



**Superintendent**

Tyler Ream, Ed. D

324-2001

**Business Manager**

Janelle Mickelson

324-2040

## Board of Trustees Meeting

**Tuesday, June 8, 2021**

5:30 p.m. via Zoom

### **MINUTES**

**ATTENDANCE:** Present unless otherwise noted

Luke Muszkiewicz, Board Chair

Siobhan Hathorn, Board Vice Chair

Terry Beaver, Trustee

John McEwen, Trustee

Janet Armstrong, Trustee

Jennifer McKee, Trustee

Libby Goldes, Trustee

Jennifer Walsh, Board Member

Student Reps:

Rylie Schoenfeld (HHS)

Eliza Lay (CHS)

Dr Tyler Ream, Superintendent

Rex Weltz, Incoming Superintendent

Janelle Mickelson, Business Manager

Gary Meyer, IT

Many Guests of the Helena School District

**I. CALL TO ORDER/ PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The Board takes a moment of silence for the student lost the week before and any other students lost over the past year.

Chair Luke Muszkiewicz called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**II. REVIEW OF AGENDA**

No changes.

**III. STUDENT, EDUCATOR, & SCHOOL RECOGNITIONS**

A. Helena High senior, Claire Downing, has been selected as a 2021 Presidential Scholar. She is one of two in the state of Montana.

B. Helena High's Green Group is a winner of the 2020-2021 SMART Schools award competition. Members of Green Group: Neal Bovington, Leif Hogg, Erin Grossman, Lucy Lantz, Isaac Nehring, Dani Prouty, Alexis Reed, and Izzy Snell  
Advisors: Jill Van Alstyne and Roger Scruggs

A. Helena High Students, Heath Caldwell and Izzy Kosena, earned 1st Place in Fossils at the 2021 Montana State Science Olympiad. Advisor: Claire Pichette

B. Helena High Students, Heath Caldwell and Robert Stimpson, earned 1st Place in Geologic Mapping at the 2021 Montana State Science Olympiad. Advisor: Claire Pichette

C. Helena High participated in the National High School Mock Trial last week which was held virtually. Star Witness awards went to Grace Johnson, Andrew Stanfel, and Isaac Nehring. Star Attorney awards went to Hailey Brewer, Emmi Highness, and Caitlin Matthews. Other team members include Sage Eck-Miller, Maddi McNeil, and Meghan Rake  
Advisor: Kasey Askin

D. Helena High student, Odessa Zentz, won the 200m, 400m, and 800m at the 2021 Montana AA State Track & Field Championships.

E. Capital High Senior, Dani Bartsch, has been named the Gatorade Montana Girls Basketball Player of the Year for the 2020-2021 season.

F. Capital High student, Sarah Heller, and Helena High student, Avery Skibicki, have been recognized as NCWIT Award for Aspirations in Computing honorees.

G. Central Elementary Educator, Katy Wright, was named Montana's 2021 Nominee for NEA Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence.

H. Central Elementary was awarded the Sustainable Ag award for the SMART Schools 2020-2021 Challenge.

I. Capital High was awarded the Living Classroom Award and the Indoor Air Quality Award for the SMART Schools 2020-2021 Challenge.

#### **IV. OATH OF OFFICE FOR 2021-2022 STUDENT BOARD REPRESENTATIVES**

A. 2021/2022 Student Board of Trustees Representatives – Rylie Schoenfeld (HHS) and Eliza Lay (CHS)

Barb Ridgeway introduces these students. She thanks those involved with the interview process.

Eliza is a Senior in the Fall. She is a member of the Swim Team, Theater, Student Council, National Honor Society. She is a lifeguard at the Green Meadow Country Club and she works as a secretary in her aunts accounting office. She also maintains a 4.0 GPA while taking mostly AP and Honors classes.

Rylie will be a Senior in the Fall as well. She was the HMS mini track team volunteer, and was a log clearer at the camp at Georgetown Lake. She is a member of the National Honor Society, a Western Aerospace Scholar, and she maintains a 3.9 GPA.

Janelle asks them to raise their right hand and administers the oath.

Board Chair Muszkiewicz welcomes them and acknowledged Barb Ridgeway for heading the process. He tells them to speak up with any concern and comment on anything they would like. They are not voting members of the Board but they are a big part. He looks forward to their student reports.

