



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
Special Board Meeting

Tuesday, May 16th, 2023
Lincoln Campus and via Microsoft Teams
5:30 p.m.

MINUTES

ATTENDEES

Trustees Others

Siobhan Hathhorn, Chair	Rex Wetz, Superintendent
Jennifer McKee, Vice Chair	Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff
Terry Beaver, Trustee	Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director
Kay Satre, Trustee	Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent 6-12
Luke Muszkiewicz, Trustee	Joslyn Davidson, Curriculum Director
Janet Armstrong, Trustee	Janelle Mickelson, Business Manager
Jennifer Walsh, Trustee	Gary Myers, Director of Educational Technology
Linda Cleatus, Trustee	Karen Ogden, Communications Officer
Jeff Hindoiem, Trustee	Rich Franco, Human Resources Benefits Manager
	Brian Cummings, Assistant Superintendent Pre-K-12
	Dr. Rob Watson, Executive Director of the School Administrators of Montana
	Katrina Chaney, Lewis & Clark County Superintendent
	Sarah Ryan, Guest of the Public
	Joseph Gilbert, Guest of the Public
	Many other guests of the public and staff of the Helena Public Schools

I. CALL TO ORDER

Board Chair Siobhan Hathorn called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m.

II. REVIEW OF AGENDA

The trustees reviewed the agenda, and no changes were made.

III. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Sarah Ryan gave general public comment. Ms. Ryan is a parent of two children in Helena Public Schools. Ms. Ryan stated that the Helena Public Schools is considering significant changes to the PEAK program, and she would like to ask that the board engages the community including teachers, parents, and students in a thoughtful and strategic process before making those changes. Ms. Ryan stated that the PEAK program has been one of the highlights of her child's experience here in Helena and the PEAK program is one of the only places where her child feels a strong sense of belonging and can engage in multisensory learning that really benefits a child with dyslexia or a learning disability. She said her child is excelling here much more than she was in their last school district and she thinks it's because of our PEAK program. Ms. Ryan stated that the school district they came from has a gifted and talented program very similar to what she thinks our program would look like if some of the changes happened that are being discussed. For example, having teachers isolated in different schools, and having smaller groups of students. Ms. Ryan stated that kind of program has not been successful in other districts. Ms. Ryan stated that it is very important to bring these students together in multi-age groups and to give the teachers time to work together collaboratively, and how successful the current PEAK program is for students.

Mr. Joseph Gilbert commented online via TEAMS that he would also like to comment in support of the PEAK program and would like to echo the statements made by Ms. Ryan and he believes significant changes should be avoided for the PEAK program.

That concluded general public comment.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Items for Action

1. Canvass of Election Results and Issue Certificates of Election

- a. Canvass Election Results and Issue Certificate of Election (Elementary)
- b. Canvass Election Results and Issue Certificate of Election (High School)

Mrs. Janelle Mickelson, Business Manager for Helena Public Schools, provided background, considerations, and the superintendent recommendation for the action item.

Background:

The annual regular school election was held on Tuesday May 2, 2023. Pursuant to 20-20-415, MCA, at the first regular or special meeting after receiving the certified tally sheets and no later than 25 days after the election, trustees must canvass the election results. After the canvass of the total votes cast, trustees must issue a certificate of election. In the case of a trustee election, the certificate must be issued to the elected trustee and the county superintendent, designating the term of the trustee position. In the case of an election on a proposition, the trustees must issue a certificate specifying the outcome of the election.

Considerations:

- The County Election Office provided the attached canvass report on May 10, 2023.
 - Highlights:
 - Total registered voters in the elementary were 40,664. Total ballots issued were 36,198. Total ballots tabulated were 15,476 with a total voter turnout of 38.06%.
 - Total registered voters in the high school were 42,864. Total ballots issued were 38,231. Total ballots tabulated were 16,253 with a total voter turnout of 37.92%.
- The election results were also provided by the county elections office on May 11, 2023.
 - Highlights:
 - The elementary general fund levy proposition passed with a margin of 55.75% (8,576 FOR, 6,808 AGAINST).
 - The elementary building reserve levy proposition passed with a margin of 54.57% (8,364 FOR, 6,962 AGAINST).
 - The high school building reserve levy proposition passed with a margin of 55.45% (8,953 FOR, 7192 AGAINST)
- The number of candidates that filed a nomination petition equaled the number of open trustee positions and no declarations of intent to be a write-in-candidate were filed. Therefore, the trustee election was cancelled at the April 11th board of trustees meeting.
- Linda Cleatus, Jennifer McKee, and Jennifer Walsh were elected by acclamation.
- Jeffrey Hindoien was appointed to the vacant trustee position at the May 2, 2023, special board meeting.
- Katrina Chaney, County Superintendent of Schools will administer the oath of office to all four trustees.

