



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 Work Session Minutes

Tuesday, November 30th, 2021 | Tour at 3:30 / 4:00pm | Helena Middle School and via TEAMS

MINUTES

ATTENDEES

Trustees *Others*

Luke Muszkiewicz, Board Chair	Rex Wertz, Superintendent
Siobhan Hathhorn, Vice Chair	Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent
Terry Beaver, Trustee	Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff
John McEwen, Trustee	Janelle Mickelson, Business Services Administrator
Jennifer McKee, Trustee	Stacy Collette, Human Resources Director
Janet Armstrong, Trustee	Karen Ogden, Communications Officer
Libby Goldes, Trustee	Brian Cummings, Assistant Superintendent
	Gary Myers, Director of Educational Technology
	Cal Boyle, Principal of Helena Middle School
	Dawn Rowling, Assistant Principal of Helena Middle School

I. TOUR OF HELENA MIDDLE SCHOOL

II. CALL TO ORDER/ PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Board Chair Luke Muszkiewicz called the meeting to order at 4:07 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. REVIEW OF AGENDA

No changes were requested to the agenda.

IV. PRESENTATION:

Helena Middle School Principal, Cal Boyle, began with a Power Point presentation which he presented to the committee. Mr. Boyle began the presentation with an overview of the staff at Helena Middle School.

- 47 classroom teachers (16 new in the last 3 years)
- 1 special service coordinator
- 6 special education teachers
- 1.5 librarians
- 1 permanent guest teacher
- 1 student teacher
- 2 counselors
- 1 building learning coordinator
- .8 FTE nurse
- .5 school psychologist
- 1 CSCT therapist, 1 behavior interventionist, 1 SBOT
- Therapeutic Learning Center (TLC)-2 district staff (teacher and para) and 2 Shodair staff (therapist and BI)
- Classified Staff-4 secretaries, 2 general education paras, 5 special education paras, 1 nurse para, and 3 cafeteria staff
- 6 custodians (2 day)
- 1 SRO
- 1 Assistant Principal
- 1 Principal

The next slide displayed data about the students at Helena Middle School. The total enrollment of HMS is 740 with 19 at Exploration Works. Mr. Boyle commented. HMS has high mobility so there are a lot of withdrawals and new registrations all the time so that 740 number will fluctuate daily. The number is usually stable around 735 to 750. There are 8 students taking advantage of the online initiative. 43% of the HMS student population qualifies for free and reduced lunch. The slide displayed additional data about the students at HMS:

- PEAK-72 eligible
- District Transportation-260
- Individualized Education Plans-120
- Speech/Language only-14
- Students in Transition (students that are considered homeless)-16
- Angel Fund-79 students-\$15,200
- CSCT-12
- SBOT-12

Mr. Boyle commented. We have a great partnership with St. John's Lutheran Church. They do amazing things for us and for the community. This year they sponsored holiday dinner

baskets for twenty of our families. We were able to deliver food baskets with an entire Thanksgiving meal. The basket also included a tablecloth and a board game.

Principal Boyle went on to comment about instruction. The reason we are here is for teaching and learning. We went through the process of the Comprehensive Literacy Grant and with the research available and the work of the staff in the District, this Educational Framework was developed by us. We wanted to know what our expectations are for what happens in the classroom that we know is going to promote the most learning. What should that look like for an administrator or a fellow teacher or as student that comes into the classroom. What are the kinds of things that they should be seeing that maximizes their ability to learn? Through that process this Educational Framework was developed. The guiding questions for instructional staff are:

- What do you want each student to learn?
- How will you know if they have learned it?
- How are you helping those that have not learned?
- How are you engaging those who are already proficient?

We collect a lot of data around that as we are going through the school year. We have a walkthrough form, so as me or other members of the leadership team are in the building, we will walk into a classroom and observe what is going on, then we will leave the classroom and collect some data around the questions that have been created. Are we seeing this kind of instruction happening? When we don't see that, then that is where we focus our professional development.

Mr. Boyle recognized Christy Mock-Stutz, Literacy Coach and Building and Learning Coordinator, at Helena Middle School. Mr. Boyle commented. Christy got us through COVID hybrid/remote learning. She became the tech guru and is the go-to for the kids with technology questions. Having this position is one of the biggest outcomes of us securing this grant.

