Mountain School Coalition

Contentions

Why Livermore, Red Feather Lakes, and Stove Prairie Elementary must stay open

Livermore · Red Feather Lakes · Stove Prairie | Listening sessions Oct. 12–19 | Board vote Oct. 27, 2026

18
deaths on US 287 since 2017

41%
of U.S. traffic deaths happen on rural roads

$9.1M
paid to PSD by mountain areas each year

2.6 to 1
dollars paid in for every dollar the schools cost

Our contentions

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01 Safety First

Closing these schools puts young kids on US 287 every day, where **18 people have died since 2017** and 570 crashes hit in five years, through wildfire country evacuated in 2012 and 2020.

The national picture

- **Rural roads are deadlier.** About 20% of Americans live in rural areas, and rural areas carry 31% of miles driven, yet they account for 41% of all U.S. traffic deaths (NHTSA, 2023).
- **Per mile, rural roads kill at 1.5 times the urban rate:** 1.65 vs. 1.07 deaths per 100 million miles driven (NHTSA, 2023).
- **Most rural deaths are run-off-the-road crashes.** About two-thirds of rural traffic deaths involve a vehicle leaving the roadway, the same pattern seen on US 287, where overturns and ditch crashes are leading causes.

Our road

- **US 287, Ted's Place to Wyoming:** 570 crashes in five years, including 116 injury and 15 fatal crashes. About 900 trucks a day. Wildlife collisions are the top crash cause.
- **Closures:** A Nov. 2023 ice storm shut the highway from about 5 p.m. to 9:45 p.m. A semi rollover shut it from 5 a.m. to 11 a.m. A 2021 hazmat spill shut it for hours.
- **Construction ahead:** Glade Reservoir's US 287 relocation and dam work are expected to overlap the first years of consolidation. Colorado work zones saw a record 31 deaths in 2024.

Say it out loud

- "Before we talk about dollars, talk about kids. This plan puts 5-year-olds on US 287 twice a day.

18 people have died on that stretch since 2017."

- "Nationally, rural roads carry a third of the driving and 41% of the deaths. PSD wants to add our youngest kids to those numbers every school day."

02 Long Rides Hurt Kids

Research across the country finds that long bus rides **cost children sleep, attention, attendance, and activities**, and rural children bear the longest rides.

- **Rural kids already ride longest:** A five-state study found almost all rural children rode more than 30 minutes one way, and about a quarter rode more than an hour.
- **Less sleep, less learning:** A rural Quebec study found long rides cut students' sleep, free time, attentiveness in class, and extracurricular participation.
- **More absences:** A 2022 study of 120,000+ New York City bus riders found rides over 45 minutes increased chronic absenteeism. The average ride there is 21 minutes.
- **Budgets suffer too:** Rural districts spend more than twice what urban districts spend per pupil on transportation.

Other states draw a line. Colorado does not.

State	Elementary ride-time standard
West Virginia	30 min recommended; closure-created routes over 45 min need state approval; over 60 min prohibited
Utah	45 min for K-6 to qualify for necessarily-existent small school funding
Vermont (2025-26 proposal)	45 min for PreK-6
Washington	About 60+ min qualifies a school as "remote and necessary"
Colorado	No limit

03 Lost School Days

PSD counts a child as chronically absent after missing **10% of school days, excused or not**, about 17 to 18 days a year. PSD's own goal is to cut chronic absenteeism in half.

- **Weather already cancels mountain buses:** Wind and snow days stop mountain bus service while town schools stay open. Every closure day moves a mountain child closer to that 10% line.
- **A highway closure strands kids:** When US 287 shuts for ice, a crash, or a spill, children are stuck on one side of it, away from home or away from school.
- **A local school keeps kids in class:** Short, local trips mean fewer missed days, which directly serves PSD's attendance goals.

04 The Hidden Cost to Families

Closing these schools doesn't remove the cost of educating mountain kids. It **shifts it onto parents**, who already drive long, rough roads just to reach a bus stop.

- **Fewer stops, longer drives:** Consolidated routes mean fewer stops, so parents drive farther just

to meet the bus, twice a day.

- **Many will drive the whole way:** When the bus ride gets too long, parents drive to Laporte themselves, moving kids from the safest vehicle, a school bus, into private cars on US 287.

A mountain child's day

Working back from Cache la Poudre Elementary's 7:50 a.m. bell, with the bus arriving at 7:40 and a 60- to 75-minute ride:

	15 min from the stop	30 min from the stop
Wake up, normal day	5:30 a.m.	5:15 a.m.
Wake up, winter day	5:00 a.m.	4:35 a.m.
Home in the afternoon	3:50–4:15 p.m.	4:05–4:30 p.m.
Child's day, door to door	10–11 hours	11–12 hours
Parent driving per day	About 1 hour	About 2 hours
Parent driving per year	About 170 hours, $3,940	About 340 hours, $7,395

- **In the dark and cold:** Sunrise isn't until about 7:15 a.m. in December and January. Parents drive icy dirt roads to the stop in the dark, and children wait outside in winter temperatures that average in the low 20s.
- **Not enough sleep:** A 5:00 a.m. wake-up means a 5-year-old needs to be asleep by about 7:00 p.m., barely three hours after getting home.

