



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

Tuesday, September 26th, 2023 | 4:00 p.m. | Lincoln Center and via TEAMS

MINUTES

ATTENDEES

<i>Trustees</i>	<i>Others</i>
Siobhan Hathhorn, Board Chair	Rex Weltz, Superintendent
Linda Cleatus, Trustee	Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent
Janet Armstrong, Trustee	Jane Shawn, HEA President
Terry Beaver, Trustee	Janelle Mickelson, Business Manager
Jeff Hindoién, Trustee	Lona Carter, Student Health
	Todd Verill, Director of Facilities
	Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff
	Gary Myers, Director of Educational Technology
	Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director
	Karen Ogden, Communications Officer
	Candice Delvaux, Executive Assistant
	Ali Martin, SMA Architecture
	Tim Meldrum, SMA Architecture
	Several Helena Public Schools Staff Members

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

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. **REVIEW OF AGENDA**

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn reviewed the agenda with the Board of Trustees and there were no changes.

The Board of Trustees moved on to General Public Comment.

III. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Adam Clinch gave general public comment. Mr. Clinch is an educator in the Helena Public School District. Mr. Clinch commented, "My name is Adam Clinch, and I am an educator in the Helena Public Schools. I have been teaching in the Helena School District for 10 years. I've spent 23 of my 35 years in the Helena Public schools. Through increased pedagogical experience and professionalism that included the application for renewing my National Board certification I received a step increase of \$1,400 for this school year, however, due to the 13% increase in health insurance with no additional assistance, I will be paying out \$2,100 more for health insurance this year while staying on the standard highest deductible plan. That's essentially an extra car payment a month or food for a family of four for a week with no extra car or food to show for it. That means I am taking a \$700.00 pay cut this year, despite providing another year of service. If you account for inflation, the outlook is far bleaker. Despite my strong desire to continue being an educator in this district and give back to a place that has given me much, I am strongly considering the long-term sustainability of being a teacher here while weighing what is best for myself and for my family. Thank you for your time."

Mr. Jake Warner gave general public comment. Mr. Warner is an educator in the Helena Public School District. Mr. Warner commented, "Ladies and gentlemen of the board, my name is Jake Warner. I teach math and robotics at Capital High School. I understand that there is a budget crisis. And that's real. What I would say is in getting out of that crisis, please do not create another crisis, a personnel crisis. I know a lot of you guys have experience in private industry and I just ask you to consider what you would do if you work for an employer that could not give cost of living adjustments that would keep up with inflation and that could no longer cover the cost of health care and is experiencing layoffs. I know that if my sister, who is now 32 years old, came up to me and said that was going on at her company, I'd say, kiddo, you've got to be looking for a new job at a new company because this isn't sustainable. So just keep that in mind moving forward as we're trying to find solutions to our budget crisis. Thank you."

Ms. Jessica Reynolds gave general public comment. Ms. Reynolds is an educator in the Helena Public School District. Ms. Reynolds commented, "Ladies and gentlemen of the board, my name is Jessica Reynolds, and this is my ninth year with the Helena School District. I am a graduate of Helena High School, so I've been with the school district for most of my life. With the increases in insurance cost, I netted an extra \$13.00 per paycheck this year, but my homeowners insurance went up, my grocery bill went up, and my student loans start again next month. I'm short about \$600 a month and I'm in the highest lane of payment after nearly a decade of service. I live paycheck to paycheck. I know I could make more in a different job or I can stay here and take a second job. What choice would you make? I am painfully aware of the budget crisis. I know there are limitations on what you can do, but the reality that we all face is that we will lose good educators. That is already happening. That is already a reality we face. We have a worker shortage. It will continue if we do not let people work one job to pay their bills, just their basic bills. We're not going on vacations. We're not buying new cars. I could make more managing Panda Express than I

could at this job, and I think that is a terrible reality to live in and it's something I want you all to keep in mind as you make decisions going forward. Thank you.”