Principal Boyle commented regarding the Comprehensive Literacy Grant. We are on year six or seven of the Comprehensive Literacy Grant. It provides a nice amount of money for us to be able to do some of these projects. The SLT (School Literacy Team) is a school leadership team that includes the administrative team, Christy, and self-selected teachers that want to be involved in school wide literacy and promoting moving things forward. Our focus in on implementing the best framework. As we are collecting that data and do more professional development, we see growth. We went from 50% to over 80% implementation of bellringers and agendas posted. We still have a little bit of work to do there. We have a consultant that comes in and helps us with the work, such as designing the walkthrough tool or managing data collection, and her name is Debbie Hunsaker. The PDSA Cycle stands for Plan, Do, Study, Act. The SLT has been implementing PDSA cycles and identifying students to decrease the achievement gap. Debbie Hunsaker is also guiding this work.

Principal Boyle then discussed the 2021 Fall iReady Diagnostic data. As a district we have adopted the iReady Assessment as a data collection tool for student achievement. We do

this assessment three times a year-in the fall, winter, and spring. You want to see growth in these numbers from the fall to the spring. The one place where I am hesitant is the 8th grade spring number. Keeping an 8th grader who is moving on to high school in May, engaged in a middle school test, is difficult. The green stands for students that are on track grade level at the beginning, the yellow is kids that are close and with a year of solid instruction will probably become green, and the red are the kids that need intensive intervention. This reading and math data helps us identify who those kids are and what kind of interventions they need to have.

Principal Boyle shared a video with the Trustees that was an example of an introductory activity from Sara Grotbo's 8th Grade Science class that displays setting a purpose for learning. Mr. Boyle said this is an excellent example of what we are looking for in our Educational Framework. Principle Boyle commented. There was a lot of focus on the agenda in that video. That agenda is laid out and designed exactly how we would want to see.

Principal Boyle shared a picture with the group of the book vending machine at Helena Middle School. Mr. Boyle commented. Through the grant monies we were able to purchase a book vending machine that operates with gold coins. We give those as an incentive, and for kids who are showing an interest in reading. The librarians, the English teachers, and the main office promotes that. We give a coin to a kid who is having success anytime we get the opportunity, and they can go pick a book of their choice.

Principal Boyle shared a spreadsheet with the group that showed all the different student clubs that are offered at Helena Middle School. Mr. Boyle commented. What you hear about middle school, is that kids don't feel like they belong. It is vital that a kid at middle school has a place that they feel like is theirs. Something that they are involved in and that they get to do. What has evolved overtime at HMS is, if you are a kid and you think there is a club that you want to be involved in and it doesn't exist, you make it. There are lots of opportunities for kids to have that place where they feel "this is my school, and I belong." If you have more of that, then the culture is more positive, and kids look forward to being here.

The next slide displayed modifications for COVID safety. Principal Boyle commented. This year everyone is wearing masks all day inside unless you are really exerting yourself in P.E. and you are not outside. Outside they can be without their masks and at lunchtime. Lunch is being most affected by the pandemic. It's tough because you are not wearing masks, and it is hard to social distance. Finding ways to social distance at lunch has caused us to do lots of modifications. We are using the gym, auditorium, and cafeteria to host lunch to improve social distancing. To start the year, lunch was exclusively outside.

Principal Boyle commented about summer school. Through the ESSER funds we had 6th, 7th, and 8th graders attend summer school this year. We had an academic focus in the morning where the kids did Math, English, and STEM. In the afternoon we either did games and activities or field trips. We had about 70 to 75 kids attend, and it was very successful for those kids that were involved.

Mr. Boyle commented about the Positive Behavior Initiative. Bob's Pawsitives have been around for a long time through the work with MBI and it has evolved. Ms. Rowling was really excited about promoting that positive climate. We used to do a weekly drawing and we would pull out of a hat. Somebody who got a ticket for doing good would get their name pulled and would win a prize. Now everybody that gets recognition can get a prize. We have created the token economy and once a student gets recognized with the Bobcat Pawsitives, they will come up at the end of the day and trade their ticket for a token or they can trade in their ticket for a prize. If they want to save up their tokens, they can take their tokens and build up to some of the bigger prizes. That token economy works, and kids are motivated by that, and there is a lot of excitement at the end of the day.

