



*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

Wednesday, January 6, 2021 – 12:00 PM

This meeting will occur at the May Butler Center (55 S. Rodney – Helena, MT. 59601) and via Microsoft Teams. Due to the size constraints of our available conference room, maximum capacity at the in-person meeting is limited to six participants - including committee members (3) and the superintendent (1).

To participate remotely, please use this link: <https://helenaschools.org/event/board-of-trustees-teaching-learning-committee-meeting-01-06-2021/>.

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*Committee Purpose Statement: The Teaching and Learning Committee collectively works to operationalize the strategic priorities of the Helena Public Schools specifically in areas related to our goals and measures for teaching and learning.*

### AGENDA

- I. **CALL TO ORDER / INTRODUCTIONS**
- II. **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT:** *This is the time for comment on public matters that are not on the agenda. Public matters do not include any pending legal matters, private personnel issues or private student issues. Please do not attempt to address such issues at this time or you will be ruled out of order. The Board cannot enter into a discussion during General Public Comment.*
- III. **REVIEW OF AGENDA**
- IV. **REVIEW OF MINUTES FROM THE 12.02.2020 TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE MEETING**
- V. **ITEMS FOR INFORMATION/DISCUSSION**
  - A. **Draft 21/22 High School Course Offerings**  
Discuss expected high school courses for the forthcoming 2021/2022 school year
  - B. **Assessment Platform Update**  
Discuss current assessment platform and implementation of new iReady Assessment (Fall 2020)
  - C. **Brief Overview of Performance Matters**  
Collectively preview Performance Matters, a new tool to aid in data analysis
- VI. **BOARD COMMENTS**
- VII. **ADJOURNMENT**

Next Meeting:  
February 3, 2021 | Hybrid Meeting (online/in-person)



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## Board of Trustees – Teaching and Learning Committee Meeting

Wednesday, December 2, 2020 – 12:00pm

### MINUTES

#### ATTENDANCE

##### *Trustees:*

Sarah Sullivan, Committee Chair  
Siobhan Hathhorn, Committee Member  
Jennifer Walsh, Committee Member  
Luke Muszkiewicz, Board Chair

##### *Others:*

Tyler Ream, Superintendent  
Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent  
Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff  
Stacy Collette, Human Resources Director  
Gary Myers, Education Technology Coordinator  
Jane Shawn, HEA President  
John Stilson, Central Elementary Principal  
Jill Nyman, Smith Elementary Principal  
Carrie Owen, Broadwater Elementary Principal  
Lisa Lowney, Kessler Elementary Principal  
Trish Klock, Bryant Elementary Principal  
Justine Alberts, Hawthorne Elementary Principal  
Megan Skolrud, Smith Elementary Para  
Tony Napoletano, Central Elementary Educator  
Amy Casne-Fetz, Central Elementary Educator  
Kathryn Wright, Smith Elementary Educator  
Christine Roberts, member of the public  
Tiffany Lyden, member of the public  
Piper Lynch, member of the public  
Kai Moser, member of the public

#### I. CALL TO ORDER/INTRODUCTIONS

The meeting was called to order at 12:04pm by Committee Chair, Sarah Sullivan.

#### II. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

#### III. REVIEW OF AGENDA

No changes were requested to the agenda.

#### IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes from the November 4, 2020, committee meeting were reviewed.

#### V. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION/DISCUSSION

##### A. Collective review and discussion of the Montessori Program including program overview and future possibilities

Dr. Ream prefaced the presentation by stating his appreciation for Montessori educators' and parents' development of a strong Montessori community within Helena. Dr. Ream said on an annual basis, he received questions and comments regarding two discussion points: adding new pods to schools and a centralized Montessori campus.

Dr. Ream provided information on the existing Montessori program that included:

- Multiage classrooms with grade-alike cohorts.
- Two multiage classrooms (first, second, and third graders) become one multiage upper classroom (fourth and fifth graders).
- Three elementary schools had an on-site Montessori program: Smith, Broadwater, and Central in which there were 16-22 students in three pods per school.
- Lottery applications were submitted for kindergarten students, and 36 students entered the program each year. Anyone not accepted into the program was added to a wait list.
- Between 13-19% of Kindergarten families submitted applications for Montessori.
- Historically, the district was unable to accommodate 53-71% of Montessori applicants, which would indicate there was enough interest to fill an additional pod.

Ms. Hathhorn asked if siblings of existing Montessori students received preference in the lottery.

Ms. Nyman answered there was no preference, but siblings could attend the same school attended by the Montessori student.

Ms. Walsh asked how the Montessori program was being promoted/communicated. Ms. Nyman replied the program hosted an information session for families prior to the lottery, but it typically wasn't well-attended. There also was an informational video on the website, and information was sent to all incoming kindergarten families each year. Ms. Sullivan asked if the information session was specific to Smith families. Ms. Nyman replied the invitation was sent to the whole community.

Via the Teams chat, the following comments were submitted pertaining to how the Montessori program was promoted/communicated:

- Kathryn Wright, "One year the Montessori teachers went and talked to the K teachers at every school to give them accurate info about Montessori. You can see the bump in applications the year we did that."
- Piper Lynch commented, "Every Kindergarten student in HSD gets a letter in the mail with lottery information"
- Tiffany Lyden commented, "The district mails out informational letters and Montessori applications to all kindergarten students in March."