Ms. Julie Ladd gave general public comment. Ms. Ladd is an educator in the Helena Public School District. Ms. Ladd commented, “My name is Julie Ladd, and this is my 30th year teaching in the district. My pay has been frozen for the last four years and will continue to be so for as long as I choose to work for our district per a negotiated agreement. Yet I do not feel that people are out to take advantage of me or feel that my job is seen as unimportant. Pitting us against each other with this rhetoric is counterproductive. My pay freeze is the result of negotiations by my union and the district, but more than that, it is the culmination of decades of unsustainable pay systems. When we first adopted PCAP, there were several teachers who did not transition to that system at its inception because we knew that it was not sustainable. And yet it persisted. The last negotiations for both teachers and administration resulted in pay bumps for some that make maintaining these salaries for decades unsustainable. Perhaps deserved, but unsustainable, nonetheless. This is the result of failure to look forward as a united district. The fact of the matter is that for the district as a whole, it is not something that we can sustain. We are not the auto industry with billions of dollars in profits and if we were a business with profit sharing, no group of informed members would have looked at our numbers and voted to adopt the pay bumps of our last negotiations. We are here to serve our students and I worry that in this time of cuts to make it possible to pay for our staff, we are talking about slashing P.E. when so many of our kids are obese and sedentary. We hear of cutting music, art, and theater when so many of our students are anxious, depressed, and unable to operate socially. I think we need to step back and question how we got here in the first place. This is a historical issue. We need to use informed foresight to drive our decisions as we work to move forward together as a district. I do not know how to fix this. I do know that not every action that would make us know that we are valued needs to be monetary. There are ways to think outside the box and provide our employees with benefits that give us reasons to continue to go above and beyond as we have done for years, even as we live in these extraordinarily expensive times. Thank you.”

Ms. Jennifer Schaefer gave general public comment. Ms. Schaefer is an educator in the Helena Public School District. Ms. Schaefer commented, “My name is Jennifer Schaefer. This is the start of my 17th year in the district and my 20th year in education and this year has been a year of firsts for me. This is the first year in my career that my paycheck has seen a zero-dollar increase. I am at the top of my lane and my contract reads the exact same amount as it read last year to the penny. This is the first year in my career that the district has not been able to increase their contribution to insurance. This year my extra out of pocket contribution to maintain the premium insurance for my children and myself would be \$1,733.40. This is the first year that I have been unable to offer my family premium care due to the amount of money it would cost to carry us and to fill our flex account. We have made the decision to go with standard care. I gambled, hoping that by changing to standard, my take home pay would be the same. The gamble paid off and I bring home enough extra to fill my gas tank once more a month. Unfortunately, I have a child who sees private speech and private OT weekly. Even on premium care it's hard and we always empty our flex account early. I'm feeling really anxious about how to make this work and to see

how this all balances out this year. I understand the position you are in. However, we also run budgets and are required to pay our bills. I am hopeful that as you look at each of us, you are reminded of each of our stories and remember the hard positions we are also currently in.”

Ms. Kari Skadberg gave general public comment. Ms. Skadberg is a para educator in the Helena Public School District and was selected as the Para Educator of the Year for 2023. Ms. Skadberg commented, “I wrote a few figures down. The insurance increase is \$141 per pay period from what it was last year, which was covered by our benefits. My step increase is \$64 per pay period, which leaves a difference of \$77 per pay period so I had to opt for the standard versus premium insurance, which I've actually had since I started working for the district ten years ago. So, some of the ways that has affected me is I've had to opt from getting new glasses this year because I know I need glasses, but I have no vision benefits and I have also reduced my dental benefits. So, I've had the premium since I started working ten years ago, and yet now I'm over 60 and I have higher healthcare costs because I am now a senior. And then the other thing is by choosing to go with the standard benefits, I actually returned to the district \$144 per pay period that I could very much use. I do have a summer job and in that summer job I earn three quarters of what I earn in nine months in the Helena School District. I earn that in three months. Thank you.”

Ms. Kimberly Cook gave general public comment. Ms. Cook is an educator in the Helena Public School District. Ms. Cook commented, “Hello, my name is Kimberly Cook and I've taught in the district for ten years. In November, I will have obtained my master's in art education, but my dedication and expertise in education is worth \$1,733.40 less than what I was worth last year. Instead of a 2.5% pay increase that I was owed because I have graduated on to various levels and steps, I've now received a .5% increase.”