Principal Boyle commented about WEB Day at Helena Middle School. WEB day stands for Where Everyone Belongs. It is our kickoff day for 6th graders welcoming them to middle school. Middle school transition is a scary time for kids because they don't know what middle school is going to be like and there is a lot of anxiety and nervousness. We train our 8th graders during the summer and have them come in and be the leaders for the 6th graders on their first day. Katie Burke is heading this up along with Kahlee Dalton, Andrew Roberts, and Marilyn Snezek. Our staff have gone to national trainings to figure out how to do this and they do a great job. It is a lot about relationship building, finding a friend, and finding your way around. Normally the big assembly is in the gym, but it is a COVID year, so we were outside in the stadium. It was a great success and a super fun day. I am really impressed by the dedication of the staff, and the time and energy it takes to pull that off.

Mr. Boyle commented about backpacks and reflective tape. Ms. Rowlings decided she wanted our backpacks to be more visible. Superintendent Wertz got on board, so we bought reflective tape, and all the students had an opportunity to decorate their backpacks. Now, on those dark Montana mornings, the children are much more visible.

Principal Boyle commented about 7th Grade Web Day. 7th graders never got a chance to be 6th graders and have a Web Day because of COVID last year. They didn't have the benefit of that early start day and all that excitement. Andrew Roberts, who is one of my WEB Coordinators, said I want to do this for 7th graders too. So, on the first day the 7th graders were able to enjoy the WEB assembly.

The next slide was about the Willard Creek Field Trip. Mr. Boyle commented. Field trips are back. This is our traditional 6th grade fall field trip to Willard Creek. The students go up and do some ecology lessons and plant identification, followed by a picnic and hiking the Willard Creek trail. We had to modify it this year because of busing, so we had to leave later and get back sooner. Tom Cohn and his crew at transportation do a great job and they made it happen even though they are short on staff. This was a lot of fun, and the kids love it.

Principal Boyle commented about Halloween and shared pictures of the staff and student's costumes. Halloween was on Sunday, and we celebrated on Friday at school, and it was the best attendance day of the year. It is so nice to see students back in school.

Mr. Boyle commented. As part of our safety drills, we have the red card, green card system. When we evacuate, kids must take roll with their teacher when they get outside, and then the teacher holds up the green card if they have everybody or the red card to say someone is missing. They are hard to spot when you get out there with 50 staff and 750 kids, and it is hard to make sure you have everybody. So, a project we did this year was we got every teacher their name on a stick that they hold up along with the green or red card and it helps us identify who may be missing and it is much more efficient.

Principal Boyle commented. For years we had horrible looking graffiti on our sidewalk across the street. Student Council came to me this year and said that they wanted to get rid of the graffiti. They painted over the graffiti and did a great job.

Next, Mr. Boyle commented regarding activities. Activities are back this year. We have wrestling, cross country, basketball, volleyball, track, and ultimate frisbee. Ultimate frisbee is a club that the kids created, and they are doing it at lunch. We are also going to try and run folf at the beginning of track this year because we want more kids involved. That concludes my presentation, if you have questions, I would be happy to answer them.

Trustee Jennifer McKee asked for more details about the iReady data. Principle Boyle commented. Not only do we do the benchmark assessment, but we also do intermediate testing almost monthly. That is more of a standards mastery question which is a shorter assessment that is aligned with what we are teaching in the classes at that moment. We saw growth in all three grade levels of about five to eight percent. You want to look at a standard that is being taught at that grade level, see how the students are answering questions around that standard, spend some time on instruction, and follow that up with a similar assessment. What we saw across the board at all grade levels was the five to eight percent growth. That makes me think that benchmark is also going to increase as we go forward.

Board Vice Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented. Are you seeing improvement in scores with your incoming 6th graders with having several grant schools that feed into HMS?

Mr. Boyle responded. I would like to definitively tell you yes; the problem is the pandemic got in the way and we have also changed from the STAR test to the iReady test during that pandemic transition. I would say yes because we have fewer kids needing the big reading intervention at 6th grade than we did four or five years ago.

