



Superintendent

Rex Wertz
324-2001

Business Manager

Janelle Mickelson
324-2040

Board of Trustees Meeting

Lincoln Center
1325 Poplar St., Helena, MT 59601
And on TEAMS

Tuesday, June 11th, 2024
5:30 p.m.

MINUTES

ATTENDANCE – Present unless otherwise noted.

Siobhan Hathhorn, Chair
Jennifer McKee, Vice Chair
Linda Cleatus, Trustee
Jeff Hindoien, Trustee
Jennifer Walsh, Trustee
Kay Satre, Trustee
Rachel Robison, Trustee
Janet Armstrong, Trustee

Charlie Snellman, Capital High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees
Adella Harris, Helena High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees

Rex Wertz, Superintendent
Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director
Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent
Janelle Mickelson, Business Manager
Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff
Shane Snyder, Senior Infrastructure & Information Systems Manager
Kaitlyn Hess, Assessment and Federal Programs
Jane Shawn, HEA President
Rob Brewer, Facilities Manager
Rich Franco, Human Resources Benefits Manager
Brett Zanto, Capital High School Principal
Steve Thennis, Helena High School Principal
Many guests of the public as well as Helena School District staff

I. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. REVIEW AGENDA

The Board of Trustees reviewed the agenda and no changes to the agenda were requested.

III. OATH OF OFFICE FOR 2024-2025 BOARD OF TRUSTEES STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

Charlie Snellman was sworn in as the 2024-2025 Capital High School Student Representative, and Adella Harris was sworn in as the 2024-2025 Helena High School Student Representative.

IV. RECOGNITIONS

The Board of Trustees recognized the staff and students listed below.

A. Speech and Debate National Qualifiers-Capital High School

Congratulations to the following students who are National Qualifiers in Speech and Debate: Evelyn Dachs, Fiona Kuntz, and Katherine Armstrong. Special thanks to Coach Ditch for all that she does to encourage and support students.

B. Speech and Debate National Qualifiers-Helena High School

Congratulations to the following students who are National Qualifiers in Speech and Debate: Layla Riggs, Samuel Hutchinson, and Ethan Taylor. Special thanks to Coach Hermanson for all that she does to encourage and support students.

C. Montana Coaches Association Coach of the Year-Capital High Softball

Congratulations to Capital High Girls Softball Coach Mike Miller who has been named the Montana Coaches Association Coach of the Year for softball!!

D. Softball State Champions-Capital High Girls Team

Congratulations to the Capital High Girls Softball team for winning the State Championship!! Special thanks to Coach Mike Miller for all that he does to support these outstanding athletes.

E. Montana Coaches Association Coach of the Year-Helena High School Girls Track & Field

Congratulations to Helena High School Girls Track Coach Jesse Zentz who has been named the Montana Coaches Association Coach of the year for girls track and field!!

F. **Track State Champions-Helena High Girls Team**

Congratulations to the Helena High Girls Track team for winning the Track State Championship!! This is their third state championship in a row!! Special thanks to Coach Jesse Zentz for all that he does to support these outstanding athletes.

G. **Individual State Champions in Track-Helena High Girls**

Congratulations to the following athletes who were individual state champions in track!! Special thanks to Coach Jesse Zentz for all that he does to support these outstanding athletes.

- Madi Todorovich - 300 Hurdles, 400
- Logan Todorovich- 100, 100 Hurdles, High Jump, Long Jump
- Reghan Skogen- Pole Vault
- Logan Todorovich, Hazel Bishop, Reghan Skogen, Madi Todorovich - 4x100 Relay
- Hazel Bishop, Reghan Skogen, Evey Linden, Madi Todorovich - 4x400 Relay

H. **Individual State Champions in Track-Capital High Boys**

Congratulations to the following athletes who were individual state champions in track!! Special thanks to Coach Lon Carter for all that he does to support these outstanding athletes.

- Gavin Mow - 110 Boys Hurdles
- Tyler Crum - Javelin

The Board of Trustees moved on to hear the Superintendent's Report from Superintendent Rex Weltz.