What the driving costs one family each year

One-way distance	Example	Miles / yr	Cost / yr	Hours / yr
5 miles	To a bus stop	3,400	$2,465	85
10 miles	To a consolidated stop	6,800	$4,930	170
15 miles	To a consolidated stop	10,200	$7,395	255
20 miles	Livermore to Laporte	13,600	$9,860	340
25 miles	Stove Prairie to Laporte	17,000	$12,325	425
40 miles	Red Feather to Laporte	27,200	$19,720	680

- **More than the tax bill:** At 40 miles, driving costs a family about $19,700 a year, roughly eight times what a $400,000 home pays PSD.
- **A second job:** 680 hours is about 17 full work weeks a year behind the wheel.
- **Across the community:** If 30 families drove an average of 25 miles, they would spend about $370,000 a year, on top of what PSD spends on longer bus routes.

Assumes the IRS 2026 rate of 72.5¢ per mile, four one-way trips a day (drop-off and pickup), 170 school days, and about 40 mph on mountain roads. Distances are estimates (15 and 30 minutes ≈ 8 and 15 miles at about 30 mph on mountain roads); costs are per family, not per student. Bell time from CLPE's most recent posted schedule; confirm for 2026–27.

05 Fire and Emergencies

In a wildfire, **a school in the community is an asset, not a liability.** In 2012, Stove Prairie served as a community hub during the High Park fire.

- **Cameron Peak, 2020:** The fire evacuated 6,000+ people, including Red Feather Lakes, Rist Canyon Road, and Highway 14 toward Stove Prairie. Power was cut along County Road 27,

including Stove Prairie School.

- **Mitigation beats transportation:** Money spent on defensible space and hardening the campuses protects kids where they live. State grants (Colorado State Forest Service, DNR's COSWAP) exist for this work.
- **Evacuating from home, not from a bus:** A child 45+ miles from home during an evacuation is separated from the parents trying to reach them.

06 Follow the Money

Mountain taxpayers send PSD about **$2.60 for every $1** their schools cost. Even a modest $400,000 mountain home pays PSD about $1,500 a year, more than half its property tax bill.

Area	Paid to PSD / yr
Crystal Lakes	$2.63M
Glacier View	$2.28M
Livermore	$1.95M
Red Feather Lakes	$1.38M
Poudre Canyon	$0.84M
Total	**$9.08M**

Stove Prairie and Bellvue are not counted, so the real total is higher.

Paid in vs. cost

Paid to PSD each year **$9.08M**



Cost of all three schools **$3.5M**



Closing them saves about 1.2% of PSD's $299 million in local property tax, before the added cost of busing.

PSD is the biggest line on every mountain tax bill

Area	Total mills	PSD share of bill
Stove Prairie	86.01	66.7%
Crystal Lakes	95.75	59.9%
Bellvue	97.06	59.1%
Livermore	98.01	58.5%
Glacier View	99.40	57.7%
Red Feather Lakes	99.86	57.5%
Poudre Canyon	107.2–108.9	52.7–53.5%

- **The conservative check:** Using PSD's lower 2025 levy (54.09 mills), mountain areas pay about $8.6 million. Cut that in half and they still pay about $4.3 million, still more than the roughly $3.5 million the schools cost. The estimate would have to be about 60% too high before revenue fell below cost.
- **Home values:** Typical mountain homes are worth about $380,000 to $610,000 (Red Feather Lakes roughly $380,000 to $450,000; Livermore about $610,000). At $400,000, a home pays PSD about $1,500 a year.
- **The same rate, less service:** Mountain homeowners pay the same PSD levy as Fort Collins, including the 2024 debt-free mill levy override that raises about $49 million a year for facilities.
- **We have lost schools before:** The mountain area once had about 15 elementary schools. PSD closed Poudre Canyon and Gleneyre in the 1980s and '90s. Three remain.

07 PSD's Real Enrollment Problem

PSD doesn't have a Mountain Schools problem. It has a **family retention problem**: it is losing students to options outside the district, and closing more schools will push more families out.