#### **V. 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.*

**Jenise Cockhill:** Good Evening to the board of trustees. My name is Jenise Cockhill. I am speaking tonight with regard to the importance of extracurricular clubs, sports and activities in the hope that with the School Boards insight, they may return to normal this fall. I currently serve as the Board chair for Capital High Booster Club and have been involved with this organization since 2016. Our mission is to provide financial assistance to all Extra Curricular Activities, Sports and Clubs at CHS while promoting school spirit and academics to enhance our kid's educational experience. We lend financial assistance to ALL clubs ranging from Drama and Robotics to Basketball and Track and EVERYTHING in between. In short, we subsidize any and all Extracurricular activities where our district budget falls woefully short. In my years with this organization, I have seen how truly important and vital extra-curricular activities are to our students. As parents and educators, we would like to believe that our kids love learning about math, English and science. We want to believe that they are excited about these things and that it makes high school fun. However, this simply is not true. What keeps our children engaged in high school is the things they are passionate about. While it is true that some students are enamored with aspects of their education, the majority of them love the part of school that is fun and provides them with a social and emotional platform to excel. Teenagers want to feel a part of something big. They want a group of like -minded

individuals to share in their passions. Extracurricular activities provide this niche for them. Teenagers want to find 'their people'. They sit through Math and English counting the minutes until they can be with their group and work on their upcoming choir performance or practice their Speech & Debate skills. I can assure you these statements are accurate. In my years with the Booster Club, I have had the privilege of sitting and listening to kids present the funding requests for these various activities. I have listened to the girl in Drama Club who admittedly struggled with acceptance, which led to thoughts of self-harm, get completely excited and animated when asking for funding to help with the annual stage performance set. She told our board how finding her place with CHS Drama kept her in school and is now looking forward to pursuing post-secondary education. I have witnessed the extremely shy and withdrawn boy come to life as he spoke to us about helping fund his trip to a National Competition for Skills USA. His love and passion for high school stems from the fact he gets to go into the automotive shop every single day. He was setting his goals on winning the National Competition to help him get a scholarship to help fulfill his dream of becoming a flight mechanic. The importance of belonging and acceptance is completely evident in sports. We have heard from numerous sports teams at CHS, who ask for funding to help pay for their uniforms and equipment. These students are proud of their High School and their community. They want to represent their school and make their teachers and parents proud. In return, they reap the benefit of learning to work as a team, taking criticism and using it to push themselves to become better at their craft. They learn to win with grace and lose with dignity. All of these things are vital for a successful life as an adult and overall good human. Getting these activities, clubs and sports back to normal without masking will help ensure success in the classroom. Our students deserve to be able to compete, perform and lead all while actually seeing their counterparts, audience and fans smile back at them in approval. They need the social engagement and acceptance that normal activities provide to keep them involved in the classroom. I am completely grateful that our athletes got to compete in the 20-21 school year. I personally loved watching both of my children do what they love and are passionate about. Unfortunately, a large portion of the rest of the groups did not get the same chance. Numerous clubs and activities were not allowed to perform, compete or even just meet in person! This is unacceptable. As parents and educators, it is our job to mold our children into good humans that are productive members of our society. Involvement in extracurricular clubs, sports and activities is a key component to keeping them engaged in the classroom. It is our responsibility to give our students all necessary platforms to excel. Unfortunately, the majority of our students did not get that chance this last school year. I urge our District to please consider allowing all of the Extra Curricular sports, clubs and activities to move forward as normal without masks to allow all students the chance to find their place and passion. Thank you for your time.

**Kara Orban:** She is speaking on behalf of the Helena Black History Month Education Initiative. They are a group of educators, librarians, historians, and parents whose goal is the increase the teaching of Black History in Helena. They would like to celebrate Black History Month in February of 2022 and they have drafted a letter describing their efforts and intents. They would also like it taught throughout the year. They would like it reinforced that Black lives matter every day. They are interested in helping the school

district provide a more formal, physical, and accessible avenue to teach Black History in the Helena Public Schools. They are currently seeking grant funding to put together kits for teachers at Elementary levels. They are asking that the district ensure that Black History is taught and that teachers are supported with training and materials.

**Jamie Bright, parent:** She has spoken several times this year. She has fought for parents and children to be able to watch their students play sports, she has fought for kids to be able to remove masks. She has provided data and also antidotal information and she feels she hasn't been listened to. She feels the virus is not fatal to children but that the other effects have been detrimental. She doesn't want the students to be used as marketing tools. Students have been exposed to higher dangers outside of school, such as child abuse, rape, depression, pregnancy, etc. She doesn't understand why kids are not wearing masks elsewhere but still have to in school. She quotes Dr Fauci and says he quotes that the masks you buy at the store are not effective anyway.

**Amanda Osborne, parent:** She would like to speak on her frustration on the lack of consistent COVID protocols between schools in the district and even classrooms in the same school. There are many rules and protocols and they seem to be made up as they go along. She asks that data backs up the protocols for the upcoming year and that is be clear and communicated to parents. She says Middle Schoolers are eating lunch in the hallway on the floor. The floor is dirty. The lunchroom is still not being used. They are covering band instrument valves. Outdoor protocols are not consistent. Her child can't play on certain equipment or with kids in other classes. She pledges the flag but can't see it because it's on the other side of the building. Plexiglass is still in the classrooms even though CDC says it's not helpful. She wants to offer the kids the best experience as possible.