Board Vice Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented. Could you speak to the value of having the SRO here at Helena Middle School.

Principal Boyle commented. Since I have been Principal, I have had the same SRO here the entire time and that has been so reassuring. He is part of the building and the culture and a huge asset to us. All of it has been positive and having that consistent person and that relationship is so important. I think kids understanding that law enforcement is there as a positive, as help, and as another trusted adult is huge and beneficial to our kids.

Trustee Libby Goldes asked for more details about students that attend PEAK.

Principal Boyle commented. I would say the number of students that attend PEAK is in the low thirties, and they meet weekly. It gets difficult at the middle school level because there are so many opportunities for other things. You qualify and enter PEAK when you are in elementary school, so it is evenly split between 6th, 7th, and 8th grade. There are more 6th graders that attend on a regular basis.

Trustee Libby Goldes commented. How do the students find out about what clubs are offered at Helena Middle School?

Principal Boyle replied. That is part of our WEB Day, our advisor time, and school-wide announcements. So much of it is kid driven because the kids are creating the clubs and then they are out recruiting members for their club.

Trustee John McEwen commented. How many kids are participating in the clubs?

Mr. Boyle responded. I would say if you combined that with our school sponsored activities such as the sports and student council, I would say well over half of the students are participating in clubs. We do a gaming club once a week and it is so highly sought after that we must do a lottery. The kids sign up at the end of the week to get picked for next week. We just don't have enough space, computers, or people to run it for everybody that wants to do it, but it is highly sought after.

Trustee Jennifer McKee commented how great the 7th grade WEB Day was, and what a great culture that Helena Middle School has.

Trustee John McEwen commented. Why is the enrollment at Helena Middle School so fluid?

Principal Boyle replied. It is because of our community and population. At the end of the year if we look at our ins and outs at HMS, we usually have 200. We have 180 school days, and if we have 200 ins and outs, that equals a kid a day. That is just how mobile our population is that feeds our school. It has to do with our poverty numbers, and we have a highly transient population in Helena. Students that need intensive treatments or inpatient stays-they also withdraw-because they are doing their schooling in a different setting. When they finish that treatment and come back, they enroll. That also drives some of those numbers. Also, four out of five of our feeder schools are title schools.

Trustee Terry Beaver commented. Did you ever have an experienced teacher come to you and tell you, "Since I started using the bell ringer, I am a much better teacher than I was before."

Principal Boyle responded. I don't think anybody has ever said it to me in those words, but I do have a recent experience where a staff member was engrained to how things have been done and was reluctant to use the new framework. After our opening day staff meeting where I went over this information, the staff member came up to me and said, "I

never realized how integral our own people were in building that framework. I really thought it was something that someone tore out of the back page of a book. Now that I know that it was you guys, and we that we did it...I'm all in."

Board Chair Luke Muszkiewicz commented. I really appreciate the discussion, specifically around what it takes to transition students from online/hybrid model to full time in person model. To me what is so important is it is clear you have a commitment to continuous improvement. You try new things, and you assess, and I really appreciate that. I do have a question. Are there any meaningful trends over the past few years in terms of total enrollment and free and reduced eligibility?

Principal Boyle replied. Eight years ago, we were down below 700 students for total enrollment, and it was a dip for a couple of years. It bounced back and we have consistently been above 730 and as big as 770, but that 750 number is consistent. The ins are matching the outs on the mobility. I can't be confident in the free and reduced lunch numbers. The reason why is because lunch is free for everybody now for the second year in a row. So, encouraging people to fill out financial paperwork when they are already getting the lunch for free is difficult. In a regular year when lunch is charged, it is difficult to get people to fill out the paperwork. Now, when there is no real incentive to fill out paperwork, I feel that we are underestimating our number. By how much I am not sure. We serve about 750 meals a day here at the school, so kids are taking advantage of the food.

Board Chair Luke Muszkiewicz commented. Thank you so much. The last thing I will say is I appreciate your commitment to our COVID mitigations protocols.

Board Vice Chair Siobhan Hathorn commented. It is obvious you have a strong culture here which is great and that doesn't happen without teachers going above and beyond. Please extend a thank you from the Board to the staff for all that they do.