V. **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

Superintendent Weltz gave his Superintendent Report to the Board of Trustees.

- **Recognition**
 - Graduations – Seniors/Admin/Staff/Special Guests/Parents/Community
 - PAL – PAL Senior Speeches
 - Access
 - HHS
 - CHS
 - End of the Year Celebrations
 - Staff that make the EOY so special
 - Congratulations to Educator Jen Mooney at Helena Middle School, who was selected as the Helena Education Association Teacher of the Year!!
 - Congratulations to Paraeducator Christi Redmond at Kessler Elementary, who was selected as the Helena Education Association Para Educator of the Year!!

- Congratulations 2024 Helena Public Schools Retirees
 - Congratulations to Four Georgians, 2nd Grade Teacher, Mrs. Sheri Johnston, who was selected as the 105.3 KMTX Teacher of the Month for May 2024.
 - Thank you, Helena Education Foundation, and the Helena Education Association, for sponsoring the Community School Safety Forum hosted by Jason Russell with Secure Environment Consultants.
 - Congratulations to Kathy Kidder, Capital High Assistant Principal, for receiving the Montana Association of Student Councils Administrator of the Year for 2023-2024!
 - Congratulations to Sol Jones, C.R. Anderson Middle School Assistant Principal, for receiving the Middle School Student Council Administrator of the Year Award for 2023-2024!
 - Thank you to our generous sponsors of the 2024 Retirement Celebration Sodexo and Robert Worthy, Walmart, Costco, Safeway, Albertsons on North Montana, Super 1 Foods, Van's Thriftway, and Forget Me Not Flowers.
 - District Office Team
- **New Business**
 - Board of Trustees Work Sessions-Budget Discussions
 - Pre-registration is now open for Helena Public Charter Schools
 - Free screenings are now available now through the end of June for the district's new "KinderSprouts" public preschool program opening this fall
 - Planning for Board Retreat in July
 - Staffing for the 2024-25 SY
 - HSD Hosting the 2024 AA Superintendent Summer Summit
- **Outreach/Meetings**
 - Cabinet & Leadership
 - Retirement Celebrations
 - Hometown Helena Kiwanis
 - Teacher Meeting
 - Parent Advisory Committee
 - Board of Health Meeting
 - Meetings Across District with Jason Russell, SEC
 - Board Leadership
 - AA Superintendents
 - Commercial Energy Meeting
 - HEA/HSD Meeting
 - HEF Board Meeting
 - HEF Executive Committee
 - TV, Print, Radio Media
- Other

That concluded the Superintendent’s Report portion of the agenda. Superintendent Weltz answered any questions the trustees had about his Superintendent Report. The trustees moved on to hear general public comment.

VI. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no general public comment and the Board of Trustees moved on to review the Consent Action Items.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Consent Action Items

1. Personnel Actions
2. Warrants
3. Approval of FY 2023-24 Out-Of-District Attendance Agreements (Nonresident Students Attending Helena School District)
4. Approval of FY 2024-25 Out-Of-District Attendance Agreements (Nonresident Students Attending Helena School District)
5. Acknowledge Out-Of-District Attendance Agreements (Helena Resident Students Attending Other School Districts)
6. 5.14.24 Full Board Meeting Minutes

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the Consent Action Items as presented.”

Motion: Trustee Jennifer McKee moved to approve the Consent Action Items as presented. Trustee Jennifer Walsh seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

That concluded the Consent Action Items. The Board of Trustees moved on to review the Items for Action.

B. Items for Action

1. Bryant Elementary School Solar Photovoltaic System Project Award Recommendation

Facilities Manager Rob Brewer presented the action item *Bryant Elementary School Solar Photovoltaic System Project Award Recommendation* to the Board of Trustees. Helena Public Schools Facilities Director Todd Verrill is requesting the Board of Trustees award the Bryant

Elementary School Photovoltaic System Project to Solar Montana. The project will install a 62.08kW solar photovoltaic system on the gymnasium roof. The facilities office received bids from three contractors, and Solar Montana submitted the lowest proposal at \$123,739. Solar Montana has completed numerous projects for the district in the past and Mr. Verrill is confident they will provide the same level of professional installation for the Bryant system. They will complete this roof project in the summer of 2024 before the start of the 24-25 school year if approved. Mr. Brewer answered any questions the trustees had regarding this action item. A major portion of the funding for this project is coming from the NorthWestern Energy E+ grant, around \$20,000 will be provided by the Sun Run, and around \$50,000 will come from the building reserve fund.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the *Bryant Elementary School Solar Photovoltaic System Project Award Recommendation* as presented.”