## **VI. NEW BUSINESS**

### **A. Items for Information**

#### **1. 2021-2022 School Year Overview: Draft Plan**

**Incoming Superintendent Rex Weltz:** He feels the work through the last 14 months have been important but he wants to move forward. He is looking to regenerate coming out of COVID. It is a draft plan based on priorities to step out of COVID and in to a normal environment. He will ask for feedback and post it on the webpage and then send out a survey link to get feedback. He also created a glance into what the future looks like. They will look at safety and health, high quality teaching, targeted interventions, social/emotional support, consistency and extracurricular opportunities. He is looking to have normal schedules and transportation, optional masking, collaborative classrooms, full activity schedules and continued precautionary practices. This is the hope but things could move in an opposite direction as well. They will continue with handwashing, higher cleaning standards, enhanced air filtration, continued contract tracing and outdoor learning opportunities. It is a work in progress throughout the Summer.

Chair Luke Muszkiewicz acknowledges that some people may have public comment about this and it is not an action item so cannot be commented on, however

he encourages them to go to the website and take the survey to offer comment that way. He also says an email can be sent to Trustees or Superintendent.

Trustee McKee speaks on making the masks optional but recommended. She asks why they are recommended if they don't control disease. Dr Ream says that it all depends on where the CDC will go and there is a lot tied to that guidance. It's hard to know in early June where the world will be in August. If it is recommended, then it's on the families to decide what is best for their own family.

Trustee McEwen asks about vaccines. He asks if they have authority to require vaccinations and if the plan should require that. Dr Reams says he has seen universities consider it but no public schools in that regard. Hospital works are being required but he thinks it would be a violation of HB 702. He doesn't think that will be seen across the country. Mr. Weltz says that COVID 19 vaccine is specifically not added to the vaccines required for school admission.

Trustee Goldes says that the vaccine is currently in the emergency phase. She hopes that soon it will be like a normal vaccine, recommended by all physicians, etc., once fully approved. She would like to address whether students will still have remote options for school attendance. The info received says that those options will be limited and only offered to those that need it for a medical reason. She knows that some families chose to keep kids home based on the medical needs of other family members. Is there another option for DLI again this year? Mr. Weltz says they will weight those needs and may still have those options available. They are still looking at what that will look like based on available resources. She also asks if there is an option for a "masked" classroom.

Trustee Walsh appreciates the work that has gone into this. She asks if they are still looking at metrics and phases for next year? Dr Ream says things have changed over the last few months but he doesn't think it will be a multi-phase year. He thinks the whole year will look pretty normal or phase 3. There will be cohorts possibly, and maybe different quarantine guidelines. At this point there have not been any outbreaks from things like bussing, etc. She then asks if they will be looking at masking parameters over the next month to update policies. Mr. Weltz says at this point it will be a case-by-case situation. It's possible that if there is a spike, they will fall back on the mask requirement.

Trustee McKee asks if a child is in quarantine, and they become online, how would that be handled in the Fall. House Bill 702 says that they can't discriminate based on vaccinate status. So, they are still working on how the quarantine aspect will work. Chair Luke Muszkiewicz says that last year they made sure that every student had a computer so he believes it safe to say that every student will have one again going forward.

Chair Luke Muszkiewicz says he appreciates the timing and that before the school year is over, they are looking forward to the next year and how it will work. He is happy that Mr. Weltz is getting out in front to try and have the best plan possible. It will inform the conversations that everyone will be having. Things will continue to evolve and this summer won't be a normal one. He feels the plan is quick and easy to

read and knows there are details behind it. He is excited that they are moving in the right direction and he gives credit to the staff, students, parents and medical professionals in the community. He is thankful for the vaccines. He is optimistic that they will come through.

## **B. Items for Action**

### 1. Declaration of an Unforeseen Emergency

Dr Ream says this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> one they have looked at in the last 16 months. It's a bit different because of a number of factors. Vaccine progress is important but COVID unknowns mean that they must stay vigilant. He is recommending a continuation of the Declaration of an Unforeseen Emergency that currently goes through June 30, 2021. It gives continued flexibility going forward. The Board can also choose to terminate the declaration at their choosing. He recommends it continues through June 30, 2022. Chair Luke Muszkiewicz says that MTSBA is recommending that every school have one of these going forward.

**Motion:** Trustee Goldes makes a motion to continue to declare an unforeseen emergency within the meaning of that term as set forth in Title 20, Chapter 9, Part 8 to become immediately effective and to continue through June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022 or until terminated by a vote of the Board of Trustees. The declaration is necessary to the community and school health concerns related to COVID 19. Furthermore, the Board of Trustees authorizes the Superintendent to take necessary steps to execute this declaration and inform the public and government agencies of this declaration. Trustee Hathhorn seconds the motion.

#### **Public Comment:**

**Ms. Sandborn:** She asks about redeclaring the emergency, he mentioned the availability of vaccines, but she is wondering what other reasons warrant this declaration. Would cases or hospitalizations warrant that or is availability of vaccines the sole reason for renewing?

**Tammy Stefanik:** She would like to say that she disagrees with declaring an emergency through the entire next school year. She has not seen any reason for it. She isn't seeing many cases in schools. Her daughters outside graduation showed them shaking hands of trustees and principals and no one seemed too concerned. She feels the Board could take action later if need be. She has a lack of trust in the Board at this point. She wants to make it known that she disagrees.

