school is using 97% of its General Fund budget for staffing costs—compared to 80-85% for the majority of other schools in Montana. The Gardiner School Board and its three subcommittees, are looking at ALL options right now to stabilize the budget and ensure the long-term sustainability of the school, however, most of the cuts and reductions in flexible expenditures have already been made. The enactment of any decisions will be done with a full understanding of potential impacts to students, faculty, staff and the community at large.
7. Q: How did the school get into this financial mess? Weren't they financially 'well off'? A: Yes, the school was "well off" for many years because of the multiple sources of funding that it had from the state of Montana, directly from the National Park Service and other federal funds. In recent times, funding for the

Mammoth students, in particular, has been replaced with money from Wyoming ONLY—this means that the money for these students that came from Montana and the NPS is gone, and if trends continue in the federal budget, some of these other funds may go away as well. Furthermore, and of great concern, is that Gardiner School's enrollment is falling—168 students are enrolled (K-12) as of this fall—the last 3 years has been the first time the number of students has been below 200 in decades.

8. Q: Why is Gardiner Schools' enrollment dropping? A: Declining enrollment is a result of large-scale trends that face our community as a whole, including: housing shortages, escalating real-estate prices, transition of housing from family residences to vacation rentals and the changing hiring practices of the area's major employers. Less kids equals less funding.
9. Q: Isn't Gardiner the top-ranked school in the state? How could it get into this precarious financial position? A: Yes, Gardiner was the only "Gold Medal"-ranked school in Montana for 2016-2017. This placement is based upon graduation rates, standardized test scores, the number of students who take, and pass, AP classes AND that have a graduating class of 15 or more—a number that may only last for the next 3 more years. Gardiner has been a well-funded school for many years and has done a lot for its students to give them a world-class education in a small, mountain town setting. The sources of that funding are either gone or diminishing and the Gardiner School Board is in the process of evaluating all the options to balancing the budget while holding onto many of the things that make Gardiner Schools great.
10. Q: Can the school combine the principal and superintendent positions to save money? A: Yes. By Montana law, and based on enrollment numbers and staffing, the school is only required to have one 1/2 time superintendent and one 1/4 FTE (Full Time Employee) principal—so the same person can fulfill both roles. Is this the right decision for Gardiner? This is among the many questions that the Gardiner School Board of Trustees is evaluating over the next 2-3 months. The board's decision to hire Mr. Russell as an "interim superintendent," on a one-year contract, was to fill this key position with someone who could guide the school through these challenging times, but also leave the school with the option to absorb the superintendent position should it be deemed appropriate. These, and many other decisions are ones the board of Trustees is addressing now.
11. Q: Will this negatively affect the town going forward? A: Perhaps so, but it is hard to say exactly how. Children are the lifeblood of any community and when potential residents look at making anyplace "home," they look at jobs, the schools and housing... the Gardiner Schools are tied to all three of these.
12. Q: Is there any hope on the horizon? A: Yes, there is always hope as we have an extraordinary community full of creative, motivated people, outstanding and resourceful faculty, staff, and students—these are all reasons for hope. What can you do? Give us your feedback and ideas, contact the Boosters and the North Yellowstone Education Foundation (NYEF; a newly founded nonprofit being organized) to help the school offset the financial impacts and to provide other avenues for anyone to pitch-in on behalf of Gardiner Public Schools. It's not just about money, we need you to listen to kids read, share your talents and skills with classes, help out with sports and other extra-curricular events... it will take all of us working together to ensure Gardiner meets and overcomes these challenges. We need your input on this and so many other decisions affecting the school... so please ask questions and get involved! FYI, NYEF and the Boosters Club will both have tables at the Library Bazaar for the November 7th event.