Motion: Trustee Kay Satre moved to approve the *Bryant Elementary School Solar Photovoltaic System Project Award Recommendation* as presented. Trustee Jennifer McKee seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

2. Health Benefits Committee Recommendations for Plan Year 24-25

Superintendent Wertz stated there is a wide variety of individuals that serve on the Health Benefits Committee (including teachers, nurses, a trustee, an administrator, and a para educator). Superintendent Wertz and Mr. Franco stated that we are seeing increases in health care across the state and the nation. Mr. Rich Franco, Human Resources Benefits Manager, presented the action item *Health Benefits Committee Recommendations for Plan Year 24-25* to the Board of Trustees. The Health Benefits Committee recommendations to the board is to unbundle the plans, to have an increase in deductibles and max out of pockets to adjust the actuarial value along with making both plans 70/30, to close the percentage gap in premiums between the two health plans, and to adjust the ratios towards national benchmark. Mr. Franco went into detail about each of the recommendations mentioned above and answered any questions the trustees had regarding the recommended changes to the health plan for 24-25 that he presented.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item *Health Benefits Committee Recommendations for Plan Year 24-25*.”

Motion: Trustee Linda Cleatus moved to approve the action item *Health Benefits Committee Recommendations for Plan Year 24-25*. Trustee Kay Satre seconded the motion.

Public Comment: Ms. Jennifer Schaefer gave public comment on this action item. Ms. Schaefer is a teacher in the district. Ms. Schaefer commented on topics including but not limited to how inflation is causing the insurance prices to go up, however, employees are not receiving anything to help them with inflation and stated how much this increase will hurt the staff in the

district.

Ms. Michelle Schweyen gave public comment on this action item. Ms. Schweyen works in the business office in the district. Ms. Schweyen commented on topics including but not limited to stating that last year due to the insurance changes that were made a large majority of people changed from option one to option two to meet their financial needs in their household and there was a requirement that they need to stay on the plan for two years, and by substantially changing the plan this year seems unfair for the people who don't have the option to switch back to their other plan. Ms. Schweyen also stated there is a substantially higher personal liability on option two versus option one for a single person, so the district is essentially putting that personal liability on the individuals with no compensation on the lower premiums.

Mr. Franco stated explained that employees are no longer mandated to stay on the standard or option two plan for two years. Mr. Franco discussed how difficult these changes are for everyone in the district, but the Health Benefits Committee is trying to make the plan solvent for years to come.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

3. Board of Trustees Budget Reduction Recommendations 2024-2025 (Elementary District)

Superintendent Wertz and the Board of Trustees had a robust discussion about the action item, *Board of Trustees Budget Reduction Recommendations 2024-2025 (Elementary District)*. Superintendent Wertz reviewed the document that showed the Board of Trustees budget reduction recommendations and the total cost savings for the elementary district. Superintendent Wertz stated that our targeted savings for elementary K-5 is \$900,000 and right now we are projecting a savings of \$974,697, however, he does not believe we will be able to reduce the K-5 Independent Positions by 2 FTE (with an estimated cost savings of \$75,000), so our projected savings would be brought back to \$900,000 if we do not reduce the K-5 Independent Positions by 2 FTE. The estimated cost savings for 6-8 is \$342,194. The Board of Trustees, Superintendent Wertz, and Board of Trustees Student Representatives had a robust discussion about the interlocal fund and the legislature meeting for the 2025 session and when school districts may see additional funding.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented. "At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item, *Board of Trustees Budget Reduction Recommendations 2024-2025 (Elementary District)* as presented."