Superintendent recommendation:

Canvass the election results, issue the certificates of election, and administer the oath of office to elected trustees.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented. "At this point I would entertain a motion to canvass election results and issue certificate of election for the elementary district."

Motion: Trustee Luke Muszkiewicz moved to canvass election results and issue certificate of election for the elementary district. Trustee Jennifer McKee seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 6-0 motion carries unanimously.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented. "At this point I would entertain a motion to canvass election results and issue certificate of election for the high school district."

Motion: Trustee Jennifer McKee moved to canvass election results and issue certificate of election for the high school district. Trustee Jennifer Walsh seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 7-0 motion carries unanimously.

The trustees moved on to the Oath of Office for 2023-2024 Elected Trustees.

B. Oath of Office for 2023-2024 Elected Trustees

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn called upon Ms. Jennifer Walsh, Ms. Jennifer McKee, Ms. Linda Cleatus, and Mr. Jeff Hindoien to be sworn in by Ms. Katrina Chaney, Lewis and Clark County Superintendent.

Ms. Jennifer Walsh, Ms. Jennifer McKee, Ms. Linda Cleatus, and Mr. Jeff Hindoien recited their Oath of Office and were sworn in by Ms. Katrina Chaney.

C. Items For Action

2. Organization of the Board of Trustees

- a. Appointment of Board Chair
- b. Appointment of Board Vice Chair
- c. Appointment of District Clerk

a. Appointment of Board Chair

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented. "I've asked Trustee Muszkiewicz to survey our Trustees and see what interest there was for these very important leadership positions. Do I have a motion for our consideration for Board Chair?"

Motion: Trustee Janet Armstrong moved to appoint Trustee Siobhan Hathhorn as Board Chair. Trustee Terry Beaver seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

b. Appointment of Board Vice Chair

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented. "Do I have a motion for our consideration for Board Vice Chair?"

Motion: Trustee Janet Armstrong moved to appoint Trustee Jennifer McKee as Board Vice Chair. Trustee Kay Satre seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

c. Appointment of District Clerk

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented. "Do I have a motion for our consideration of District Clerk?"

Motion: Trustee Jennifer McKee moved to appoint Janelle Mickelson as District Clerk. Trustee Jennifer Walsh seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

D. Items For Information

1. Health Benefit Committee Premium Recommendation for Plan Year 2023-2024
2. Budget Consensus Recommendation Committee

1. Health Benefit Committee Premium Recommendation for Plan Year 2023-2024

Mr. Rich Franco, Human Resources Benefits Manager, reviewed the Health Benefit Committee Premium Recommendation for Plan Year 2023-2024 with the Board of Trustees and reviewed the premium analysis 5% PY 23-24, final calculations PY 23-24, unreserves lookback over the past four years, and the employee OOP expense outlook.

- **Premium Analysis 5% PY 23-24** – Mr. Franco shared what the expenses for the insurance are expected to be for the plan year 2023-2024. The trend (inflation) numbers we got from Allegiance and Alliant (Consultant Group) were Medical 2.30% to 7.25%, Dental 3.70% to 4.60% and Vision 2% to 5.80%. The committee voted on a 5% Medical, 3% Dental, 2% Vision trend (inflation) percentage increase based on our group size and historically we've ran a little bit lower than the national trend numbers. With that said, with our current Premiums, we are projected to lose \$1,563,440.
- **Final Calculations PY 23-24** – Mr. Franco shared what it would take to cover the \$1,563,440, which would be a 12.88% Premium Increase. This would only get us to breakeven and not lose anymore money from our Unreserves. Mr. Franco stated that for the Premiums if we did a 13% increase in premiums, we would cover the cost and have about \$14,904 over the breakeven point.
- **Unreserves Lookback 4 Yrs.** – Mr. Franco shared an outlook of the Health Insurance Unreserves through the last 6 months (1/2) of the Plan Year, over the past 4 years. This is helpful to understand that the last 6 months the Health Plan pays for more expenses due to employees/insurance members hitting their Deductibles and Max Out of Pockets (OOP). Our Unreserves take on average a \$731,851.83 loss in the last 6 months. The last 3 years have been the hardest on our Plan and if we look at just those last 3 years the average rises about \$157,000 (\$888,814.16 avg).
- **Employee OOP Expense Outlook** – Mr. Franco showed the difference the employees will see in comparison to the current Plan Year we are in. For the Standard Employee Only plan, they would see (\$86) difference which would mean they would have less "leftover" Benefit Dollars going into their check or to utilize for FSA and so forth. On the Premium Employee Only the employee would see a (\$125) difference meaning they would incur that cost per month. The Employee (EE) plus Spouse and EE plus Family plans cost more because the Spouse is an additional adult life. We give a discount of about 8%-10% for the Spouse in the calculations.

