



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 – Budget and Programs Committee

Friday, September 4, 2020 – 12:00pm

MINUTES

ATTENDEES

Committee:

John McEwen, Committee Chair
Sarah Sullivan, Committee Member
Terry Beaver, Committee Member
(excused absence)
Luke Muszkiewicz, Board Chair
(not a member of the committee)

Others:

Tyler Ream, Superintendent
Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent
Janelle Mickelson, Business Services Administrator
Jane Shawn, Helena Education Association President

I. CALL TO ORDER

Committee Chair, John McEwen, called the meeting to order at 12:00pm.

II. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

No comments were offered.

III. REVIEW OF AGENDA

No changes were requested to the agenda.

IV. REVIEW OF MINUTES

No changes were requested to the September 4, 2020, committee meeting minutes.

V. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION/DISCUSSION

1. Budget to Date Update

Ms. Mickelson presented a budget update to the committee. Mr. McEwen referenced the educator salaries and asked for clarification on the remaining amount in the budget. Ms. Mickelson replied not all positions had been hired at the time the report had been prepared.

Ms. Mickelson clarified the administrator salaries balance reflected one administrator position having been absorbed due to a drop in enrollment and two positions being filled at lower salaries than their predecessors.

Ms. Mickelson voiced her concern for the substitute categories, specifically after December 30. Dr. Ream added the district's ability to spend CARES money ended after December; it would be February before legislators started discussing another stimulus.

Mr. McEwen asked how CARES money was being spent. Ms. Mickelson answered it was being spent on anything Covid-19 related – technology, salaries, Office 365 and other software licenses, PPE, hand sanitizer, etc.

Ms. Sullivan asked for clarification on Ms. Mickelson concerned about substitutes, specifically whether she was concerned about the number being hired or the amount they were being paid. Ms. Mickelson replied both: the amount they were being paid was concerning for the Business Department, and the number of substitutes needed was concerning for the Human Resources Department.

2. Agenda Planning for the 2020/2021 School Year

Dr. Ream provided the committee with tentative agenda items based on trustee recommendations last year: multi-year budget projections, high school staffing, non-general budgets, and negotiations updates. He added it is helpful to have a guideline for topics since most items require time for staff to compile.

Dr. Ream asked for the committee's feedback on discussion items they would like to see on future committee meeting agendas. Ms. Sullivan replied finalizing negotiations should be a priority. She added she also would like to look at a Montana AA school district comparison of salary matrixes across the board. She specifically mentioned administrators, who have not received an increase for quite some time and who's salaries are not aligned with other AA districts in Montana. The committee agreed that they would like to see salary matrix comparisons for all classifications of employees. Dr. Ream recommended adding review of the salary matrixes over a few months' meetings. He added one challenge might be obtaining that data from other districts. Ms. Sullivan noted salary information should be public record. Dr. Ream confirmed, adding there might be some sources who pull or have pulled together that information.

Ms. Sullivan expressed interest in reviewing the different mental health programs within the district. Dr. Ream asked if she specifically was interested in programs, like PAX, or contract, like Shodair. Ms. Sullivan answered a program review to assess what was working and where they could be improved. She added there may be some budgetary considerations this year based on the

SRO discussion. Mr. McEwen agreed with reviewing the mental health programs and associated funding. Mr. McKay clarified services ranged from Tier III students receiving assistance from Shodair, to CSCT and other contracted services, to new screening tools used to identify and assist students. He added the whole explanation would include what the district was doing for broadscale students, for at-risk students, and a combination. Ms. Sullivan clarified she was interested in seeing measurements for success and areas for improvement. Dr. Ream confirmed an SES (social and emotional support) overview, program breakdowns, and contract breakdowns would be provided.

Dr. Ream clarified future agenda items would include an SES discussion at one meeting and salary matrix discussions as multi-meeting conversations.

Dr. Ream provided an update on the SRO discussion with the city manager. He added the discussion included the idea to bring together a group of individuals to assess the SRO program who had no preconceived notions of the services. Ms. Sullivan asked for confirmation that no decisions would be made until the new city manager started in October. Dr. Ream confirmed that all discussions had been paused.

