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, September 10th, 2021 – 12:00pm

MINUTES

ATTENDEES

Committee Members:
John McEwen, Committee Chair
Janet Armstrong, Committee Member

Others:
Rex Weltz, Superintendent
Brian Cummings, Assistant Superintendent
Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent
Luke Muszkiewicz, Board Chair
Janelle Mickelson, Business Services Administrator
Stacy Collete, Human Resources Director
Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff
Gary Myers, Education Technology Director
Karen Ogden, Communications Officer
Jane Shawn, HEA President

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

II. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT
    No comments were offered.

III. REVIEW OF AGENDA
    No changes to the agenda were made.

IV. REVIEW OF MINUTES
    The August 06, 2021, committee meeting minutes were reviewed. No changes were made.

V. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION/DISCUSSION
   A. Budget to Actual Report-Janelle Mickelson
      The committee reviewed the budget to actual report. It was discussed that right now we have the ESSER funding to help support the budget, but that we would hit a cliff in 2024 and the budget would be much tighter unless we make some adjustments.
   B. Technology Department/Levy-Gary Myers
      Gary Myers, Education Technology Director for the District, shared a Technology Levy Discussion Power Point slide with the committee.
      Current Levy Stats:
      - Approved by voters in 2005
      - "[For]purchasing, renting, repairing and maintaining technological equipment...and the associated training for school district personnel"
      Why Do We Need a New Tech Levy?
      In 2005 it wasn't possible to imagine what technology was going to look like today, so the number of devices that we need, what it costs to support a network, how many staff you need to keep the help desk running, repair devices and keep everything functioning. As well as in the technology world there have been a lot of changes in how licensing works. A lot of devices that we have on our network that cost us money for replacement cycles that are critical for safety and security-those things didn't exist in 2005. With the current levy that we have, the way that we are having to do funding for technology is really impacting other budgetary funds.
      - Connectivity-we need to have a network that is stable and secure and is fast enough to be able to support different scenarios.
      - Safety and Security-we have had to add a Safety and Security Developer so that we have someone on staff who knows all the cameras and door locks and can maintain all of that and keep it running and current.
      - Food and Fees-the students have their student ID cards that they swipe, or numbers that they type in when they go to pay for their lunches. Parents can also go online and pay for fees.
      - Instruction (materials and curriculum)-a lot of materials that they use in class are online and some material is only available online.
      - Communication-when we send out notifications to the community that all happens through our technology engine as well. We have also updated our enrollment forms so that parents can fill those out electronically so that it updates our student's information system, so we have the most current information.
      - College and Career Readiness-because we had so many students learning remotely and on devices during COVID it really brought in the focus of the college and career readiness piece, and how much that relies on technology experience. The students that we have now are going to take classes or do certification programs, and part of everything that they do is going to have an online component. The way that technology has impacted other fields since 2005 has changed dramatically.

Mr. Myers then shared a chart breaking down the different budget areas of the Technology Department.

- Staffing 33%-Helpdesk, Systems, Network, Safety and Security, SIS Support, Surplus and Ordering, and State Reporting
- Devices 29%-Chromebooks, iPads, Laptops, Desktops, Projectors, Document Cameras
- Services 11%-Internet connectivity, Moodle LMS, Website Hosting
- Licensing 21%-PowerSchool, Service Tools, Service Contracts, Office 365, Firewall, Servers, Door Access, Cameras
- Infrastructure 6%-Batter Backups, Wireless Controller, Access Points, Content Filter, Wiring Projects, Analog Fire Alarm Lines

The overall total cost of everything combined is around $3 million dollars. Our current technology levy is a little over $1 million dollars, so there is anywhere between $1.8-$2 million dollars that we are not getting with our technology levy. Gary then proposed some funding options to the committee.

Current Levy:
- $135 per student
- $520,500 Elementary/$559,500 HS
- Impact on other budget accounts of about $2 million per year

Proposed Levy:
- $388 per student
- $2,015,000 Elementary/$1,085,000 HS
- No impact on other budget accounts

The next question is, what are we getting with the proposed $388 per student funds? The core parts are a solid network, safety and security, and the communication piece. We also get 1:1 student devices, connectedness and on-demand learning, college and career readiness, teacher laptops, integration training, and help desk support.

A rough estimate was determined that at the elementary level the proposed levy would cost a family about $23 a year in the elementary for a $100,000 home and a little over $45 a year for a $200,000 home. For the high school side, it would be about $11 a year for a $100,000 home and $22 for a $200,000 home.

Committee Member Janet Armstrong asked if we would be proposing a regular levy or a perpetual levy? What is the difference?

Mr. Myers commented. The levy that we have now is perpetual so if we go out for a new technology levy then that would be a 10-year levy. Every 10 years we would have to go out for a new levy. If the new levy does not pass, then we do revert to the current levy that we have.

The committee then discussed that the county runs our levies, so the request would have to be run through them and it's expensive to run more than one levy. The recommendation was to run the technology levy with the regular election in May of 2022.

The committee discussed if this was ready to move to the full board to review. Committee Chair John McEwen said he did not want it to go to the full board yet for review. He said that there was still plenty of time before May, and he also wanted to hear more about facilities and what their levy might look like. Superintendent Weltz proposed that this would be good to bring forward at work session meeting where the board collaborates and discusses both technology and facilities before it gets presented at a regular board meeting.

Board Chair Luke Muszkiewicz commented. I agree that many regular meetings would need to occur to discuss this before it is taken to the full board. I am also concerned about how going out for a tech levy would affect our ability to reup our voted building reserve levy. The big thing that I don't think anyone has mentioned yet is the idea of a high school bond. I don't think we should go forward with any of these pieces until we have an idea of what our overall strategy is. Where does the tech levy fall in terms of priority? Questions I would like answered are: are there other AA districts that have run a tech levy and what did that look like? Secondly, has our technology allowed us to save money anywhere? Has our shift to software as a service as opposed to hosting everything internally: has that allowed us to decrease our costs in any way? This is important because it shows that we have done all the cost containment things we can do before we go out and ask for more money. The last thing is what can voters expect if we pass this levy? Are they getting something they didn't get before? Or are we asking them to help us maintain the same level of technology service that we did during the pandemic, like 1 to 1 Chromebooks for example.

VI. BOARD COMMENT
Committee member Janet Armstrong commented. I know you mentioned that we are taking money from other places, but I don't know what the impact of taking that money is. We need to know what the cost of not passing this is as well. What is the impact on each individual student's learning by having these devices? Can we show that benefit when we are not in a pandemic as well?

Superintendent Weltz commented that we need to give soundbites, updates possibly to our community quarterly about the things we are working on as a district and what our needs are.

Committee chair John McEwen said he would like to know what other districts have done with this opportunity.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. McEwen adjourned the meeting at 1:00 PM.