- **Losing students every year:** In 2024, PSD reported a net loss of about 739 students to public options outside the district and online programs.
- **Where they go:** In 2022–23, 1,851 students left PSD, including 1,300 to state-authorized charter schools, while 1,060 came in from other districts.
- **Private schools, too:** About 6% of Fort Collins K–12 students attend private school, including St. Joseph Catholic, Heritage Christian Academy, Rivendell, and Front Range Baptist Academy.
- **Homeschooling will grow:** When the nearest school becomes an hour-plus drive, homeschooling becomes the practical choice for many mountain families. Each child who switches leaves PSD's count entirely, taking their per-pupil funding with them, while the family keeps paying the full PSD levy.
- **Already undercounted:** Colorado homeschool families file a notice with the district each year, but families enrolled in a private "umbrella" school never do. PSD should publish its homeschool notices for the mountain ZIP codes (80545, 80536, 80512) for the last five years.
- **Money follows the child:** State per-pupil funding goes with each student who leaves. Every mountain family pushed to a charter, private school, or homeschooling takes that funding with them, while still paying the full PSD levy.
- **Closures drive families away:** Long rides and lost community schools give families one more reason to leave. PSD's own savings estimate should count the students it will lose.

08 Heritage and the Buildings

- **Stove Prairie, 1896:** Built by two homesteaders, it is the oldest operating one-room schoolhouse in Colorado.
- **Local precedent:** When PSD's predecessor closed the Poudre Park school in 1954, the board deeded the schoolhouse to the community. It is still a community building today.
- **Questions PSD must answer:** Do any deeds carry reverter clauses? Would buildings be sold, leased, or left vacant? Who pays to maintain empty buildings in wildfire country?

09 Process and the Law

- **PSD's own rules:** In May 2026 the Board adopted Policies FCB and FCB-R, which set the criteria for closures, including transportation impact. The community deserves to see exactly how each Mountain School was scored.
- **The state recognizes remote schools:** Colorado's school finance law provides extra "small attendance center" aid for schools under 200 students that are 20+ road miles from a similar school. Does PSD receive it, and what would closure forfeit?
- **Colorado knows some bus routes are impractical:** State law lets a board that finds transportation impractical pay room and board instead. That option exists because some rides are too far.
- **Precedent for challenges:** Denver parents sued over the 2024 DPS closures, focusing on whether the district followed its own process.

10 Answering the Other Side

They'll say	We say

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They'll say	We say
"Property taxes are pooled district-wide."	True, and they also fund mountain kids' middle and high school. Even so, these communities likely pay in far more than they get back.
"Mountain schools have the highest per-pupil cost in PSD."	Even at about $3.5 million all-in, the schools cost well under half of what these areas contribute, and busing adds its own cost and risk.
"School buses are the safest way to travel."	Agreed, and that is not the point. The risk is the road, the weather, the closures, and the hours of exposure, plus families who will drive instead.
"Consolidation gives kids more resources."	Not if they lose sleep and school days to long rides on US 287, and lose the school that anchors their community.
"Enrollment is too small."	Small, multi-age classrooms are the model, not the problem. Colorado funds small, remote schools for exactly this reason.

11 What We Ask

- **Pause the vote** until the community sees how each Mountain School scored under FCB/FCB-R.
- **Publish a ride-time study:** door-to-door times for every mountain child, in good weather and bad.
- **Show the full ledger:** what the Mountain Schools cost, what added busing will cost, and what small attendance center aid would be lost.
- **Invest in safety where kids live:** fund wildfire mitigation at the three campuses instead of longer bus routes.
- **Count every cost:** include added busing, mileage costs pushed onto families, and the students PSD will lose to charters, private schools, and homeschooling.
- **Put community use first:** if any building closes, commit it to community use, as the district did in Poudre Park.

Show up. Speak up.

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[YOUR WEBSITE OR CONTACT]

Sources and notes: Estimates, not legal advice. National crash data: NHTSA Traffic Safety Facts, Rural/Urban Comparison (2023 data); IIHS Fatality Facts. Bus-ride research: Howley et al., five-state rural bus study (2001); ERIC Digest ED459969; Cordes, Rick & Schwartz, "Do Long Bus Rides Drive Down Academic Outcomes?" (2022). Ride-time standards: W. Va. Code 18-2E-5d; Utah R277-445; Vermont State Board proposal; Washington remote-and-necessary rules. Enrollment: PSD Board presentation (2025); Coloradoan (2023); NCES Private School Survey 2023-24. Mileage: IRS 2026 standard rate. Local crash data: CDOT US 287 corridor study and news reports. Revenue: Larimer County Assessor, 2024 Abstract of Assessments and Levies (fire district assessed values × PSD's 2024 levy of 57.37 mills). Cost: coalition estimate of all-in operating cost for the three schools (about $3.5 million); request PSD's actual figure. Law: C.R.S. 22-32-113, 22-54-122; PSD Policies FCB/FCB-R. Consult a Colorado education-law attorney before relying on any legal point.