Motion: Trustee Jeff Hindoiien moved to approve the reductions in the 24-25 Elementary District budget by the amounts listed and by the line items set forth on the matrix provided in the board agenda for a total amount of \$974,697 across the K-5 budget and \$342,194 across the 6-8 budget. Trustee Janet Armstrong seconded the motion.

Public Comment: Ms. Brenda Nordland gave public comment on this action item. Ms. Nordland served on the Helena Public Schools Board of Trustees for nine years. Ms.

Nordland commented on topics including but not limited to stating that if these cuts are implemented, her granddaughter will receive less education opportunity than either of her children did when they were in school. Ms. Nordland stated her opposition of cuts to the music and P.E. programs and asked the trustees to not take closing schools off the table when considering reductions.

Ms. Jennifer Schaefer gave public comment on this action item. Ms. Schaefer is a teacher in the district. Ms. Schaefer commented on topics including but not limited to stating that restructuring music and P.E. is not a good decision and stated how programs such as music and P.E. impact children and asked the trustees as they vote tonight to keep the people in the district and their direct impact at the front of all their decisions.

Ms. Carrie Owen gave public comment on this action item. Ms. Owen is an HPS parent, a Helena taxpayer, and a public-school teacher at Helena High School. Ms. Owen commented on topics including but not limited to stating that she has become an advocate for the least advantaged students, as well as stating the many benefits of music and physical education. Ms. Owen encouraged the board members to vote against cuts to music and P.E. as it would negatively affect students, especially low-income students in our community.

Ms. Susan Baranek gave public comment on this action item. Ms. Baranek commented on topics including but not limited to stating her support for closing Hawthorne Elementary School if it would allow the rest of our elementary school students to still experience music and P.E.

Ms. Maria Foot gave public comment on this action item. Ms. Foot is a teacher in the district. Ms. Foot commented on topics including but not limited to stating the opportunities that music has provided for her daughter, expressing her concern with the cost of insurance for next year and her opposition of cuts to the music program and how that would negatively affect students.

Ms. Jacque Semmens gave public comment on this action item. Ms. Semmens is a parent of three children in the Helena School District and two of those children have been attending the PEAK program. Ms. Semmens commented on topics including but not limited to stating that her children did everything they could to advocate for the passing of the levies because of how important PEAK has been to them. Ms. Semmens expressed her support for gifted education and stated if the program is reduced that teachers should continue to be able to teach those children directly rather than serving as education coordinators.

Ms. Cassie Buska gave public comment on this action item. Ms. Buska is a taxpayer and a teacher in the school district. Ms. Buska commented on topics including but not limited to speaking in support of the art and P.E. programs and stated the reasons why it is so important for her children.

Mr. Matt Zeltwanger gave public comment on this action item. Mr. Zeltwanger commented on topics including but not limited to speaking in support of the PEAK program and asking

the board to retain the three tenured educators that are crucial to the success of the program.

Ms. Colette Ozburn gave public comment on this action item. Ms. Ozburn is a School Counselor at Warren Elementary School. Ms. Ozburn commented on topics including but not limited to stating her opposition to any cuts or restructuring to the music and P.E. programs. Ms. Ozburn stated her concerns regarding the addition of a .5 counselor potentially covering an elementary school when the administrator is not there.

Ms. Jenny Sika gave public comment on this action item. Ms. Sika was a twenty plus year resident of Montana that moved out of state last year to Wyoming, where she stated they have a full, immersive, gifted and talented program for students. Ms. Sika commented on topics including but not limited to stating her opposition to cuts to the PEAK, music, and P.E. programs.

That concluded public comment on this action item, and Chair Hathhorn asked if there were any further board comments.