Ms. Sarah Van Stry gave general public comment. Ms. Van Stry is an educator in the Helena Public School District. Ms. Van Stry commented, “My name is Sarah Van Stry and this is my 20th year teaching at Capital High School in the Helena School District. This year I did not move up on the pay scale because I'm frozen in a ghost lane. Unfortunately, 20 years of service was not enough to grandfather me into the previous pay scale where I would have continued to move up the ladder. However, even worse than being frozen at this number is now going backwards in my pay this year due to increasing healthcare costs. I'm making \$220 less each month than I did last year. I don't see how it's fair-the cost of living has not gone down \$220 a month and I am now worth less to the district this year than after a year of experience. I'm wondering how much less I'll be making even further down the road next year.”

Ms. Janna McBride gave general public comment. Ms. McBride is an educator in the Helena Public School District. Ms. McBride commented, “I stand before you today to speak from my heart about the incredibly challenging and often underappreciated profession of teaching. This is not just a job, it's calling and we're here because we care deeply about our students and their futures, but it's time we address the realities we face as educators. Teaching is not

an easy path. It is a profession that requires us to wear multiple hats simultaneously. We're mentors, caregivers, motivators, and often surrogate parents to our students. We invest countless hours into nurturing young minds, striving to make a difference in their lives and shaping the leaders of tomorrow. We do this because we genuinely care about each and every one of our students and our community, and we believe in the power of education to transform their lives. However, despite the immense importance of our work, the teaching profession is frequently undervalued and underpaid. The financial burden that educators bear is an issue that needs urgent attention. Let's not forget that many of us dip into our own pockets to provide supplies, books, and even food to our students who come to school hungry and without. We do this because we care, but it is a stark reminder of the systematic issues we face, and no teacher should have to subsidize their profession from their own pockets. The sacrifices we make for our students are immeasurable. We spend late nights grading papers, planning lessons, attending professional development sessions and other things for our students to show that we care. We miss family events, holidays, and personal time because we know our students rely on us. These sacrifices are not made lightly. We have families and we have professional lives and it's time to acknowledge the immense dedication and sacrifice we put in, and it's time to back that up. My husband and I have been here for 12 years serving this district. We've earned our masters. I've earned my national board certification and it's time that we be supported financially so that our passion for our students comes first, and we don't have to find jobs that we don't get to chase this passion because we must have jobs to support our families financially."

Mr. Thomas Baty gave general public comment. Mr. Baty is an educator in the Helena Public School District. Mr. Baty commented, "I'm in front of you because when I went to check my pay stub the other day, I was dismayed that I was making less money than I was at the same time last year. I came to the Helena district with two bachelor's degrees, and I earned a master's while I was here. I am the president elect of the Montana Choral Directors Association, which is a statewide music teacher organization. I have 13 years teaching experience, ten in the Helena district serving our Helena students and families, and just recently I've volunteered to help solve for a loss of music FTE in the high schools. What the perception for me is and the messaging from the district is that my professional value has diminished by \$743.28 between this year and last year. It's disturbing. I must now think to myself, what am I going to cut out of my life that I enjoyed before? Is it going to be programs for my children? Can I continue to sign them up for basketball, soccer, and swimming lessons? Will I need to cut out trips to visit family across the state and they won't get to see their grandparents as much anymore?"

Mr. Gabriel Furshong gave general public comment. Mr. Furshong is an educator in the Helena Public School District. Mr. Furshong commented, "I am a second-grade teacher at Broadwater Elementary and I just want to take a minute to thank you all as board members for being here without pay and volunteering your time and thank you Superintendent Weltz. I am a non-tenured teacher, and I came into this profession three years ago from a much higher paying profession because I came from a family of teachers. I am disappointed to see that that I'll be getting about \$455 less than I did last year and I'm sure many of you are disappointed too. As we work hard to balance our budget my hope is that we'll be intelligent enough and creative enough to make cuts that allow us to reinvest where

resources are most needed, and I would contend that they are most needed to create a more sustainable profession for teachers here in Helena. I hope that's the place where we really consider reinvesting is to give teachers a better deal. One note I'll leave you with is that at the recent Education Interim and Budget Legislative committee meeting it was noted by OPI that 85% of graduates from teaching programs in state either move to another state or don't enter the profession, and so if we want to head off the next crisis, we have to be very creative and assertive and I would even say aggressive in the cuts we're making so that we can make the teaching profession sustainable here in Helena."

