



**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, September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024**  
5:30 p.m.

### MINUTES

**ATTENDANCE – Present unless otherwise noted.**

Siobhan Hathhorn, Chair  
Jennifer McKee, Vice Chair  
Linda Cleatus, Trustee  
Jeff Hindoién, 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  
Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent  
Janelle Mickelson, Business Manager Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff  
Todd Verrill, Facilities Director  
Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director  
Gary Myers, Director of Educational Technology  
Kaitlyn Hess, Assessment and Federal Programs  
Jane Shawn, HEA President  
Tim McMahon, Activities Director  
Lisa Cordingley, HEF Executive Director  
Jim Kerins, Communication and Management Services, LLC (CMS)  
Caleb Lewis, Communication and Management Services, LLC (CMS)  
Brett Zanto, Capital 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 5:30 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

## **II. REVIEW AGENDA**

The Board of Trustees reviewed the agenda and Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn stated that the agenda item: *B. Items for Action-2. Smith Elementary HVAC Design Contract* will be removed from the agenda this evening as the *Smith Elementary HVAC Design Contract* needs further review and will come before the Board of Trustees at a future date.

The Board of Trustees moved on to the recognitions portion of the agenda.

## **III. RECOGNITIONS**

The Board of Trustees recognized the Helena Public School District staff listed below:

- 2024-2025 Fulbright Teachers For Global Classrooms Program  
Congratulations to Capital High School Educator Mr. Jake Warner who has been selected for the 2024-2025 Fulbright Teachers for Global Classrooms Program, a program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). As a result, Mr. Warner will attend the Global Education Symposium in Washington D.C., February 6-8. He will also attend the international field experience that is scheduled for next summer.
- 2024 Public Sector Employer Governor's Safety Achievement Award  
The Helena Public Schools has been selected to receive the 2024 Public Sector Employer Governor's Safety Achievement Award. Special thanks to Mr. Neal Murray, Safety and Operations Manager, and Mr. Todd Verrill, Facilities Director for their commitment to safety in the district. The Governor's Safety Achievement Award recognizes Montana's small, medium and large employers and individuals in the public and private sectors that are committed to safety in the workplace.

The Board of Trustees moved on to hear a presentation given by Ms. Lisa Cordingley, Executive Director of the Helena Education Foundation.

## **IV. PRESENTATION**

### **Helena Education Foundation-Lisa Cordingley, Executive Director**

Ms. Lisa Cordingley, Executive Director of the Helena Education Foundation (HEF), shared that HEF's first full school year of programming started in September of 2002. Ms. Cordingley stated, "The Helena Education Foundation has no intention of trying to fund public education, even in part. That is the job of the local, state and federal governments through whatever system is deemed to most adequately fund education's future leaders, voters, citizens, and next-door neighbors of our communities. We believe that districts enhanced by resources beyond tax dollars are more likely to attract top teachers and result in

exceptional student learning and performance.” Ms. Cordingley shared that last spring *Pen and Ink Magazine* launched and the Harrison Award recipients shared their writing materials to a packed audience at the Holter Museum of Art. Ms. Cordingley shared details of other amazing HEF programs including Celebration of Excellence, Carnival Classic, Fabulous Firsts, StoryBook Theater, Great Ideas and Spark Grants, and Great Conversations. Great Conversations is taking place on November 20<sup>th</sup> this year has more than 30 topics including Global Economy, Dolly Parton, Forever Chemicals, MT Dialects, Cell Phones in Schools, special guest Ann Compton, and so much more. Ms. Cordingley shared “Special Projects” are a regular line item for the HEF budget now. Last year HEF was granted \$100,000 from Boeing for Industrial Tech in middle and high schools. Just last week HEF received support through a grant to invest \$65,000 in STEM kits to circulate among the elementary schools. In January and February of this school year HEF will sponsor a multitiered exploration of the impact cell phones have in our lives. From Dr. Jonathan Haight’s book, *The Anxious Generation*, to book talks, film screenings, and a few speakers for presentations—they have lots of ideas and tremendous support from teachers who have reached out to them, and they are eager to explore this topic with the community. This month HEF will mail to more than 1,400 homes their fall update, which shares not only opportunities to participate in HEF, but also features a myriad of ways community members can engage directly with our schools—such as volunteering, attending music programs, applying to substitute, working as a para or a bus driver, or serving on the Board of Trustees. Ms. Cordingley answered any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding her presentation.