Mr. McEwen asked to review the enrollment data. Mr. McKay replied there would be more accurate numbers after the October pull date. Ms. Mickelson added clarification that enrollment projections had been made from district actuals in previous years. The committee requested an update on enrollment at the November committee meeting. Mr. McKay referenced the enrollment projections and said 600 kindergarteners had been projected last spring for this year, but current enrollment was closer to 550. He added high school enrollment was very similar to the projections. Dr. Ream noted a lot of kindergarten parents were choosing to wait to enroll their student(s) until next year.

Mr. McEwen asked for an update on rate setting for activities, a discussion point at one of last year's committee meetings. Ms. Mickelson recommended discussing it in a spring meeting and implementing any changes for the 2021-2022 school year. Mr. McEwen requested a comparison with other Montana districts. Dr. Ream agreed to add it to a spring meeting agenda.

Mr. McEwen asked if the board should be concerned about the transportation fund. Dr. Ream noted it would be a complicated year to discuss the transportation fund. He added expenditures would be higher this year because there were more buses but fewer students. Ms. Mickelson added the governor had set aside \$10 million for transportation to supplement the county property taxes and reduce the taxes for the state reimbursement. This could be used until December 30. Dr. Ream recommended a discussion regarding the transportation fund a year from now since this

year's bus route model was new and it had not been determined if the new model would remain in future years.

Ms. Sullivan asked if there were practices – specifically with technology and transportation – that would continue past the pandemic. Ms. Mickelson answered a lot had changed in the business office that she wanted to continue – going paperless, accepting online payments, digitally maintaining timecards.

Ms. Sullivan asked how changes in practice affected the budget. Dr. Ream answered that, in hindsight, it would have been a good idea to have staffed up on Level 1 Techs early summer. He added there were a lot of Level 3 Techs doing one-off solves, which pulled their time from other responsibilities. Dr. Ream continued the technology department was minimally staffed on a normal year, and the technology budget was already overrun, but some of the changes were going to affect practices into the future. Ms. Sullivan asked if such changes would be a good discussion item for the future. Dr. Ream recommended looking at the results of last year's audit to determine next steps for the technology services. Mr. McKay added online curriculum services has become essential, opposed to supplementary in the past, which accounted for a significant increase in technology costs. Ms. Mickelson said it also might be helpful for the technology department to present what they need and what those needs cost. The committee agreed to review the technology budget at a future meeting.

Mr. McEwen requested an FTE analysis. Dr. Ream replied that the related conversation had last year focused on the decreasing FTE as a direct result of declining enrollment at Helena High. He added it would be beneficial to look at staffing distribution by student, school, and department to ensure equity.

Mr. McEwen noted another broad topic of interest could be pandemic issues. Dr. Ream replied those discussions naturally would become part of each discussion, especially since funding was unclear after December 30.

Ms. Mickelson asked the committee if they would still like to see multi-year budget projections. Ms. Sullivan answered she would. Mr. McEwen replied he didn't feel it was a priority until the next legislative session was almost over. Ms. Mickelson replied updates would still be made, especially with regards to staffing. Ms. Sullivan requested updates to the projections for the board. Ms. Mickelson said she would update the staff piece now and wait until the pull date in October to update enrollment numbers.

Dr. Ream clarified he would take the ideas generated by the committee and present it to the committee as a calendar at the next committee meeting.

VI. BOARD COMMENT

Mr. Muszkiewicz described the multi-year budget projections as one of the most important accomplishments of the last two years. He added it affirms approval of the budget each August and provides background information for decisions at the legislature.

Mr. Muszkiewicz voiced his appreciation for the variety of topics that will be discussed by the committee, specifically referencing transportation, transportation, and tuition. He added his preference would be to keep the committee's focus on budget and finance since an additional committee – the Teaching and Learning Committee – had been created partly to evaluate programs. Ms. Sullivan asked for clarification that Mr. Muszkiewicz would prefer SES discussions take place in the Teaching and Learning Committee. Mr. Muszkiewicz confirmed that would be his preference, but he would leave the decision up to committee chairs.

Dr. Ream provided an update that the USDA will continue to provide free meals for all children ages 1-18 through the end of December.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. McEwen adjourned the meeting at 1:14pm.