Ms. Callah Kenney gave general public comment. Ms. Kenney is a student in the Helena Public School District. Ms. Kenney commented, "My mom is a teacher in your district and the cost of living has gone up, but her take home amount has gone down. What this looks like for me is, although I am ranked first in the nation for archery, I will not be able to continue to pursue my passion as I previously had. For my brother who is in college, it means no more care packages or visits from his family. The choices being made not only affect teachers, but they are also affecting the entire community."

Ms. Jane Shawn gave general public comment. Ms. Shawn is the Helena Education Association President. Ms. Shawn commented, "I stand before you as a teacher starting my 17th year in the district this year. This year, even with the step increase, I will be bringing home over \$1,000 less than I was last year. I have also been asked to speak on behalf of my colleague Paul Phillips. Paul is the most senior teacher in the district. He also will be bringing home less money this year. He was not able to attend as he is currently at work at his second job."

Ms. Tricia Rummel gave general public comment. Ms. Rummel is an educator in the Helena Public School District. Ms. Rummel commented, "I teach English at Capital High School and I am a product of Montana public schools and I've had an extraordinary career because of Montana educators. My first teaching position was in the top performing school in Montana. I spent nine years teaching abroad in the top performing schools in Asia, Europe and the Middle East, and I came back here to work with some of the finest colleagues that I've ever seen, and it's been my privilege to be in this profession with them. There's an expression that says show me your budget and I'll show you your values. I haven't been in this district long; it's only been four years. For the first three years, the district made some budget decisions. They gave a 30% raise to the administrators and that showed their values and I applaud that. I also value my administrators. I think they're extraordinary people. I don't value them more than I do my colleagues and nor do I value them more than I do the education for our students and what they deserve. I knew when I got out of Montana schools, that I was competitive with people all over the planet, and I know that we give our kids these extraordinary opportunities. So, I'm asking you to let your budget show your values, value our kids and value our educators."

Ms. Maria Foot gave general public comment. Ms. Foot is an educator in the Helena Public School District. Ms. Foot commented, "I am a high school teacher in the district. I have been here for 12 years teaching. I am also a single parent to a spectacular senior. I have strived to be a positive example and show her how hard work can pay off. I put myself through

college. I earned my master's degree. I am a nationally board-certified teacher. This year I am worth \$165 a month less to this school district. This year I wanted to be able to spend time with my daughter before she headed off to college, but I may not have that option if I'm not making enough money to pay my bills."

Ms. Elizabeth Kenney gave general public comment. Ms. Kenney is an educator in the Helena Public School District. Ms. Kenny commented, "My name is Elizabeth Kenny. This is my 17th year in the district. My daughter just spoke, so I'm a little emotional about that. Two years ago, my daughter and I were in an awful car accident. Because of this car accident I can't make any other choice but premium insurance. We're both still seeing a chiropractor, and I'm in OT and PT. I've been to the Mayo Clinic and there is a lot going on. This means I'll be taking home \$300 less than I did last year. I still have the medical bills for both of us. We are going to have to cut back and she's aware of it. She has been working really hard in archery and she was ranked first in the nation. She's working on being in the Olympics, but we must cut that back. This is hard on our entire family, but also on the community."

Mr. Mike Burk gave general public comment. Mr. Burk is an educator in the Helena Public School District. Mr. Burke commented, "This is my 33rd year teaching-29th in Helena, and I simply wanted to state that you always look forward to that first check of the year. Yesterday I saw that and to my dismay I've learned that I'm going to be worth about \$119 less per check for a total of \$1,430 a year. It's a mortgage payment. I would hope that we can take a look and listen to all the people that are here to talk today and consider those numbers."