Mr. Franco stated that the Health Benefit Committee has had a very hard decision to make, to maintain the viability and solvency of our Health Plan. With the 12.88% increase needed, the Health Benefit Committee voted to make a 13% Premium increase so there is no loss to our Unreserves. The Committee is also looking to implement a few programs that are projected to save our Health Plan about \$100,000+ for the next Plan Year to help reduce costs. The Committee is looking at other feasible options for the next Plan Year to reduce costs such as Plan restructuring, an RFP and other programs. Mr. Franco stated that the Board of Trustees will vote at a future meeting if they approve of the 13% premium increase, but that would not determine where those dollars would come from. Bargaining work is going on right now for the upcoming year and it's that process that will determine what portion, if any, of next year's premium hike will be paid by the district. The other option, of course, is for employees to pay for some portion of the hike.

2. Budget Consensus Recommendation Committee

Superintendent Rex Weltz shared some of the work that has been completed thus far to address the over six-million-dollar budget shortfall in the elementary general fund and high school general fund. In January 2023, Superintendent Weltz initiated weekly leadership meetings to address the general fund shortfalls. Between January and May of 2023, we have initiated reduction strategies including utilizing retirement savings, building budget reductions, initiating a non-renewal process, central office department budget reductions, relocation of programs into existing spaces across the district, and administrative reductions. With these efforts we reduced the shortfall by nearly \$2.7 million dollars in the elementary general fund and around \$646,000 dollars in the high school general fund. We are still short around \$3.3 million dollars combined in the elementary and high school general fund; therefore, we will be forming a budget consensus recommendation committee comprised of over 35 people including community members, Helena Public Schools staff members, and Trustees that will come around the table to brainstorm how we can reduce the shortfall of over \$3,000,000 dollars. Superintendent Weltz has asked Dr. Rob Watson, Executive Director of the School Administrators of Montana (SAM), to facilitate the budget consensus recommendation committee along with two co-facilitators from the district. The first meeting will take place on Thursday, May 18th at 6:00 p.m. Superintendent Weltz introduced Dr. Rob Watson to the Board of Trustees.

Dr. Watson shared that this is his 30th year working in public education. Dr. Watson has served as a teacher, a principal, and a superintendent. Dr. Watson stated his experience with the consensus process started in Bozeman, and then in Missoula and the process itself helps solve complex issues. Dr. Watson stated that the issues we are facing are

being faced by every other school district in the state. The issues around complex problems happen everywhere, and the School Administrators of Montana (SAM) believe that through this sort of process, they can help a lot of school districts. We will be the first school district that SAM will be working with on this sort of project, but Dr. Watson hopes in the future they will work with a lot more school districts across the state. SAM is interested in working with school districts across the state because they are all about maintaining good leadership. They believe that the longer you can keep leadership in a community, the better you are because it takes several years for a leader to get established and to start solving some problems, and so they believe this sort of process helps maintain, sustain, and retain good leaders in our state.

Dr. Watson shared his goals with the Board of Trustees which include, building trust in a process, he wants to address unresolved conflict that may be occurring in our district and in our community, he wants to encourage that we use a process, either this process or something similar, to solve future problems, and the last goal is that we will reach a resolution and that resolution will be met with consensus of the entire group. Dr. Watson stated that the committee will present to the board a variety of options to help solve the budget issue.

Dr. Watson explained how the process will work. The first step is that trust will be developed among the group, a safe environment will be provided through protocols so everyone has a voice in the group, and then after some time through consensus they will reach a resolution. Dr. Watson conclude by stating that this is not a quick fix solution. Designing solutions to be sustainable and long-term takes time. The end goal is to bring some options to the board, and the board will decide what the solution will be for the budget.

V. BOARD COMMENTS

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn and Board Vice Chair Jennifer McKee welcomed Trustee Hindoien and Trustee Cleatus to the Board of Trustees and stated they are looking forward to working with them.

There were no further board comments.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 6:59 p.m.

Candice Delvaux, Recording Secretary Date