**Robyn Mohs:** She is concerned about this and didn't know that School Districts could do this. She disagrees with it. The plan is a draft so the declaration should not go for another year.

**Lisa Schlosser:** She echoes the sentiment by the last speakers. She does not agree and thinks it's ridiculous that the School Board thinks they have more power than the Governor who voted in a bill that limits his ability to change the law. It seems it will add to the level of the non-trust that the community

has with the School Board. Prom had 785 kids in close proximity and no spread. She feels the School Board is over reaching their power. She feels that Helena School District has been the failure of the entire state and she wants that on record. Other schools have gone back longer and Helena is a failure and the students have failed because of the School Board.

**Courtney McAdams:** She thanks them for allowing public comment and she feels it was a covert move by the Board to bring this up as she didn't even notice it on the agenda. There is a lot of mistrust by parents who have been speaking at all the meetings for a year. She feels they have not been listened to and she feels that this declaration is out of line. She agrees that the Board has failed the kids who are now behind. She believes that the focus should be on getting the kids back to their grade levels. 20% of the students failed. She felt there should be public comment on the draft and that is where the focus should be.

**Tim Ravendal, Conservative News for Montana:** He asks how he can record the meeting from his end. He says that he is locked out and that it is a violation of public meeting laws. He wants to make sure the people who are not here are able to follow as well.

**Tillman McAdams:** He is opposed to the unforeseen emergency. This is an epidemic that they have now seen and have data on and the State of Montana's health service site show that there have been zero deaths of those under 20 in the state and only one for the age group of 20 to 29. People do get sick and there have been a lot of cases but CDC makes the recommendation that you adjust to the area that you are in. Some places have had no masks in schools with the same result. Facts should drive the decisions. The data is there.

**Howard DeRosier:** He is very against the declaration and said he was in the meeting earlier in the year when it was decided that Dr Ream could phase in different ways and the Board could phase down. Dr Ream said they are waiting on CDC guidance. They don't know what's going to happen in the Fall so it makes no sense to do that now. If a new trend happened or more data come in, then it can be looked at later. However, just deciding that they have the power for another year is ridiculous.

**Jamie Bright:** She understands why the Board wants to continue with the declaration. She feels it is so they can keep making dictatorial decisions without considering public input. She feels COVID is an excuse and it is not warranted. She feels COVID is being used as a scapegoat of distance student not meeting benchmarks and it's a way for the Board to wash their hands of the responsibility. She fully disagrees with this.

**Board Comment:** Trustee Armstrong would like a better understanding of what the purpose behind this is and what that policy actually accomplishes. Dr Ream says that MCA-20-9-806 stipulates specific pieces with declaring an unforeseen emergency. It has been recommended by MTSBA and done by



other school districts as well. Chair Muszkiewicz adds that in a lot of ways, passing this does not mean that they are going to do or not do any given specific thing. It's more of something that is recommended. Many districts have passed this. From a Board perspective, it authorizes them to have these 1900 series policies. They are temporary policies. Two of them will be looked at tonight. We are looking at getting rid of one and amending another so it recognizes that we are still in an environment that is not normal and it gives extra flexibility. It allows them to make changes without several steps. They can make changes quickly based on new information. Two have already been passed and this would be a third.

**Vote:** 8-0. Motion carries.

2. Policies for Consideration:

a. Termination of Policy 1904

Barb Ridgeway explains that it is no longer applicable and it was established in 2019 to allow expenditures from the transportation fund to deal with COVID.

**Motion:** Trustee McEwen makes a motion to dismiss policy 1904. Trustee McKee seconds the motion.

**Public Comment:** None

**Board Comment:** None

**Vote:** 8-0. Motion carries

b. Revision of Policy 1905

The recommendation would be for the use of masks but that they no longer be required. Furthermore, it establishes some of the safety protocols that will continue. The things they are actually doing have been added to the policy to include student handwashing hygiene, physical distancing, cleaning and disinfecting, cleaning protocols on busses. Chair Muszkiewicz asks if they can just delete lines 20, 21 and 22. Barb Ridgeway says they can just delete.

Trustee McKee asks when it would go in to effect? Barb Ridgeway says the recommendation would be to go into effect July 1.

**Motion:** Trustee McEwen moves to adopt changes to policy 1905 to include eliminate lines 20, 21 & 22 and make it effective July 1. Trustee Hathorn seconds the motion.

**Public Comment:**

**Landon:** In talking about loosening restrictions and making masks optional, his point of contention is if restrictions are lessening, where is the emergency? He would like to know why other things are moving away from emergency?

**Amanda Osborne, parent:** She supports masking being optional but she does not support the language of the proposed amendment because masks are either a necessary protective measure or they are not. They are not putting masking or not masking on a level playing field. They are opening up kids to

harassment, etc. because one practice will be more accepted than another. Its an unfair burden to put on the younger kids.

**Caroline Phaff, parent:** Her main concern that kids 12 and under will not be able to be vaccinated by the time school starts in the Fall and so there isn't really an option. She would love to see the school say they would wait until vaccines become available to that population. At that point, maybe make it optional. Research says that masks work well when everyone wears them. She wants her child to be able to go to school and be safe. She teaches with a mask on and it was fine. If masking is optional, only a couple kids need to get it to make it spread.

