



*The Helena Public Schools educate, engage, and empower each student to maximize his or her individual potential with the knowledge, skills and character essential to being a responsible citizen and life-long learner.*

## Board of Trustees – Teaching and Learning Committee Meeting

May Butler Center | 55 S. Rodney Ave  
Wednesday, December 18, 2019 – 12:00pm

### MINUTES

#### ATTENDANCE

##### *Committee:*

Sarah Sullivan, Committee Chair  
Libby Goldes, Committee Member

##### *Excused Absence:*

Siobhan Hathorn, Committee Member

##### *Others:*

John McEwen, Trustee  
Tyler Ream, Superintendent  
Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent  
Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff  
Jane Shawn, HEA President  
Wynn Randall, Project for Alternative Learning  
(PAL) Principal  
Dave Thennis, C. R. Anderson (CRA) Principal

#### I. CALL TO ORDER/INTRODUCTIONS

The meeting was called to order at 12:05pm by Committee Chair, Sarah Sullivan.

#### II. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

None was offered.

#### III. REVIEW OF AGENDA

No changes were requested.

#### IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

No changes were requested.

#### V. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION/DISCUSSION

##### A. Panorama Education Discussion

Dr. Ream said, through negotiations, the current cost for a three-year contract with Pandora Education was \$77,000. He asked the committee for feedback on the Panorama Education presentation and direction for the next steps to be taken.

Ms. Sullivan asked the price for a single year, and Dr. Ream answered \$45,000. Ms. Goldes asked for pricing on a comparable product. Dr. Ream answered a proposal was only obtained from Panorama Education. Ms. Goldes asked what percentage of the overall budget was \$77,000, and Dr. Ream replied that it was nominal.

Ms. Goldes inquired into pricing for the MyVoice survey. Dr. Ream answered that the state pays for a one-time student survey, but the district must pay for any additional server

Ms. Sullivan recommended contracting with Panorama Education for the three years and asked the attending administrators for their feedback. Mr. Thennis said he felt the MyVoice surveys lacked confidentiality for staff and parents, but his school's MBI team reviewed the student survey and utilized the data. He added that surveys for parents and staff would be viewed as important if the data collected was used to make decisions rather than just to complete a survey. Dr. Randall said the response rate had been low in previous surveys at PAL, and the smaller staff necessitated assurances of confidentiality. Ms. Shawn said teachers have always had an issue with the lack of confidentiality in the MyVoice surveys.

Ms. Shawn referenced a previous discussion regarding the ability for educators to access the surveys to make their own assessments. Dr. Ream confirmed and added the use of a third-party to conduct the surveys would increase the level of trust with educators that the results would remain confidential.

The committee agreed to contract with Panorama, and Dr. Ream said he would negotiate further on the proposal and would relay the information to the committee by the next committee meeting. He added the contract would be activated in January, and a school could be decided upon to pilot the surveys this spring.

#### B. Student Cell Phone Use Discussion

Ms. Sullivan prefaced the discussion by noting the recent media coverage on cell phone use in schools and asking the attending administrators about their experiences with disallowing cell phones in their schools. Dr. Randall detailed his process at PAL, which requires students to lock their phones in a locker at the beginning of the day, for the duration of the day, including lunch. Exceptions to the process include a student leaving by him/herself and a student leaving for a job. Upon returning to the PAL campus, students are required to lock their phones again.

Ms. Sullivan asked for the parent response to the procedure. Dr. Randall answered that since PAL was a school of choice, the parents had to agree with the procedure for students to attend. He said a common argument is parents wanting to be able to get in touch with their students. According to Dr. Randall, PAL overcomes that argument by staffing the front desk, providing advisor phone numbers to parents, and expecting parents at the school in case of an emergency. Dr. Ream asked if PAL has had any parent remove their students from the school because of the procedure, and Dr. Randall replied that he had not. Dr. Randall described the level of offenses and penalties assessed based on the number of violations. Ms. Sullivan asked for an overall analysis of the cell phone ban. Dr. Randall answered that the procedure has been positive overall since it has increased students' engagement with each other and with educators. Dr. Randall said although the model at PAL wouldn't work in a larger school, magnetic pouches may be an option. He described magnetic pouches to the committee, which are checked out similarly to library books to contain and lock cell phones until they are unlocked by a teacher.

Ms. Sullivan asked Mr. Thennis about his current practices at CRA. Mr. Thennis said their current practice was the result of frustration from teachers and administrators having to constantly send students to the office for cell phone infractions. After working with several teacher groups, CRA decided to prohibit cell phones during the instructional day. Mr. Thennis described the current procedure as if a student is caught with a phone during the day, a teacher takes it from the student, and the student can get it back at the end of the day. He said, after being told the school wanted students to engage with each other and with staff, most parents thanked administration for the decision. He added that some parents have trouble not being able to contact their students all the time. Mr. Thennis described the biggest challenge to the process was monitoring students at lunch but said the practice generally has been successful. He added the credit was due to the staff for their consistency in enforcing the procedure. Mr. Thennis continued that there have been instances of students refusing to give up their phones, and those instances were handled as insubordination rather than a cell phone violation.

Ms. Sullivan said feedback she has received from teachers has been that they want any ban to come from district policy. Mr. McEwen asked if a policy for cell phones to be banned district wide must come from the board. Dr. Ream answered the best solution and appropriate timeline first needed to be thoroughly researched. Ms. Goldes asked if it would be best for a general cell phone policy to be at the superintendent's discretion. Ms. Sullivan said she would prefer direction come from the board. Ms. Goldes recommended acquiring feedback through future surveys on potential implementation strategies.

Ms. Ridgway addressed the articles sent by Ms. Sullivan and said each described a lot of steps and prep work completed prior to implementation. Dr. Ream added there was nothing prohibiting individual schools from barring cell phones. He added that thorough research and timing were important when considering the most effective implementation.

Mr. McEwen asked if the board was to write a policy regarding cell phones, should it include all distractions rather than limited to cell phone. Mr. McKay answered that there already was a policy in place regarding distractions and added the issue lies in determining the effects if schools, educators, and students don't comply with the policy.

The committee agreed to begin researching implementation of a cell phone ban. Ms. Ridgway said discussion about cell phones occurred each year when writing handbooks and the biggest challenge was determining a solution that didn't completely consume administrators' time. She recommended beginning the research and having conversations with principals.

Ms. Sullivan voiced her appreciation for the principals' attendance at the committee meeting.

## **VI. BOARD COMMENTS**

None were offered.

## **VII. ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting was adjourned at 1:06pm by Ms. Sullivan. The next Teaching and Learning Committee meeting will be at noon on January 8, 2019.