



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 Finance Committee

Friday, November 6, 2020 – 12:00pm

MINUTES

ATTENDEES

Committee:

John McEwen, Committee Chair
Sarah Sullivan, Committee Member
Siobhan Hathorn,
(*not on committee*)

Others:

Tyler Ream, Superintendent
Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent
Janelle Mickelson, Business Services Administrator
Stacy Collette, Human Resources Director
Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff
Gary Myers, Education Technology Coordinator
Jane Shawn, Helena Education Association President
Jim Penner, member of the public

I. CALL TO ORDER

Committee Chair, John McEwen, called the meeting to order at 12:06pm.

II. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

No comments were offered.

III. REVIEW OF AGENDA

No changes were requested to the agenda.

IV. REVIEW OF MINUTES

The October 2, 2020, committee meeting minutes were reviewed.

V. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION/DISCUSSION

1. Budget to Date Reports

Ms. Mickelson presented current year-to-date budget updates to the committee and noted her continued concern for funding after December 30. Dr. Ream added under \$1million remained in CARES Act funding for the district, and he was confident it would all be spent before December 30.

2. Enrollment Trend Analysis

Dr. Ream presented enrollment trends at the elementary (K-6) level based on the October 5, 2020, pull date. He added that though the numbers were preliminary, the trends would hold. He added this was the first of two pull dates – the second would be the first Monday in February 2021. Ms. Mickelson said the average of the two pull dates became the average enrollment, which would be entered into a formula to establish the ANB (Average Number Belonging).

When looking at the data by grade level, Dr. Ream stated the largest decline in an elementary grade was third grade, but there was no discernable pattern to the decline or increases in enrollment.

Ms. Sullivan asked if the declining enrollment was due to changes in the Montessori program. Dr. Ream answered the only trend he found was Montessori was more difficult to utilize in an online setting, but there was no indication the declines disproportionately affected Montessori students.

Mr. McKay added not all schools had DLI programs, so DLI students have been counted in the enrollment data for the school in which they attend DLI classes.

Dr. Ream addressed seventh and eighth grades, noting the increase in attendance within seventh grade. For the elementary district – which is Kindergarten through eighth grade – total enrollment was down 231 students – about 5.2%. Dr. Ream told the committee the decrease at the high school level was due to the anticipated loss of students to East Helena High School; the decline was not pandemic-related. Ms. Mickelson added a natural attrition of 2% typically occurred across grades between the fall pull date to the spring pull date.

According to Dr. Ream, this paralleled state data, which showed a greater decrease in the elementary grades than in the high school grades.

3. Technology Department Overview

Dr. Ream described the Technology Department presentation as Part Two, since it had been given for the Teaching and Learning Committee on November 11, 2020.

Mr. Myers described the department assessment as an opportunity to address ongoing staffing issues, assure the department was supporting the district's mission, and rethink the department so it runs efficiently and effectively.

Mr. Myers stated his priorities for the department assessment were addressing immediate staffing needs, conducting focus groups with stakeholders, meeting with each member of the department, addressing the work order backlog, and sending tech support to each building.

Mr. Myers spoke to the expectation changes for the department, which included having a staff of 10 or fewer for the last two decades, a daily user increase from 1,000 to 9,000 in less than a year, a

significant increase in Microsoft Teams traffic, the necessity for increased connectivity, comparable districts' technology staffing, comparable salaries, and the volume of help desk tickets.

Mr. Myers provided the committee with feedback from each of the focus groups.

- The teacher focus group noted their appreciation for Microsoft Stream and iReady, though they weren't as supportive of PowerSchool.
- The administration focus group highlighted the challenges in the relationship between technology and infrastructure – security cameras, boilers run by an app, and secure access points to name a few. The administration focus group also noted the importance of streamlining the onboarding process for new staff from a technology standpoint.
- The family/student focus group praised the consistency on the Teams platform and asked for the ability to connect directly with the Technology Department on tech issues. They mentioned teachers needed to be aware of how long assignments took to complete. Logins remained an issue with this focus group.

Mr. Myers divided the scope of the Technology Department functions into three categories: tech operations, which included firewalls, servers, sound systems, repairs, etc.; shared functions including inventory, budgeting, and vendor agreements; and technology applications, which included things like software, account management, vendor/textbook uploads, teacher support, and PowerSchool. Mr. Myers said the previous Technology Director outsourced numerous operations and functions because of the limited staff within the department.

Mr. Myers addressed the additional workload needed to comply with Montana privacy laws and the requirements of negotiating contracts with vendors to maintain compliance.

Mr. McEwen referenced feedback that said there were a lot of platforms for students to access and asked for clarification that an integrated digital learning platform didn't exist. Mr. Myers answered there were options for LMS (learning management systems), but they were very expensive and didn't provide much flexibility for teachers. Dr. Ream added LMS development was extensive, and there were no guarantees a custom system synced with existing systems.

Ms. Sullivan asked Mr. Myers and Dr. Ream if they anticipated using the digital tools after the pandemic. Dr. Ream replied the district would continue to use the tools.

From this assessment, Mr. Myers outlined the immediate changes he had implemented:

- Hire additional Tier 1 support staff
- Hire a department secretary
- Revise the salary matrix to better retain and support staff
- Establish a new department organization chart
- Send "triage" teams to each building
- Maintain a dedicated help desk

Mr. Myers provided an overview of the proposed organization chart for the committee with descriptions of each position.

Mr. Myers provided details related to the shortfalls from the current technology levy, which was currently \$1.08million. He provided a chart listing current and projected shortfalls through FY 2027. Dr. Ream added the district has had to make cuts in other areas to pay for the shortfall. He outlined three options for the future:

- A new levy
- Providing less technology services
- Determining what can be cut from the general fund to pay for technology needs

Mr. McEwen asked if there was money in the building reserve to pay for security doors and cameras. Ms. Mickelson replied the building reserve fund was for capital improvements and could not be used to pay for staffing.

Ms. Sullivan asked if there were budget projections for the technology department after the pandemic. Mr. Myers replied the projections presented were established before the pandemic. Ms. Sullivan asked if the same person would continue to answer the help desk after the pandemic. Mr. Myers replied the current individual would return to being a Technology Teacher, but the help desk would continue to be staffed.

Ms. Mickelson added the technology budget would remain solvent through this year and perhaps next year, but there would not be enough in the budget to cover technology needs the following year. She added further discussion must be had regarding balancing technology budgetary needs and facility budgetary needs.

VI. BOARD COMMENT

There were no board comments.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. McEwen adjourned the meeting at 1:15pm.