



*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  
Lincoln Campus  
And via Microsoft Teams  
Tuesday, February 13th, 2024  
12:00pm

---

## MINUTES

### ATTENDEES

Trustees:  
Janet Armstrong, Committee Chair  
Kay Satre, Committee Member  
Jeff Hindoién, Committee Member

Others:  
Rex Weltz, Superintendent  
Jane Shawn, HEA President  
Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director  
Candice Delvaux, Executive Assistant  
Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff  
Janelle Mickelson, Business Manager  
Gary Myers, Director of Educational Technology  
Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent  
Kaitlyn Hess, Assessment & Federal Programs  
Lona Carter, Student Health  
Joslyn Davidson, Curriculum Director  
Tim McMahon, Activities Director  
Karen Ogden, Communications Officer  
Melissa Roman-Lehman, Instructional Coach  
Dr. Rob Watson, Executive Director of SAM  
Several Guests of the Public

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Trustee Janet Armstrong called the meeting to order at 12:03 p.m.

**II. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no general public comment.

**III. REVIEW OF AGENDA**

No changes were made to the agenda.

**IV. REVIEW OF MINUTES**

The committee reviewed and approved the 1.09.24 Budget and Finance Committee Meeting Minutes.

**V. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION/DISCUSSION**

**A. Budget to Actual Reports**

Mrs. Janelle Mickelson, Business Manager and District Clerk for Helena Public Schools, reviewed the budget to actual reports for the elementary general fund and high school general fund with the Budget and Finance Committee. Mrs. Mickelson stated that our percentage remaining at this time of year is 1.6% higher than it was last year, however, we have still not settled negotiations, so that will change. Ms. Mickelson stated that we are having a hard time filling paraprofessional positions, primarily in the elementary, but also in the high school, therefore, we are seeing budget savings there because Ms. Mickelson budget for those positions to be filled. Ms. Mickelson stated there was a spike in utility costs In January for gas and electric, which was expected.

Ms. Mickelson answered any questions the committee had regarding the budget to actual reports.

Ms. Mickelson stated that we completed our second enrollment count, and she is working on projecting our budgets based on that count, we are just waiting on some solid figures from the OPI, and there is still a question on how the charter schools will be handled regarding enrollment and basic entitlement. The Budget and Finance Committee had a robust conversation about enrollment, consistency practices and

what it looks like in the retention and recruiting of students, and the school funding mechanism at the state level.

## **B. Presentation of Recommendations from Budget Consensus Committee**

The Budget and Finance Committee viewed a presentation of recommendations from the Budget Consensus Committee from Dr. Rob Watson, Executive Director of School Administrators of Montana. Dr. Watson began his presentation with background information about the Budget Consensus Committee. In the spring of 2023, the Helena School District convened a diverse group of nearly 40 stakeholders with the purpose of examining the district budget and making recommendations for potential reductions. Based on budget forecasting, the district anticipated a budget shortfall for the 2024/25 school year. The committee met approximately 12 times from May 2023 to February 2024. Stakeholders included parents, teachers, administrators, community members, and Board members. The committee used a facilitated consensus process to make decisions.

Dr. Watson moved on to review the budget value statements from the Budget Consensus Committee. The committee examined several sources of information to create “budget value statements.” The purpose of these statements was to capture goals and objectives that could be used to evaluate potential budget reduction ideas. The statements were presented to the Board of Trustees at their October meeting. The statements are listed below.

It is the mission of Helena Public Schools to foster dynamic educational experiences that prepare all students for life. In order to succeed in this mission and support the needs of all students, the budget should allow Helena Public Schools to:

1. Empower students with a dynamic and diverse education, foster the well-being and shared responsibility for life-long success and achievement. (Short title: student outcomes and achievement)
2. Provide all students a well-rounded education that meets or exceeds (or upholds) accreditation standards in well-maintained, safe facilities that are equipped with relevant technology. (Short title: programs and environment)
3. Build trust and support for additional funding by continuously adapting and maintaining a vibrant and well-connected community. (Short title: trust and engagement)
4. Foster financial sustainability with a budget that is economically responsible, supported, and informed by the needs and aspirations of our community. (Short title: sustainability)
5. Recruit and retain the highest quality staff through recognition of accomplishments, quality training, robust support, and market compensation. (Short title: staff)

Dr. Watson moved on to discuss the estimated budget forecast for the 2024-25 school year. Throughout the term that the budget committee met, participants were presented with several budget scenarios based on the most current information available. Each scenario was built on several assumptions. The final scenario (dated January 10) shows a potential shortfall between \$660K to \$4.58M. This range is built on several assumptions including: the outcome of HEA negotiations and the results of the spring levy elections. The numbers will also change based on the second student enrollment count, the adjustment of the K8 operational levy as well as the potential addition of a HS operational levy.

Dr. Watson discussed budget reduction ideas. At the December committee meeting, the participants brainstormed several budget reduction ideas for each grade level band: K5, MS, HS. Each idea was discussed and clarified. A final list of ideas was forwarded to the administration to determine a cost estimate. Cost estimates were developed based on several assumptions, as described in the “Notes” section of the lists that Dr. Watson shared. Next, Dr. Watson reviewed the Methodology: Prioritizing Reduction Ideas. Using the Budget Value Statements, committee members evaluated each of the budget reduction ideas as they related to each budget value. Each idea was evaluated with regard to impact on (1) student outcomes and achievement (2) programs and environment (3) trust and engagement (4) financial sustainability and (5) staff. For each idea, committee members rated each budget value statement on a scale of significant impact, minor impact, no impact, or positive impact. The average rating of all committee members was used to create a priority list. The items at the top of the list were rated as having minor or no impact on the budget values. While the items at the bottom of the list were rated as having a significant impact on the budget values. It is the recommendation of the committee that the Board would use these prioritized lists when making budget decisions. The Board could consider the low impact items first (top of list) and use the significant impact items (bottom of list) only if needed to balance the budget. Dr. Watson reviewed the K5, middle school, and high school prioritized lists with the Board of Trustees. Dr. Watson concluded his presentation by sharing communication to the Board from the Budget Consensus Recommendation Committee and answered any questions the Budget and Finance Committee had regarding the presentation.

## **VI. PUBLIC COMMENT**

An unidentified guest of the public commented asking if cuts will still have to be made even if the levies do pass.

## **VII. BOARD COMMENTS**

The trustees discussed that if all the levies pass then it will buy us time, and we will hopefully have to cut very little, however we are still dealing with the issue of the state funding mechanism for public education and declining enrollment. The recommendations from the

Budget Consensus Committee will need to be considered if the levies do not pass, and more cuts will have to be made.

The trustees expressed their appreciation to Dr. Watson and the Budget Consensus Recommendation Committee for all the hard work that went into this long and thought-out process. The trustees also expressed their appreciation for the many different viewpoints that went into this document including administration, teachers, staff, parents, and business and community members.

#### **VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

Trustee Janet Armstrong adjourned the meeting at 1:01 p.m.