**Tammy Stefanik, parent:** She will echo comments before her, in believing the wording should change. She does not feel the word "recommend" is the best word to use. If masks continue to be required, there is a lack of opportunity for students to have equal opportunity to education without risk of harm to their health. There are students who cannot or should not wear a mask. The only way to get an exception for kids who should not wear a mask is to go through the 504 process. Masking has been normalized and that's not ok.

**Courtney McAdams, parent:** She agrees that the language should change to "optional". Her kids are hard working kids who follow the rules and if someone says it is recommended it puts a lot on the child to decide. Each parent has a choice to send their kid with a mask. The N95 masks are the only ones that truly work and they are used in hospitals, etc. Cloth masks don't work. Her family wore cloth mask and all got COVID. They have had no choice all year. The children have failed and now have to go to summer school and wear a hot, sweaty mask until July 1. The Board should stand up for the kids. She wants to make sure that teachers cannot push the recommendation even when its optional.

**Lisa Schlosser, parent:** The last time they were allowed to make public comment, it didn't seem that the parent's concerns were even considered. She would ask the Board to consider what they are hearing. Its important for the kids. She comes as a physical fitness instructor who has taught for 20 years and she sees little kids outside with masks on so they can get on the bus. But at restaurants, the masks are no longer required. Having them on in the heat is not good for anyone. She had to pull her kid out after class several times getting sick to her stomach from mask wearing. She had more absences this year than any of her 11 years before. Her daughter had to quarantine 5 times because of COVID exposure and never got it. The school Board needs to step up for these kids. She doesn't know why she still has faith in the Board, but she does.

**Roby Mohs:** She came and asked for this to be one the agenda months ago and she knows other parents have been asking as well. She doesn't understand why they had to wait all year when numbers have been so low for so long. She

thanks them for finally putting it on the agenda. She agrees that “recommended” is not the right word. She says the Board and the Teachers are not Doctors. She says the American Rescue Plan looks to be written from a political stand point and they are not Doctors either. “Optional” needs to be the word. She says to consider the graphs on websites stating the numbers. Vaccines are fine if people want them but remember that the vaccine industries have no liability. Do School Board members want to take accountability for mask wearing health issues and absenteeism and grade drops? The date for optional needs to begin tonight.

**RyAnn Christman:** She has a 16-year-old who has not attended in school since 2019 because of the masks. She spoke with Dr Ream at the beginning of all this. Her son has sensory issues and the CDC says accommodations should be made for those with sensory issues. The Health Department voided that from their draft. She spoke to Dr Ream who was very kind and he recommended that her son go to PAL but they also wear masks. She has tried to work with the school. He can’t tolerate a mask for more than a few hours. She asked that he do ½ days in person and online in the afternoons, so she could work in the morning and be home in the afternoon. She was told no. So, her son has missed all social aspects since then. She has spent hours looking at the law, and COVID info. These kids are not getting sick but they are missing out on everything else. There needs to be accommodations and it needs to be optional.

**Board Comment:** Trustee Hathorn says that it has been an interesting year to say the least. She feels happy that she can hear from people from all sides. They have heard compelling arguments on both sides. The Board has done a lot to look at everyone’s perspective and respect it. She feels that it is a major change in how things have gone. Data can be found to support any position. Things are ever changing. They have to do what they believe the community needs. The numbers are low currently and things look good. It looks safe to provide the choice to families. Moving forward, this gives families the choice to do either. There is also a bullying clause. Families can choose and children are protected. She believes this is the right thing for right now.

Trustee McKee is in favor of the change. One reason the numbers are lower is vaccination as well as other factors. She has heard comments about COVID not being a threat to children. She never thought there was a major threat to children but children are dependent on adults and adults needed to stay healthy. The children were just more vulnerable. She doesn’t know that the difference in wording places a burden on the children. Either way of wording is fine with her.

Trustee McEwen asks when summer school starts? He asks if the policy change should take place with summer school instead of July 1? He also

comments that the wording of “recommend” is the correct one. It still leaves the choice to the families.

Mr. Weltz says that both words will work the same but one gives a bit more power. It gives time to see what the CDC recommends. CDC guidelines have to be followed so that when they do get ESSER funds, they are tied to ability to follow guidance. There is an MOU with the staff that ends June 30. If that terminates early, they will have to redo the MOU and that takes some time. Its not as simple as just changing a date. Summer school starts for high schools the week after school gets out. K-8 summer program starts June 28. So elementary will wear them 3 days.

Dr Ream agrees with what Mr. Weltz has said. They can’t predict what the CDC will come out with. It’s been a few weeks and they are still waiting for more guidance. Different districts end different dates and the CDC knows that schools need to know what guidance will be going forward.

Chair Muszkiewicz weighs in and says it is simply unrealistic to renegotiate the MOU with HEA before next month. That’s the major factor in the July 1 date.