Board Vice Chair Jennifer McKee stated that if Hawthorne Elementary School was shut down, there is no room at another school in the district to place over 200 students that currently attend Hawthorne Elementary School. The only way to accommodate these students at another school would require purchasing a modular which would cost around \$500,000. If Hawthorne Elementary School was shut down it would save \$345,000 but if we had to spend \$500,000 on a modular, we would increase our debt by an additional \$150,000 this year, which financially does not make sense at this time. The trustees had a robust discussion about the music and P.E. programs and discussed that we are not entirely eliminating music and P.E., we are reducing it as minimally as possible. Right now, in the elementary district students attend two P.E. classes and two music classes over two weeks for a total of four elementary and music classes, and if we reduce it, they will attend around three elementary and music classes over two weeks. The group also discussed the PEAK program and how there will be discussions and planning around how the program will look if it is restructured. Student Board Representative Adella Harris stated her support of restructuring the PEAK program and stated that students can find other ways to be challenged and rewarded such as through AP and Honors classes. Student Board Representative Charlie Snellman is also in support of restructuring the PEAK program for middle and high school students, however, opposes restructuring the PEAK program for grades three through five. Student Board Representative Charlie Snellman stated how important the music program has been to him and he hopes we will only have to restructure the music program for one or two years in the hopes that there will be more funding in the future to support the program. Trustee Jennifer McKee stated that she hopes in the future we can bring back three administrators at C.R. Anderson because she feels there is truly a need for that. Board Chair Hathhorn stated making these cuts is not something the board wants to do, but they must do it in order to keep our school district solvent. Trustee Jeff Hindoiien expressed his appreciation for the people that served on the Budget Consensus Recommendation Committee and stated that regarding Hawthorne Elementary School you cannot run small K-5 schools under the Montana school funding model with flat or declining enrollment and we need to start planning now for next year.

Vote: 7-0 motion carries unanimously. *(Please note, Trustee Jennifer Walsh abstained from voting due to the fact that she is a Trustee strictly for the high school district, and this action item only pertained to the elementary district.)*

4. Board of Trustees Budget Reduction Recommendations 2024-2025 (High School District)
The Board of Trustees reviewed the action item *Board of Trustees Budget Reduction Recommendations 2024-2025 (High School District)*. Superintendent Weltz reviewed the document that showed the Board of Trustees budget reduction recommendations and the total cost savings for the high school is estimated to be \$1,234,759. Board Chair Hathhorn stated at the end of the last Board of Trustees Work Session the board wanted to further discuss the budget reduction recommendation item, *Reduce 11 FTE by teaching 6 out of 7 (if needed), Keep 23 credits*, therefore, she invited the trustees to discuss this topic further. Trustee Kay Satre stated that she would like to know more regarding how it would be decided which teachers would teach 6 out of 7, and what the process and steps would be. Superintendent Weltz and Assistant Superintendent McKay stated they are beginning to meet with principals to plan this process while keeping accreditation in mind. Trustee Satre stated she is looking for some assurance that there are steps in place to try to mitigate the impact of that *(teaching 6 out of 7)* for as many of our teachers as possible and to make it as equitable as possible, such as having half of the faculty teach a sixth class for the first semester and the other half of the faculty teach a sixth class the second part of the semester. The group had a robust discussion about natural attrition, tenured and non-tenured positions, as well as scheduling, courses offerings and electives. Trustee Jennifer Walsh stated it is very important for our students to be able to have a wide range of choices for course offerings and electives. Trustee Janet Armstrong asked if we are in the same position for the line item: *Reduce 9-12 Independent positions (1 FTE TBD)* with an estimated cost savings of \$45,000 as we are for the elementary line item that states *Reduce K-5 Independent Positions by 2 FTE TBD*. Earlier Superintendent Weltz stated that he does not believe we will be able to reduce the *K-5 Independent Positions by 2 FTE* (with an estimated cost savings of \$75,000), and he also does not believe we will be able to reduce a 9-12 Independent position (1 FTE TBD) in the high school.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented. “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve action item number four: *Board of Trustees Budget Reduction Recommendations for 2024-2025 (High School District)*.”

Motion: Trustee Jennifer Walsh moved to approve *the Board of Trustees Budget Reduction Recommendations for 24-25 (High School District)*. Trustee Jennifer McKee seconded the motion.

Public Comment: Ms. Susan Baranek gave public comment on this action item. Ms. Baranek teaches freshman English at Capital High School. Ms. Baranek commented on topics including but not limited to stating her concerns with increasing class sizes and adding an extra class to many teachers and the effects it will have on students. Ms. Baranek asked the board to reconsider drastically increasing class sizes and adding an extra class to high school teachers.

