

Nebraska

# Schools Rely On Property Taxes

BY GRANT SCHULTE  
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Nebraska's K-12 public schools rely more heavily on local taxes for funding than nearly every other state in the nation, according to a report released Monday.

The report by the OpenSky Policy Institute says Nebraska ranked 49th in the percentage of school funding provided by the state in fiscal 2012, the most recent year available.

The longtime focus on local funding has created wide disparities in property tax rates and led to increased state funding for fast-growing urban districts, according to the report.

Districts with the least property wealth, including many urban areas, tend to have the highest average tax rates, the report said. At the same time, many rural districts are losing state aid. Farmers in those districts often pay more in property taxes because they own valuable land —

not because their incomes have risen.

It also has fueled a sometimes-heated debate among lawmakers over how to make state funding for schools equitable, said Renee Fry, executive director of the OpenSky Policy Institute. The group's report does not make specific recommendations, but could factor into debates next year among lawmakers who are looking at the funding formula.

"Nebraska's changing demographics — a declining rural population, skyrocketing agricultural land values and increased student needs in many areas — have made this balance even more challenging," Fry said during a news conference at the Capitol.

The report was released as lawmakers work on a new, long-term "vision" for Nebraska education statewide. Sen. Kate Sullivan, chairwoman of the Education Committee, has said the lawmakers are reaching out to schools and residents to help decide Nebraska's priorities for education.

The funding dispute in recent years has revolved around larger districts that are seeing flat-lined property values and larger student enrollments. Smaller districts complained about their higher expenses for student transportation and teachers, who are in demand in Omaha, Lincoln and bordering states.

Fry said lawmakers could look at several options, including a general increase in state aid for schools, or changing the kind of local tax that is allowed to support schools. Property value may not be the best indicator of how much a community can generate locally, she said; incomes of residents might be a better measure.

The report notes that about 58 percent of education funding in Nebraska came from property taxes and other local resources, according to the most recent U.S. census data from the 2011-12 school year. Nearly 32 percent came from the state, and 10 percent came from federal sources.

## On The Range



Bison make their way across one of the roads at Theodore Roosevelt National Park recently in North Dakota. Efforts are being made to keep the oil boom out of the area of the park. Oil fields virtually surround the western North Dakota park now. To read a story on the situation, see page 16.

ELIZABETH FLORES/MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE/MCT

## Fed Prisoner Facility Set To Be Built In Kearney

KEARNEY, Neb. (AP) — A Kentucky company has won a \$6.7-million bid to build a Kearney re-entry center for federal prisoners, according to the U.S. Bureau of Prisons.

Federal officials announced Friday that Louisville, Kentucky-based Dismas Charities was awarded the bid to construct a planned, 7-500-square-foot facility, the *Kearney Hub* reported.

Dismas Charities operates re-entry programs and had secured a building permit in 2013 for the Kearney property. U.S. officials had requested proposals last year for one in Nebraska.

Dismas Vice President Steven Vice said the company has 120 days to build the facility and expects it to be finished in January. Vice said the 48-bed facility will house federal prisoners who have committed nonviolent crimes that are primarily related to substance abuse. The center will offer supervision and support for inmates nearing release.

"We're very happy about (the bid)," Vice said. "We've already started the project from early planning stages and development. We're moving forward as soon as possible."

# Dakotas Endure Weekend Of Storms And Heavy Rain

By The Associated Press

SIoux FALLS — A stormy weekend in the Dakotas led to flash flooding, power outages and damage to homes, cars and trees.

A storm that blew through Sioux Falls early Sunday with heavy rain and 60 mph winds uprooted trees, some of which hit vehicles and homes. Trees also took out electrical lines, knocking out power to about 5,200 people for several hours.

"It just sounded like a jet taking off all night," resident Rob Loe told the *Argus Leader* newspaper.

Street flooding was reported in Aberdeen on Saturday night after nearly 3 inches of rain fell, stranding vehicles. Stan Heier told the *American News* that he had half a foot of water in his garage.

"That's a lot of rain. Holy

buckets," he said.

Sunday rainfall set records for the date at both recording stations in Grand Forks, according to the National Weather Service. The airport station had 1.15 inches and the University of North Dakota station 1.83 inches. The previous records at both stations had stood for more than three decades.

