



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

Wednesday, September 2, 2020 – 12:00pm

MINUTES

ATTENDANCE

Committee:

Siobhan Hathhorn, Committee Member
Jennifer Walsh, Committee Member
Sarah Sullivan, Committee Chair
(*excused absence*)

Others:

Tyler Ream, Superintendent
Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent
Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff
Joslyn Davidson, Curriculum & Instruction
Administrator
Tim McMahon, Activities Director
Gary Myers, Education Technology Coordinator
Jane Shawn, HEA President

I. CALL TO ORDER/INTRODUCTIONS

The meeting was called to order at 12:09pm by Committee Member, Siobhan Hathhorn, and introductions were made.

II. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

III. REVIEW OF AGENDA

No changes were requested.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes from the May 6, 2020, committee meeting were approved.

V. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION/DISCUSSION: Overview of Summer Planning Efforts/Accomplishments

Dr. Ream summarized the extensive summer planning efforts and highlights, beginning with the instructional team. This team – led by Joslyn Davidson and Lona Carter (Jefferson Elementary School Principal) and including Josh McKay and Gary Myers – met more than any other planning group, averaging 30 hours each week. This team’s deliverables established the foundational framework for instructional planning this school year. Dr. Ream continued that the team worked through each Phase to determine alignment in instruction for digital, in-person, and hybrid learning to provide a common floor for what teachers could accomplish in the next school year.

Mr. McKay noted the importance of streamlining and increasing the sharing of resources among teachers to help establish alignment across the phases.

Ms. Hathhorn asked for clarification on remote instruction when either a A Cohort or B Cohort students were not in class. Ms. Davidson clarified it was a blend of live video and recorded lessons. She added that since each classroom had a microphone and projector, students watching a lesson via Teams were able to participate in and interact with the students and teacher in the classroom.

Dr. Ream referenced the blended instruction block framework example provided to the committee, and noted it provided a general sense of consistency across the day. Mr. McKay added clarification on the blocks, including details on digital learning check-ins, lunches, PLC on Wednesdays, and capturing at-risk students. Ms. Hathhorn asked if the framework was consistent across the district or a recommendation to teachers. Mr. McKay answered the grade levels were different based on the age group efficiency times. He added most days included three instruction blocks and a specials block. Dr. Ream added the framework was still a draft, but it was helpful to have a visual of what a typical day will look like.

Ms. Hathhorn asked how specials would be incorporated into the day. Mr. McKay answered there would be a blend of specials traveling to classrooms and students traveling to specials. Ms. Ridgway provided an overview of the librarians' involvement.

Ms. Hathhorn inquired how SPED students would be served. Mr. McKay answered intervention time had been built into the schedule. He added common themes across the system were a time for remote connection, an educator lunch at the end of the day, block time, and prep time. He added the provided example was a core concept to be adapted at each school to best serve its specific students.

Ms. Ridgway added specific notes on the librarians, who will be delivering their content in six-week blocks aligning with classroom lesson plans. Librarians were also designing lesson standards for Clever that integrated into the classroom curriculum. DLI students will be able to check out books at their neighborhood school. Ms. Ridgway added the blocks also limits contact with Cohort groups, a health and safety consideration.

Dr. Ream noted the specials also will have consistent interaction with DLI students, the result of feedback received last spring requesting more consistency, especially at the secondary level. He added there were additional resources built out for communication consistency between students and teachers, standards curriculum, clear and common expectations, and lesson structure.

Dr. Ream described the week by week unit planners – used to help align standards-based content – as especially beneficial for combo teachers, as they helped take the guess work out of teaching new concepts. He added the unit planners included a Wednesday-Wednesday format (to be used in Phase I).

Ms. Walsh asked if there would be a follow up with teachers on the expectation that Teams would be the only form of contact and if teachers would have the latitude to transition from previously used programs. Ms. Davidson replied teachers could continue to use Moodle, but all communication to students and families should occur via Teams. Dr. Reams added some teachers had been using other platforms for years. As a result of recent legislation, Montana now has some of the tightest student privacy laws in the nation. Some of the previously used platforms do not meet new the new privacy laws. He added it would be a work in progress to transition those pieces over to Teams. Mr. Myers added teachers were not prohibited from linking to external sites from Teams, but Teams needed to be the source for communication.

Ms. Walsh expressed concern over students needing to bookmark alternative platforms – like Moodle or Google Classroom – in order to complete assignments, which doesn't satisfy the need of completing assignments in on place. Mr. Myers responded teachers would link to external sources from Teams, so there would be no reason to leave Teams to access other platforms. He referenced Google Classroom and told the committee it was not good privacy and security practice since it encouraged students to create their own email accounts.

Dr. Ream referenced professional development, stating there would be traditionally grade-level training, and an additional piece had been added this year to address online and blended learning through Better Lesson. This online training uses experts across the United States talking with small groups of teachers to walk through best practices and challenges. He continued that in the first week of training, over 100 teachers participated. The partnership will continue through the fall and perhaps later. Ms. Davidson added the feedback from teachers has been positive, the company has been really responsive, and teachers found the material valuable.

Dr. Ream provided an overview of the supportive learning opportunities offered to parents and guardians. Mr. Myers planned two parent tech events, both of which Mr. Ream said he received excellent feedback. Mr. Myers said over 400 families have watched the events, and additional training was being considered.

The committee agreed to postpone the “Monthly Planning Topics” discussion item until October.

VI. BOARD COMMENTS

Ms. Hathhorn expressed her appreciation for everyone in the district in preparation of this year. She asked how staffing was. Dr. Ream answered it was a dynamic situation, but classroom vacancies currently were very low – around four. The Human Resources department was interviewing for Para and SACC positions.

Ms. Hathhorn expressed interest in learning what the attendance standards would be for in-person and DLI students and in collecting data on attendance. Mr. McKay replied it was more complicated than taking attendance, but there was a day to day touchpoint for all learners. Ms. Hathhorn said it was important to establish a framework for attendance expectations. Ms. McKay responded principals were looking at four-six week goal setting for attendance.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:12pm by Ms. Hathhorn.