Trustee Beaver says that the point for contention is the word “recommendation”. Throughout COVID, the only tool they had against COVID was the masks. In the last 4-5 months, the vaccine has come out as another tool. Vaccinations have increased the potential to eliminate or protect against COVID. At the present, kids under 12 can’t be vaccinated. So, for those kids, the mask is the only tool. He would personally recommend the mask to these children. Maybe by the time schools open for Fall, there will be a vaccine for them.

Chair Muszkiewicz says that he agrees with Trustee Beaver. He wants to address that children under 12 can’t yet get the vaccine so some say that this population could still be required to mask. He wants to be clear that HB 702 forbids them from doing that. They cannot differentiate based on vaccination status. He thanks the students and teachers and support staff who have worn the masks at school. He believes that is the most important action that kept staff and family’s safe. Vaccination is a personal choice and not everyone can even take it. But the vaccine is changing the game and he is hopeful that because of it, they can operate at normal next year. He does believe in the proposed wording though. Because those under 12 cannot get the vaccine currently, he believes the word “recommended” is the right choice, but effectively it is every family’s choice. He fears that masks will continue to distract from the core educational mission.

**Vote:** 7-1. Opposed by Trustee Armstrong. Motion carries

### 3. Approval and ratification of the HPS-AFSCME Custodians and Grounds Collective Bargaining Agreement

Stacy Collette brings a tentative agreement that was reached on May 10, 2021 with the custodians and grounds crew. The majority voted and it passed. It's a 2-year agreement that begins July 1, 2021 and ends June 30, 2023 with a salary reopener next Fall. Employees will receive a step, in accordance with the collective bargaining provision and have agreed to a \$1000 bonus to each employee covered by the agreement and prorated based on their FTE. The insurance was dealt with by the Health Benefits committee and wording for night shift was removed as there is no longer any night shift positions. They also added a personal day to be used on non-student days such as Spring or Winter break. There is a retirement pay change from \$125 per year of service to \$200 per year of service.

Trustee McEwen asks what the retirement pay is? Stacy Collette says that they have \$125 for every year of service at time of termination. It's a stipend. Trustee McEwen also comments that the personal day is in addition to the vacation benefit that all public employees receive. So, he asks if they are adding another day of vacation? Stacy Collette clarifies that teachers are given 5 personal days and those are bargained in. The custodial unit has done a clause to mirror those days. It levels the playing field for those that have personal days vs those that don't across the board. It's a paid day that can't be carried forward or cashed out. Trustee McEwen says that there are 6000 people in Helena that are covered by that statute. So, these employees are getting a bit better than others in state, city or county.

Trustee Beaver asks for clarification on the removal of the night shift language and differential. There was a boiler watch position. He asks if that is gone? Stacy Collette clarifies that they no longer have that position but instead they pay a stipend to one of the craft members to be on call 24/7 and he checks them regularly. This actually reduced costs.

**Motion:** Trustee McKee makes a motion to approve the ratification of HPS-AFSCME Custodians and Grounds Collective Bargaining Agreement. Trustee Beaver seconds the motion.

**Public Comment:** None

**Board Comment:** None

**Vote:** 8-0. Motion carries

### 4. Approval and ratification of the HPS-Carpenters Collective Bargaining Agreement 3

Stacy Collette says they reached a tentative agreement on May 12, 2021. It is a 1-year agreement from July 1, 2021- June 30, 2022. The insurance language is the same as the previous. Year one employees will receive a \$0.50 raise which moves pay from \$24.81/hr to \$25.31/hr. They have also agreed to a \$1000 bonus to be paid in this calendar year. There is also a \$300 clothing allowance paid in July for boots, shirts and pants. They also have the 1 non-personal day to be used on a non-student day. The Friday of Spring Break will be a paid day off.

Trustee McEwen asks if the day off is vacation time? Stacy Collette says yes, its an additional paid day off. Most employees get this. Facility, maintenance and custodial will run 4- 10's over Spring Break and then that Friday is a paid day off.

Trustee Beaver asks about the clothing allowance of \$300 dollars. He sees some district employees wearing shirts that have Helena School District #1 logo. He asks if those are provided in addition to the stipend? Stacy says yes. Jackets are purchased and used during the winter months so when they are plowing or shoveling, they are easily identified. They also need reflective properties to keep them safer. Normal craftsmen outside the district get these allowances and the school district needed to remain competitive.

**Motion:** Trustee McKee makes a motion to approve the ratification of HPS-Carpenters Collective Bargaining Agreement 3. Trustee Beaver seconds the motion.

**Public Comment:** None

**Board Comment:** None

**Vote:** 8-0. Motion carries

#### 5. Approval and ratification of the Painters Collective Bargaining Agreement

Stacy Collette explains that there is 1 painter and they have agreed to a 1-year agreement from July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022. Insurance is the same as the previous. Pay has been adjusted by \$0.50 an hour which moves them from \$25.24 to \$25.74. They have added the \$1000 bonus to be paid in June of 2021. They have the same clothing allowance and 1 extra personal day as in the previous agreement.