The heavy weekend rain resulted in the cancellation of a soccer game in Grand Forks between the University of North Dakota and South Dakota State because the field was flooded. The rain also disrupted other events, including a downtown Minot festival and street dance, and Bismarck State College's 75th anniversary celebration. An outdoor concert in Medora on Saturday by Kat Perkins, a North Dakota native and top-five finalist on

the TV program "The Voice" earlier this year, had to be postponed.

Storms spawned two tornadoes Saturday evening in northeastern South Dakota, one of which caused damage.

A tornado about 4 miles northeast of Ipswich damaged several buildings at a farmstead, the weather service reported. The twister had a preliminary rating of EF-1 on the enhanced Fujita scale, which is the second-weakest rating with top wind speeds of 110 mph.

The other confirmed tornado touched down about 7 miles west of Cresbard but did no apparent damage.

## SD Tourism Official Wins National Award

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — South Dakota Secretary of Tourism Jim Hagen has been named State Tourism Director of the Year.

The U.S. Travel Association announced the award Monday.

Roger Dow is the association's president and CEO. He says the tourism marketplace requires states to invest in effective, efficient promotion, and Hagen is running a respected program.

Hagen began his tenure as tourism secretary in 2011. He previously served as the national campaign director and public relations director for the Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard says Hagen has "an enthusiasm for South Dakota that is contagious."

## Prominent SD Golfer Dies In Accident

SIoux FALLS (AP) — The Sully County Sheriff's Office says a prominent figure in the South Dakota golfing community has died in a utility task vehicle accident.

The *Argus Leader* reports Mark Amundson died when his UTV rolled over early Monday morning.

Jonathan Harms is a public information officer at the Department of Public Safety. He says Amundson was ejected from the two-seated vehicle because he wasn't wearing a seatbelt. Harms says Amundson was pronounced dead at the scene of the accident.

The 55-year-old man was the CEO of Sutton Bay resort. He held 13 South Dakota Golf Association titles.

## Motorists Must Avoid Hwy. 34 Work Zone

HOWES (AP) — South Dakota transportation officials are warning motorists about driving around barricades on closed highway sections.

Officials say motorists have been moving barricades and driving through a construction zone on Highway 34 east of Howes. A semitrailer got stuck in the mud over the weekend after heavy rain moved through the area.

Officials say people who drive in work zones risk safety and also can damage roads. Tampering with traffic control devices and driving around barricades also are misdemeanor offenses.

Highway 34 is closed for a 2 1/2 mile stretch so workers can repair erosion on dams for Howes Lake and Lake Buffalo. Traffic is being detoured. The Highway Patrol is monitoring the area.

## Drowning Reported At Private Lake

COLUMBUS, Neb. (AP) — An official says a man who drowned at a private lake in rural Polk County fell into the water.

Polk County Attorney Ron Colling says the man was unable to get back on the dock after he fell Saturday night at a lake northwest of Clear Creek.

The *Columbus Telegram* says Columbus Rescue was sent to the lake a little before 9:30 p.m. The body was recovered around 10 p.m.

More information about victim hasn't been formally released.

## Nearly 100 Pounds Of Pot Seized

SEWARD, Neb. (AP) — Two people from Colorado face charges in connection to the discovery of nearly 100 pounds of marijuana in a car in Nebraska.

The Nebraska State Patrol says the men were stopped Sunday morning on Interstate 80 in Seward County. A trooper stopped the vehicle for following too close.

The trooper was given consent to search the car, where more than 99 pounds of marijuana was found in a suitcase in the trunk.

The driver, 26-year-old Santiago Adame-Melchor, and passenger, 26-year-old Anahit Conejo-Galicoa, both of Aurora, Colorado, were arrested and taken to the county jail. They face a charge each of possession of marijuana with intent to deliver.

Court records do not list attorneys.

## Nonprofit Provides Supplies To Students

EAGLE BUTTE (AP) — A nonprofit group has provided school supplies to more than 500 children on South Dakota's Cheyenne River Reservation.

The supplies given by the organization Cheyenne River Youth Project include backpacks, compasses, calculators and mechanical pencils.

The organization says many of the donations came from the group Running Strong for American Indian Youth, which is based in Alexandria, Virginia and numerous individual donors.

Families on the reservation give \$30 to the Youth Project organization every year, which allows them to participate in annual distributions including school supplies, winter clothing, a Christmas toy drive, household supplies and baby items.

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