Fremont County School District # 1
Wyoming

**Superintendent:** Paige Hughes  
**Primary contact:** Karen Bierhaus, director of federal programs and consolidated grants  
1,733 students, K-12, rural

### District Description

Fremont County School District # 1 covers 3,147 square miles in west-central Wyoming. The city of Lander (population 10,244) is the Fremont County seat and the school district’s administrative center. The district is nestled along the Wind River Range of the Rocky Mountains, an area popular with tourists and recreational enthusiasts and once the site of a gold rush and Indian trading post. Ranching, agriculture, tourism, and the oil and gas industries play significant roles in the region’s economy.

The Wind River Indian Reservation, shared by the Eastern Shoshone and the Northern Arapaho tribes, is located in Fremont County. There are three schools on the reservation, but 18% of the students enrolled in the Fremont County school district are American Indian. Some of these students live on the reservation but choose to attend Fremont schools.

The eight schools in the Fremont district enroll 1,733 students in five elementary schools, a junior high, and two high schools, one of which is an alternative school. The two most rural elementary schools enroll just 6 and 18 students, but the other three schools in more populated parts of the district enroll many more.

### Key Findings

- American Indian students make up 18% of the enrollment in Fremont County School District #1. Most of the Indian students are also English language learners who have difficulty with oral and written English because of the influence of their Native American language. The students receive additional help in reading, speaking, and writing through tutoring and after-school programs.

- All Fremont County schools have made adequate yearly progress in past years, but the district is concerned about its ability to continue this trend when additional grade levels are tested in 2005-06. More tested grades will mean that student subgroups will be large enough to count for AYP at individual schools, and some subgroups may not make AYP. The district is also concerned that the alternative high school that serves so many low-achieving students will not make AYP as the proficiency targets increase.

- The very rural and mountainous nature of Fremont County makes it difficult for the school district to attract and retain highly qualified teachers. With teacher retirements increasing in the coming years, district officials are concerned that they will not be able to recruit qualified teachers for math and special education.
Overall Impact of NCLB

The general level of accountability required by No Child Left Behind is well accepted in the district and has become a part of how the Fremont County schools function, according to Karen Bierhaus, director of federal programs and consolidated grants. “There is a much greater reality and understanding of the importance of accountability at the instructional level,” she said. “We all have a clear idea now of the testing. Test results and other data are being turned into information that principals, teachers, parents, and students can all use.” The students are benefiting, according to Bierhaus, but district staff knows that more improvement is needed.

What Bierhaus finds particularly burdensome and time consuming is the paperwork associated with documenting NCLB requirements. She also expressed concern about the continual need for parent notification and involvement that NCLB requires. “Designing parent involvement activities beyond the traditional has been a challenge,” said Bierhaus. “We still need to look for more ways to engage our least represented parent groups.”

NCLB and Student Achievement

Overall, the performance of students in the Fremont schools meets or exceeds the proficiency requirements for NCLB as set by the state of Wyoming. The subgroups, however, have not maintained the required level of performance as measured by WYCAS (Wyoming Comprehensive Assessment System). The achievement gaps between white and American Indian students exist at all three grade levels and are greatest in grade 11, as the following table shows.

| Table 1. Percentage of Proficient and Advanced Students
| Grades 4, 8 and 11, 2004-05, WYCAS |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | Grade 4 | Grade 8 | Grade 11 |
| | Reading | Math | Reading | Math | Reading | Math |
| State target | 42% | 37% | 45% | 38% | 57% | 47% |
| Fremont | 45% | 41% | 46% | 51% | 58% | 50% |
| White | 53% | 48% | 49% | 55% | 65% | 56% |
| American Indian | 25% | 19% | 28% | 28% | 24% | 16% |
| English language learners | 27% | 20% | 25% | 13% | 8% | 17% |
| Low-income | 35% | 25% | 32% | 32% | 41% | 33% |
| Students with disabilities | 5% | 5% | 5% | 5% | 15% | 15% |

Source: Wyoming Department of Education, wdesecure.k12.wv.us/stats/wde_public.esc.show

Adequate Yearly Progress and School Improvement

All of the Fremont schools have made AYP in the past three years, and they did so again in 2004-05. Some student subgroups have been too small to count for AYP at the school level, but all except the small racial-ethnic groups count at the district level. When testing at more grade levels takes place in 2006, the subgroups at some schools will be large enough to count for AYP.
Testing Issues

Wyoming tests students in grades 4, 8, and 11. This will change in the spring of 2006, when all students from grades 3 through 8 plus 11 will be tested in accordance with NCLB. The WYCAS test used in previous years has been eliminated, and new tests were developed for the 2005-06 testing cycle. The new tests, Proficiency Assessments for Wyoming Students (PAWS), were piloted last year, and workshops were held with teacher participation to determine the cut scores of the new tests.

Students in Fremont County schools also take the TerraNova test (a commercial standardized test), and twice a year they take an online test, the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) from the Northwest Evaluation Association, so that teachers can follow the achievement of individual students.