Trustee Beaver comments that traditionally there have been 2 painters. He asks why this has been reduced? When there were 2, one was also responsible for replacing glass. He asks who now does that as well as locks? Stacy Collette says that the locksmith belongs to the custodial and maintenance team. She doesn't know when the second painter position was dropped. The maintenance crew backs up the painter when help is needed.

**Motion:** Trustee Goldes makes a motion to approve the ratification of the Painters Collective Bargaining Agreement. Trustee McKee seconds the motion.

**Public Comment:** None

**Board Comment:** None

**Vote:** 8-0. Motion carries

#### 6. Approval of Health Insurance Plan and Premiums for the 2021-2022 School Year

Stacy Collette provides a recommendation to adjust the self-funded health insurance premium plan. This last year, there was a 20% increase in claims cost. Plan team members and advisors reviewed claims and gave the best estimate for where they will be next year to maintain solvency. The plan can sustain 11% of the increase and absorb over \$763,000 of the expense required to maintain solvency for next year. In addition, the committee voted to approve the 7% increase in premiums to cover the cost of the increase. They came to an agreement of a 2.8% increase of benefit dollars

to offset the employee out of pocket expense. Traditionally, Helena Public Schools covered the employee out of pocket of the premium plan for the employee only. The 2.8% would lend \$23 per month, per employee in overall benefit dollars from the general fund. They commit to this for the next 2 years plus the additional \$5 life insurance. She recommends the Board accept the changes.

Trustee Beaver asks what unreserves are? Trustee McEwen explains that they used to be called unrestricted reserves but are now just called unreserves. Stacey says that they are the monies that they have within the plan that can be spent on administration, and the pieces to keep funds solvent. Trustee Beaver asks how much there is in unreserves? Stacey says there is \$4.1 million to date.

Mr. Franco explains that unreserves are in a similar pot as reserves. They are financially obligated to hold the \$5.8 million dollars in case the plan goes belly up. The consultants looked it over and said they are financially sound. The unreserves is the money to pay claims and admin fees and anything else that come up. There is stop loss insurance for high-cost claims but all that does increase stop loss premiums. Those were at over \$1 million this year. They try to keep those funds above \$3.5 million.

Chair Muszkiewicz comments that he likes the way the district is handling this and working to absorb costs. The increase in premiums is concerning. He asks if the Health Benefits Committee could next year give a mid-year update on how things are trending. Mr. Franco says that can be done but, the first half of the year, members are still trying to meet deductibles so they're not paying out as much as they will the second half of the year when members have met their deductible. They are also looking at options to try and reduce costs for the next year.

**Motion:** Trustee McEwen makes a motion to approve the Health Insurance Plan and Premiums for the 2021-2022 School Year. Trustee Armstrong seconds the motion.

**Public Comment:** None

**Board Comment:** Trustee Goldes thanks the committee for all the work on that to keep the premiums low for the staff and families. High-cost claims can impact the result for the year.

**Vote:** 8-0. Motion carries

#### 7. Consideration of resolution requesting county to conduct 2022 Elections

Janelle Mickelson explains that the resolution would have the County run elections. They have agreed to the regular election on May 3, 2022. If there is a special election, they would want to work with the school district to decide on a date. Audrey McCue is a county election administrator, and she said that it will be run by district and not by precinct. Janelle recommends that they pass the resolution.

**Motion:** Trustee McEwen makes a motion to accept the recommendation to have the county conduct the 2022 elections. Trustee McKee seconds the motion.

**Public Comment:** None

**Board Comment:** Chair Luke Muszkiewicz says that the county does a great job and he is thankful to work with them.

**Vote:** 8-0. Motion carries

### **C. Items for Consent**

1. Consideration of 04.13.2021 Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes (see attached)
2. Consideration of the Personnel Actions (see attached)
3. Consideration of the Warrants (see attached)
4. Approval of Out-of-District Attendance Agreements (see attached)

**Motion:** Trustee McEwen makes a motion to approve the Items 1,3 & 4 for Consent. Trustee McKee seconds the motion.

**Public Comment:** None

**Board Comment:** None

**Vote:** 8-0. Motion carries

2. As a stand-alone action Item, the Board will discuss Consent Item 2. Trustee Beaver states a concern with appointments of certified personal, as there are 10 people who are listed as permanent district wide substitutes. 3 more are to be added. Their salaries range from \$40,000 to \$46,000 per year as permanent substitutes. Traditional substitutes get \$100-\$110 per day. Permeant subs get between \$222-\$255 per day that is guaranteed for the entire year. That adds 13 teachers to the teaching staff. They have just done a reduction in staff due to loosing students to East Helena. He understands that there is difficulty in getting subs. Putting on permeant contracted subs, means that they have to pay retirement, benefits, leave pay, and so on. With traditional subs, those things are not given and the cost is much less. He has heard that at some points they need up to 65 subs in a day. So, these people are 13 of them, leaving a need for another 50 or so. These subs are making almost double what a sub in an adjacent classroom make. It wont sit well with the sub staff. He is worried they will lose subs over this.