Ms. Walsh asked if there was an additional lottery for older students – fourth or fifth graders. Ms. Nyman answered the lottery was just for kindergarteners, but older students or families new to the district could be added to the wait list.

Ms. Sullivan expressed interest in seeing a breakdown of income levels of students enrolled in the program. Dr. Ream answered they could look at the current list and determine who qualifies for free and reduced lunch. Ms. Sullivan requested that information be added to the discussion moving forward. Dr. Ream added they would be looking at equity to ensure the percentage of free and reduced students in Montessori mirrored the percentage within the district.

Via the Teams Meeting chat, and pertaining to income levels of students, the following comment was submitted:

- Tiffany Lyden commented, “From a 2016 budget committee meeting, the percentage of free and reduced lunch from 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016 are 20%, 16%, 18%, and 15% respectively.”

Dr. Ream presented the committee with theoretical expansion options for Montessori as follows:

- A new pod, which in the 21/22 school would open two lower grade (first and second) Montessori classrooms, an additional class to the lower grade in SY22/23, an additional class to the upper classroom in SY23/24, and full enrollment in lower and upper classrooms in SY24/25.
  - Pros included an added choice for families and students, consistency for any school with questionable enrollment stability, and the ability to meet current unmet needs.
  - Cons included the professional capacity (three Montessori educators) to add an additional pod and schedule logistics.
  - To add a pod of three classrooms, the school/campus would need a minimum of two classrooms and an associated need – typically enrollment – that may be addressed through the addition of a Montessori pod. The only school currently meeting these conditions was Bryant.
  - Areas of inquiry associated with a new pod include expected impacts from this year’s kindergarten class, expectations in terms of Bryant’s long-term enrollment, a potentially disproportionate impact to HMS if a pod was added at Bryant, and the level of existing readiness within the school.
- A centralized Montessori campus: the phased development of a centralized, Montessori-specific campus to serve as a district hub for the program.
  - This option had the potential of becoming a long-term value-add in terms of transportation, the development of program-trained teachers, and Montessori-specific resources in one location. However, it would likely alter the cross-community nature of the Montessori program and would eventually phase the program out of Broadwater, Central, and Smith.
  - One possibility for a centralized campus was Lincoln school, which had eight classrooms, a library, and a gym/cafeteria, along with modulars that had six classrooms and restrooms.
  - Lincoln also was central to the transportation pattern, and the forthcoming boiler project would address the current heating issues.

- The pros to a centralized campus were the transportation pattern, the potential for program growth, the alignment of scheduling needs, shared supplies/materials, accommodation of growth in the Central and Smith neighborhoods, and an identity/purpose for the Lincoln campus.
- Cons included a significant program change with multiple unknowns, the potential loss of “home school” feel with a centralized campus, a change in location for teachers/staff, an older campus with small classrooms, and the loss of district “swing space.”
- A long-term plan would be set for this option that would include first grade families being notified in the first year of movement to Lincoln in fifth grade; notification in the second year of movement in the fourth grade; etc. In the fifth year, all Montessori classes would be on the centralized campus.
- Needed areas of inquiry for a centralized campus included how vested parties viewed the possibility, the success of centralized campuses across the region compared to pods, if centralized a centralized Montessori program would hinder current Montessori sites, if a new pod could be added to increase Montessori seats, potential program additions of kindergarten or pre-K, transportation feasibility, necessary fiscal resources.

Ms. Sullivan asked if Montessori students typically stayed within their peer group or transfer back to their neighborhood middle school and high school.

Ms. Hathhorn asked if applications from schools in the valley was low because families had less interest or because existing programs were so far away.

Via the Teams Meeting chat, and pertaining to professional capacity of program expansion, the following comment was submitted:

- Kathryn Wright commented, “Two things about professional capacity: 1) Existing HPS teachers can transition to Montessori while teaching. 2) Because of licensure equivalency with the state Board of Ed, HPS can hire Montessori credentialed directly from anywhere in the country without them having to also get state licensure.”

Ms. Sullivan asked if there was a district-wide or nation-wide consensus on which option was best. Ms. Nyman replied there was not; there were pros and cons to each.

Ms. Sullivan offered an additional option of increasing class size within the existing programs. Mr. McKay added the maximum accreditation limit for combo grade class sizes in elementary schools was 24 students without a para. Dr. Ream confirmed that option would add 12-24 additional acceptances into the program.

Ms. Hathhorn asked if there was a recommended breakdown of grades.

Via the Teams Meeting chat, and pertaining to the breakdown of grades, the following comment was submitted:

- Kathryn Wright commented, “Age ranges: 3-6 (preschool/K), 6-9 (grades 1st, 2nd, 3rd), 9-12 (grades 4,5,6). Questions to consider: Could 6th graders stay to complete the upper age range? Can preschool be added and combined with K to complete that first age range?”

Dr. Ream asked Ms. Wright for information on middle school and high school models. Ms. Wright replied there were national models for two-three grades at the middle school level and four grades at the high school level. Dr. Ream asked if the existing models were separate schools or integrated into general education schools. Ms. Wright replied she hadn’t heard of pods within middle schools or high schools.

#### **VI. BOARD COMMENTS**

Ms. Hathhorn said she appreciated the presentation and added there were a lot of unknowns.

Ms. Walsh agreed there were a lot of unknowns and requested the topic be brought back to the committee.

Ms. Sullivan asked what the next discussion topic for the committee was. Dr. Ream replied high school class offerings were slated for January.

#### **VII. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:25pm by Ms. Sullivan.