Impact of NCLB on Curriculum and Instruction

Each Fremont school sets its own goals for improvements in academic performance, but the curriculum for the schools is adopted by the district. In the past, major efforts have focused on improving reading and writing instruction, but the focus now is on math because math proficiency levels trail those in reading and writing. The district has adopted a new math program for K-6 and is researching best practices in the secondary levels to assure that there is a smooth transition to the junior high from what students learn in the elementary grades.

English Language Learners

Fremont's English language learners are American Indian students, except for five students whose native language is Spanish and one native Thai speaker. About 8% of the district's students are English language learners, including 130 students who have been identified as having difficulty with oral and/or written English because of influences not always attributable to their cultural dialects. Students are screened through a systematic process, and those who are considered in need of English language development are provided with small-group instruction and tutoring in reading, writing, and speaking. Some receive sheltered instruction, and others are in mainstream classes. In 2005-06, after receiving clarifying information from the Wyoming Department of Education, Fremont was able to exit over 50% of the students previously identified as English language learners.

Teacher Qualifications, Support, and Professional Development

HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

All but five of Fremont’s 144 teachers meet the NCLB highly qualified requirements. Recruitment and retention of teachers are issues that the district must continually address because it is so rural, with vast distances between Lander and other cities and towns in this part of the state. Finding highly qualified teachers for Pathfinder High School, the alternative education school, may become problematic in coming years, because the state has not yet finalized its requirements for certifying teachers at alternative schools. One issue that affects teachers' NCLB status relates to which teacher is responsible for a student’s report card grade in a specific subject—assuming that the one who determines the grade is the main teacher and should be highly qualified in that subject. To resolve this, Fremont is considering a team approach, whereby the one highly qualified math teacher in the school could be responsible for math instruction for a larger number of students who would be pulled out of their regular classrooms for math. That teacher would provide the grade for the coursework.
District officials anticipate that finding math and special education teachers will become harder and harder in the coming years. Retirements are already taking place, and these retiring teachers have to be replaced. One elementary school replaced 60% of its teachers in the past two years. Karen Bierhaus explained that the state is contemplating an increase in state funding for salaries, which would make it easier for Fremont County to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers. “Higher salaries will help recruitment,” said Bierhaus, “so we hope it happens. The beautiful scenery and tranquil living we have is sometimes not enough to attract the high-quality teaching staff we need.”

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

One of the difficulties with professional development for Fremont teachers has been finding the time for it. “The school calendar is tight, and substitutes are hard to find,” said Bierhaus. She explained that having teachers stay late on a school day or having them come to training on Saturdays is not very workable in a school district that spreads across so many miles. This problem will soon be resolved if the proposed state funding changes and five additional days are added to teachers’ work calendars. Those five extra days are designated as non-student days, to be used for professional development and training.

Principals in Fremont are also receiving professional development. NCLB has reshaped the role of principals, who must become the “curriculum and instruction leaders of their schools and the district” to meet NCLB accountability levels, according to Bierhaus and the new superintendent, Paige Hughes. Leadership training is provided by the state, and the district is taking advantage of the training.

Paraprofessional Qualifications and Support

Fremont County has nine Title I paraprofessionals. Except for one who is still working on her certification, all the paraprofessionals have either taken enough classes to meet the NCLB requirement for two years of college, or they have passed the Praxis test.

Funding and Costs

State funding for schools in Wyoming has increased in the past two years as demand for the state’s mineral resources has increased. For local school districts, this means that the additional costs of NCLB requirements, such as new tests and their scoring, will be paid for by the state without districts having to contribute a share. In addition, the state is considering other forms of monetary assistance to districts, such as paying for the rising cost of health benefits and even possible salary increases. Other changes being discussed are full-day kindergarten, summer school, and extended-day programs for students. The additional funds that Fremont County receives due to changes in the state education funding formula would cover some costs that are now being paid for from Title I, freeing up those funds to be used for other purposes.

These changes are timely for Fremont, according to Bierhaus, because the district’s Title I funding has decreased from the previous year. Last year’s allocation was $714,000, but the 2005-06 allocation is $709,000, a small drop of $5,000. As Bierhaus noted, “if this is a trend, then the federal government is still expecting us to do more with less. Cuts have been made in educational technology, and schools are being forced to examine their staffing and all programmatic expenditures.”
**Data File—Fremont County School District # 1**

**Location:** West-central Wyoming  
**Type:** Rural

**Number of Schools**
- Total: 8  
  - Elementary: 5  
  - Middle/junior high: 1  
  - High schools: 2

**Number of Title I schools:** 4

**Student Enrollment and Demographics**
- Total enrollment: 1,733  
  - White: 77%  
  - American Indian: 18%  
  - Latino: 3%  
  - African American: 1%  
  - Asian: 1%  
  - Low-income students: 36%  
  - English language learners: 14%  
  - Students with disabilities: 14%

**Teachers**
- Total number of teachers: 144  
  - Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 97%

**Paraprofessionals**
- Total number of Title I instructional paraprofessionals: 9  
  - Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 89%

**Total Number That Did Not Make AYP Based on 2004-05 Testing**
- Title I and non-Title I schools that did not make AYP, including those in improvement, restructuring, or corrective action: 0

**Number of Title I Schools in Improvement, Restructuring, or Corrective Action**

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**Number of Schools Offering Choice and/or SES**

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