Stacy Collette says that Trustee Beaver is correct. However, there are different levels of expectations for long term subs. Looking to the coming year, she sees 16 long term sub needs to cover maternity leaves alone. This isn't unusual. Those subs come in and go on contract on the 35<sup>th</sup> day. Long term subs are responsible for delivering curriculum, grading, PLC's, parent/teacher conferences. They are full time committed vs non contract subs who can come when they want to fill in a day here or there as they choose. High school staff are often losing prep time to cover for colleagues and these long-term subs help with those issues. These are certified educators that are licensed by OPI and the state.

Trustee Beaver asks how long maternity leave is? Stacy explains that the law requires 60 days. Helena schools allow that time to be taken in an intermittent fashion. So, they may come back only a few days a week but that extends their absence to 7 or 8 months. If they can partner with a long-term sub, it creates a



consistency. Trustee Beaver is not comfortable with the costs of it. Stacy says they see long term subs hired in October and November. This year they did it right away so they would commit and they wouldn't lose them to other districts. Trustee Beaver also asks why some are at \$40,000 and some up to \$46,000. Stacy says the difference comes in on their step from the matrix. It's based on years of experience.

**Motion:** Trustee McEwen makes a motion to approve Item for Consent 2, Consideration of the Personnel Actions, as is. Trustee Goldes seconds the motion.

**Public Comment:** None

**Board Comment:** Trustee McEwen asks if subs are assigned to one building or go all over week to week? Stacy says that when they are hired, they are site specific.

Trustee McKee appreciates the deeper explanation.

Trustee Hathhorn asks Janelle how it looks budget wise for personnel? Is the long-term sub policy putting an additional strain on the budget? Janelle says the budget is tight and subs are hard to budget for because every year is different. However, its not a strain. Subs cost between \$500,000 and \$800,000 a year. There are always long-term subs.

**Vote:** 7-1. Trustee Beaver opposed. Motion carries

## **CI. Reports**

### 1. Health Benefits Committee Report

Nothing to report.

### 2. Montana School Boards Association Report

Chair Muszkiewicz shares that there were 2 training sessions for new trustees. Those were recorded. The annual MTSBA meeting is Thursday, June 10 in the morning and you must register. Unless the membership objects, he will become the President at this meeting. Jan Cahill passed away unexpectedly this morning. Jan was longtime Chair for Great Falls Public Schools as well as Superintendent of Vaughn Public Schools. He was talented and effortlessly knowledgeable.

### 3. Helena Education Association Report

Jane Shawn thanks Dr Ream for his time and collaboration and she wishes him well in the future. She looks forward to working with Mr. Weltz and they have already met. She appreciates that the Board listens to all points of view and she feels that the teachers are heard. She recognizes the teachers and educators who have worked harder this year than ever.

### 4. CHS/HHS Student Representative Reports

**Eliza:** Capital High Commencement was a success. Capital High "I Time" is going to be a program from June 14 to June 25 to allow student more time to pass classes from the year and earn credits. The master schedule is being worked on. Capital High Senior Grad Walks were a hit and participants were at an all-time high.

2 teachers are retiring and other teachers are leaving. Summer school will start Friday June 18.

**Rylie:** Helena High graduation had over 300 graduates. Spring sports wrapped up. Track team took 2<sup>nd</sup> at state.

## **VII. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

**Mr. Weltz:** He looks forward to working with Jane and the union. He went to the graduations and was amazed at the resiliency of the students and the work of the staff. He was happy to see the community celebrating the kids. He thanks Dr Ream for all he has done.

**Dr Ream:** He appreciates the recognition of the student who passed as well and Jan Cahill. It's been a tough week. He appreciates the school counselors that are helping with this as well. He believes Jan did what he loved to the end. He agrees with what Mr. Weltz said about graduation and thanks Carroll College, the police and everyone who helped it look so effortless. He thanks the parents, families, students, colleagues, and the community through the challenging year. He wants everyone to know he is proud of all the hard things that had to be done and the discussions that were had. There will always be a special place in his heart for everyone in the district. He includes the Board as his boss' and colleagues. He is thankful for all the Trustees, past and present. It shows the ultimate volunteer spirit and you give of yourself. He has enjoyed working with Mr. Weltz in the transition and he appreciates his energy and vision. He also wants to thank his family for all they have endured and supported him through.

## **VIII. BOARD COMMENTS**

Chair Luke Muszkiewicz thanks Mr. Weltz for his introduction to the community tonight and his compelling vision for the future. He appreciates him for choosing Helena. To Dr Ream, he says thank you to both him and his family for choosing Helena and for the service over the past 3 years. It's been an honor. He would have wanted no one else leading the district through the last few years. His commitment is unmatched and it's been an honor to work with him.

Trustee Goldes thanks Mr. Weltz and looks forward to working with him and his dedication to the district. To Dr Ream, she expresses appreciation for all he and his family have given to the district. She wishes him happiness and success.

## **IX. ADJOURNMENT**

Respectfully Submitted,

Luke Muszkiewicz, Chair

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Gretchen George, Recording Secretary    Date