Ms. Leighann Wilson gave general public comment. Ms. Wilson is a para educator in the Helena Public School District. Ms. Wilson commented, "I'm starting my 18th year with the Helena Public Schools, and I am bringing home \$84.70 less a month due to the increase of the insurance. I chose not to take the basic plan just because of the out-of-pocket amount that I would have to pay, and I didn't want to have to choose between my insurance and if I needed to go to the doctor."

Ms. Erika McMillin gave general public comment. Ms. McMillin is a psychologist in the Helena Public School District. Ms. McMillin commented, "This is my 20th year in the Helena School District. I started here and I plan to finish here. This year my pay will be \$79.80 less than last year. This was a step that was actually a fairly big one for me. I will not see much of an increase for the remainder of my career and so future years I will see a much bigger impact. My workload is not any less. My commitment to students and families is not any less, but my pay is less."

Ms. Megan Lane gave general public comment. Ms. Lane is an educator in the Helena Public School District. Ms. Lane commented, "This is my 21st year in the district. I'm a Helena High graduate and my mom was a teacher at Four Georgians for over 30 years and served this community well. I'm going to also reference the 30% raise with back pay that was given to administrators a couple of years ago. This raise was orchestrated by members of the HSD senior leadership team, the same people who have told us in their own words that they've

known this financial cliff has been coming for over five years now, if not longer. Our leadership team knew it was going to end here and yet they still chose to give themselves a 30% raise. There has been no accountability or explanation for that. In my career I have never seen morale this low. We are standing in this beautiful room, and I ask where did that money come from when my room is still leaking on the orchestra downstairs. I'm incredibly stressed out about the fact that my paycheck is going to be \$255 less every month this year while my property taxes and insurance have increased over \$480 a month over the past 24 months. The teacher discontent and demoralization in this district is so much bigger than that. If we accept the district's offer of a .5% yearly increase for the next two years, where is the guarantee that will even help? There is still no transparency and there's still no accountability. That is why we are so upset and that is why morale is so low. That is what we want fixed."

Ms. Sue Stone gave general public comment. Ms. Stone is an educator in the Helena Public School District. Ms. Stone commented, "My name is Sue Stone and I'm a teacher at Capital High. I put in a full career in Illinois but when we moved out here, I felt like I was not finished teaching, so I got hired again. I just want to say it hurts so much to see all my colleagues suffering. The morale is really low, and it hurts, and then we walk in a room and we put our smiles on for those kids. I'm up here speaking for my colleagues because I hate to see them all hurting so much. We walk in the halls, and we are there for the kids. We do everything for the kids, but that doesn't mean that we're not worth our value. We will keep working for our kids because that's why we do this, but we still have bills to pay."

Mr. Kevin Ward gave general public comment. Mr. Ward is a graduate of Helena Public Schools, a parent of a future Helena Public Schools student, and a teacher at Capital High School. Mr. Ward commented, "Our district is in crisis and is in need of leadership and guidance from our school board. Having worked in this district for ten years, I feel that morale among teachers and staff is lower than it has ever been. We worked through a pandemic and supported our students through unprecedented times only to be met with contract negotiations that have amounted to pay cuts, ballooning class sizes, and layoffs. There is a narrative that this board has established that projects support for teachers and staff. This narrative, however, is in direct conflict with how district leaders have been negotiating. Under the most recent proposal from the district, health care prices will be raised so significantly and salaries so little that I will be making \$100 dollars less a month. In what way does this show support for your staff? The teacher shortages that have plagued rural Montana are here in Helena now. When I applied to teach in this district I was one of twenty candidates, now we are struggling to fill basic positions. These struggles are not because the profession is difficult or because teachers feel disrespected, it is because teachers cannot afford to live here. I am under no illusions that there is hidden money somewhere that can be used to address this crisis. It is a problem at the state level. Unfortunately another Montana legislature came and went without addressing this problem. To support your staff and the students of this district, you need to support their efforts in demanding better wages. You need to be honest with the parents and students, that this budget crisis is affecting their students' experiences at school. Because we do not have proper funding from the legislature class sizes are increasing, positions are being eliminated, classes are being cut. Telling parents of the district that we are able to offer the

exact same with less resources is dishonest. Your honest leadership is needed now more than ever.”