Trustee John McEwen commented. Is the building full? How many children can this building fit?

Principal Boyle responded. I would like to be at 800. With our number being at 750, it doesn't get me fully teamed at every grade level, so I don't have two teachers in each core area. So, I have some teachers that teach two grade levels.

V. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Superintendent Weltz commented.

Thank you, Board Chair. Trustees, excellent questions tonight. I appreciate the in-depth discussion and I appreciate Mr. Boyles responses. I appreciate the leadership in this District, and Mr. Boyle and Ms. Rowlings demonstrated that great leadership tonight. If you look at the overall presence of what Helena Middle School is promoting, it is about academics. It is also about the ability to connect and belong. We know that from elementary to middle

school to high school, if students have the ability to connect in some facet, they will want to be at school. I think the programs here are great. My experience with WEB is that sometimes that revitalizes a career in education. The teachers they elect to do that see a new difference and a new light in their profession, that it is not only about academics, but also about connections.

We had one student in our presence tonight sitting in the back next to Ms. Rowling. About a month ago I assisted a young lady that was hit by a car in the crosswalk in front of Jefferson. That is the student that was with us tonight. She is the reason why the backpack reflective tape came about. I'm happy to report that we got a box full of reflective tape that was divided out and sent to schools today. We are going to light up some backpacks for those dark mornings.

Recently we were on a Warren site visit and Hawthorne site visit. I want to thank both of those staff and their Principals for allowing us to be there. November was Military Appreciation Month and Military Family Appreciation Week was also in November. Jim Darcy students collected cans of coffee and brought it out to the military base in appreciation of their work. That displays connectivity to our community, and I appreciate Jim Darcy students for doing that.

I would like to thank Barb Ridgway for her work with COVID mitigation. The vaccination clinics were a great success. We had about 330 people that participated, and the next one will be December 11th at Bryant. Thanks again to Ms. Ridgway, our nurses, Lewis and Clark Public Health, PureView and St. Peter's Health for their partnership.

I would like to thank the staff at Shodair and their CEO, Craig Aasved, for supporting us during a critical, crucial, and traumatic time during the last couple of weeks. This Thursday Shodair is hosting a dinner for all school district employees discussing responding to community losses and creating a safe space to learn about trauma and how to support ourselves and others after a crisis through a trauma-informed lens. We are thankful for our partnership with Shodair.

There was an exciting buzz at Lincoln today because our Business and Payroll department moved from May Butler Center into Lincoln Center. There was a lot of laughter and a lot of excitement. I would like to thank Ms. Stacy Collette and Mr. Rob Brewer, and all the Facilities team. They have been amazing. I am very proud of the work that they have been doing, and they deserve a lot of credit. Our new space is light and bright, and people have windows. I think that is super important for effectiveness and morale.

Heather O'Loughlin, City Commissioner, has found a way to ensure Broadway will now be posted as a 15mph zone-by Jefferson. That is another good partnership we have with our city.

The Angel Fund's Annual on Broadway Fundraiser & On-line Auction will be December 6th. Join us at On Broadway for a night of fine food and fun to help raise money for students

throughout Helena. We appreciate the Angel Fund and the support from the community. Board Chair, that concludes my report for this evening.

Board Chair Luke Muszkiewicz commented. Thank you for your update and I appreciate you giving the context of the student, and Ms. Rowling's wonderful idea to get the reflective tape on backpacks, as well as our partnership with the city. Above all, I'm glad that student is doing well.

VI. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment offered.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Consent Action Items

1. Approval of the 10.26.2021 Board of Trustees Work Session Minutes

Motion: Board Vice Chair Siobhan Hathhorn moved to approve the 10.26.2021 Board of Trustees Work Session Minutes as presented. Trustee John McEwen seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 7-0 motion carries unanimously.

VIII. BOARD COMMENTS

Board Chair Luke Muszkiewicz commented. Before we adjourn, I just want to say thank you again to Principal Boyle and Assistant Principal Rowling for welcoming us into Helena Middle School tonight. For all the staff and Trustees that joined us tonight, it is great to see you all and thank you for your time.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 5:33 p.m.