Ms. Courtney McAdams gave public comment on this action item. Ms. McAdams is the parent of a Capital High School graduate and is the parent of a student at a middle school in the district. Ms. McAdams commented on topics including but not limited to stating her concern with increasing class sizes and her concern with replacing teachers that are retiring this year and that she hopes we look at the quality of those new teachers so that our kids can continue to have the same quality education. Ms. McAdams stated she hopes we will continue to offer remedial options for kids that need to get caught up.

Ms. Cassie Buska gave public comment on this action item. Ms. Buska commented on topics including but not limited to stating her concern with the reduction of 11 FTE in the high school, and if that will affect a Special Education teaching position, and her concern of special education classrooms having too many students in a classroom.

Mr. Adam Clinch gave public comment on this action item. Mr. Clinch is a teacher in the district. Mr. Clinch commented on topics including but not limited to stating the public had the ability to control this result by voting for the levies but since they voted no, teachers are now asked to teach more and do more along with having to pay rising insurance costs. Mr. Clinch stated there seems to be room to maintain five teaching periods with increases in class sizes and implored the vote to board no (*on asking some teachers to teach 6 out of 7 periods*).

That concluded public comment on this action item, and Chair Hathhorn asked if there were any further board comments.

Trustee Janet Armstrong stated the conversation tonight has been extremely respectful and understanding between everyone, and expressed how much she appreciated the new Board of Trustees Student Representatives' energy and ideas they presented this evening.

Trustee Linda Cleatus stated how painful this is and how stretched teachers are and will continue to be and that the board hears them and their concerns, but we have fiscal responsibilities, and this is not the best for everyone, but it is what must be done, and she understands how incredibly painful this is for everyone.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

That concluded the Items for Action and the Board of Trustees moved on to hear Reports.

C. REPORTS

1. Helena Education Association Report
Ms. Jane Shawn, HEA President, gave the Helena Education Association report. Ms. Shawn

welcomed the Board of Trustees Student Representatives, Charlie and Adella. Ms. Shawn congratulated Jen Mooney, who is our Helena Educator of the Year, and Christi Redmond who is our Helena Para Educator of the Year. Mrs. Mooney and Mrs. Redmond's schools were awarded a \$500 donation from the Helena Education Association and the awardee can direct how the school spends the money.

2. Facilities and Technology Committee Report

There was no Facilities and Technology Committee report this evening because the committee did not meet in June.

3. Budget and Finance Committee Report

Trustee Janet Armstrong stated that we covered budget and finance in depth this evening, and there was no further report.

4. Policy Committee Report

There was no Policy Committee report this evening because the committee did not meet in June.

5. Teaching & Learning Committee Report

There was no Teaching & Learning Committee report this evening because the committee did not meet in June.

6. Health Benefits Committee Report

Trustee Kay Satre stated the Health Benefits Committee has had many meetings and that information was covered this evening, and there was no further report.

7. Wellness Committee Report

There was no Wellness Committee report for this evening.

8. Montana School Boards Association Report

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn gave the Montana Schools Boards Association report. Chair Hathhorn stated that MTSBA had their annual meeting, and they also had a meeting to discuss the proposed coalition funding formula recommendation.

That concluded the Reports portion of the agenda. The Board of Trustees moved on to final board comments.

VIII. BOARD COMMENTS

Trustee Kay Satre stated it is important for our community to know there has been a lot of work that has gone on over a good period of time to try to position ourselves to meet this budget, and she appreciates all the hard work that has been done. Trustee Satre stated we are asking a lot of our teachers, our students, our families, and our community and she feels disheartened by the cuts that we have had to make but she also feels that they were the ones that we could make and hopes that one day they can be recouped.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn thanked the members of the Budget Consensus Recommendation Committee, administration, and teachers for giving feedback and for all the hard work that was done.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn adjourned the meeting at 10:05 p.m.

Candice Delvaux, Recording Secretary

Date