That concluded general public comment and the Board of Trustees moved on to the consent action items.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Consent Action Items

1. Personnel Actions

Siobhan Hathhorn, Board Chair, commented. “I would entertain a motion for the Consent Action Item as presented.”

Motion: Trustee Terry Beaver moved to approve the Consent Action Item as presented. Trustee Janet Armstrong seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 5-0 motion carries unanimously.

B. Item For Action

1. Consider Approval of 7th Avenue Gym Lease with Queen City Football Club

In June 2023, the Helena Public Schools solicited proposals with the intent to lease the 7th Avenue Gym. On August 15, 2023, the Board voted to award the 7th Avenue Gym lease to the Queen City Football Club (QCFC).

Following the award, administration worked with attorneys to develop the lease. The QCFC has had the opportunity to review the lease and suggest modifications.

The following are among the items addressed in the lease agreement:

- o Use of Facility / Prohibited Uses
- o Terms and Possession
- o Acceptance of Property
- o Rent
- o Improvements
- o Maintenance and Services
 - o Utilities
 - o Maintenance / Property Inspection
- o HPS Access to Property
- o Assignment and Subleasing
- o Abandonment of Property

- o Insurance
- o Indemnification of HPS
- o Default and Remedies

The Board of Trustees had a robust conversation about the proposed 7th Avenue Gym lease with Queen City Football Club. Trustee Terry Beaver stated that he is not comfortable with the lease term of 30 years because we cannot predict what the needs of the district may be 30 years down the road. Trustee Beaver believes a 20-year lease term would be more satisfactory. The trustees reviewed and discussed the portion of the lease that states, *HPS shall have the right to conduct an inspection of the Property every five (5) years during the term of the Lease to ensure that Tenant is fulfilling the obligations set forth in this Lease. Within 15 days following such inspection, HPS shall provide Tenant with a report identifying deficiencies in Tenant’s obligations under the Lease. Tenant shall have 30 days following receipt of the report of deficiencies to correct all deficiencies and shall provide notice to HPS within this time period of corrective actions taken. HPS has the right to re-inspect the Property 30 days after providing Tenant with the report of deficiencies to determine whether such deficiencies have been corrected. Failure to correct deficiencies within 30 days shall constitute material violation of the Lease.*

After much discussion, the Board of Trustees determined that they would like more time to review the lease before voting, and no one is willing to make a motion at this meeting to approve the lease document as presented, and this action item would be brought before the full board at a future meeting.

Siobhan Hathhorn, Board Chair, commented. “I would entertain a motion to consider approval of the 7th Avenue Gym Lease with Queen City Football Club.”

Motion: None

Public Comment: None

Vote: There was no motion to approve the 7th Avenue Gym Lease with Queen City Football Club, and therefore no final vote. The Board of Trustees determined that this action item would come back in front of the board for a vote at a future meeting.

C. Item For Information

1. Budget and Facilities Discussion

The Board of Trustees moved on to review a presentation provided by SMA Architecture + Design regarding the Facilities Master Plan. Tim Meldrum, SMA Principal/Partner, and Ali Martin, SMA Associate/Architect reviewed master plan goals and facilities master plan options for the elementary schools, the middle schools, the high schools, Vigilante Stadium, and other district facilities. Mr.

Meldrum discussed that through this facilities master planning process SMA has considered several goals for the master plan including safety and security, a balanced budget, equity across the district, 21st century learning facilities, and flexibility for the future.

The Board of Trustees moved on to review a presentation given by Superintendent Rex Weltz regarding the budget. Superintendent Weltz discussed various topics including funding strategies and funding options to explore, and a proposed bond and levies timeline.

V. BOARD COMMENTS

There were no additional board comments.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Board Chair Siobhan Hathorn adjourned the meeting at 7:15 p.m.

Candice Delvaux, Recording Secretary