

# Plan to help schools "go green"

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A while back, when schools in Wray, CO. were losing kids and facing major budget cuts, a Vo-Tech teacher came up with a crazy idea: hook the high school up to a wind turbine to save on energy bills. Five years later, the Wind Turbine Project is about the biggest thing to happen to this town since tractors started running on gasoline. (Kathryn Scott Osler, The Denver Post)

Lawmakers Sunday unveiled a plan to offer school districts low-interest loans to install solar panels on rooftops, build wind turbines or convert diesel-guzzling buses to battery power.

House sponsor Andy Kerr, D-Lakewood, touted the potential savings on utility bills and said students can learn about alternative energy through the program. "New energy is coming to Colorado schools," Kerr said.

House Bill 1312's architects couldn't say how many schools might participate or the estimated size of loans.

But they said the program would likely start with just a few schools at first, and windswept Eastern Plains school districts are likely candidates.

The proposal heads to the House Education Committee today. It's one of a handful of recent bills aimed at making alternative energy more affordable for more Coloradans.

The cash for the loans would come from the vast swaths of land set aside to benefit schoolchildren in the 1800s.

The state already invests proceeds from land sales, spends part of the interest and boasts a \$581 million balance in the account.

Rather than investing that money as the state typically would, it would lend some to schools at rates that are lower than a bank's but high enough to match or outstrip the fund's traditional return. The fund's rate of return is 5.1 percent at the moment, said state Treasurer Cary Kennedy.

"This program is a win-win-win," said Kennedy, predicting it will also help create jobs on top of saving on utility bills. Schools can "put that money back into the classroom, where it should be."

The wind turbine that Wray School District RD-2 switched on in late January was held up as an example of potential projects.

The district expects the turbine — which churns out an average 11,000 kilowatts a day — to offset most of its \$80,000-a-year electricity bill.

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