The Board of Trustees moved on to hear the Superintendent Report.

## V. SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT

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

- Recognition
  - o Welcome New Educators!
  - o Thank you to Valley Bank, Lisa Cordingley and the Helena Education Foundation and Jane Shawn, and the Helena Education Association for sponsoring the 2024 New Educator Orientation and to our community partners for welcoming our new educators. Special thanks to Barb Ridgway, Allison Balboni, Jane Shawn, Lisa Cordingley, and Becca Leaphart for all their efforts in organizing the event.
  - o Congratulations to Broadwater Elementary Kindergarten Teacher Kyla Owen for securing a prestigious \$24,000 technology grant to help the district implement AI safely and effectively in the classroom.
  - o Congratulations to Broadwater Elementary Montessori Teacher Jodi Delaney who is entering her eighth year as a participant in the Montana Historical Society’s “Teacher Leader in Montana History” program, which enhances the teaching of our state’s rich history.
  - o Congratulations to Capital High Educator Jim Weber who recently found out that the SME Education Foundation is offering Capital High School a Sustainability Award in the amount of \$5,000 for the purpose of providing continued support for SME PRIME related manufacturing and engineering educational opportunities to secondary students during the 2024-25 academic year.

- o Special thanks to Jane Shawn, Maria Foot, Jake West, and Barb Ridgway for all their efforts in making the new educator/mentor program a success.
  - o Thank you to the Helena Police Department and Angel Fund for purchasing shoes for local kids through Running for Montana’s Future (RFMTF).
  - o Thank you to Lisa Cordingley and the Helena Education Foundation for hosting the 2024 Carnival Classic.
- New Business
    - o Enrollment Cleanup – District
    - o KinderSprouts Start Up Update – Bryant/Rossiter
    - o Charter Schools Start Up Update
    - o Health Trust Update
    - o CMS Comp Study
    - o Shared Governance District Wide Training
    - o Helena Public Schools-Cellphone Conversations
  - Outreach/Meetings
    - o Board of Health Meeting
    - o Board Leadership
    - o Rotary Club
    - o Kiwanis Club
    - o CMS Comp. Study
    - o Hometown Helena
    - o Cabinet & Leadership
    - o All Administrators Meetings
    - o TV, Print, Radio Media
    - o SPH – Sponsorship
    - o 2024 Annual Presentation of the Community Health Improvement Plan
  - Other
  - October 17th and 18th – Educator Conferences- No School

That concluded the Superintendent’s Report portion of the agenda. Superintendent Weltz answered any questions the trustees had about his Superintendent Report. The Board of Trustees and Board of Trustees High School Representatives had a robust discussion about cell phones in schools. 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 2024-25 Out-Of-District Attendance Agreements (Nonresident Students Attending Helena School District)
4. Acknowledge FY 2024-25 Out-Of-District Attendance Agreements (Helena Resident Students Attending Other School Districts)
5. 07.24.24 Board of Trustees Summer Retreat Minutes
6. 08.06.24 Board of Trustees Special Board Meeting Open Session Minutes
7. 08.06.24 Board of Trustees Special Board Meeting Closed Session Minutes
8. 08.13.24 Board of Trustees Full Board Meeting Minutes
9. Resolution To Dispose of Personal Property- Benwell FP-12 4-Post Hoist
10. Resolution To Dispose of Personal Property-Outdated & Obsolete Curricular Resources

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 Janet Armstrong 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. Policy 3410: Student Health/Physical Screenings Examination

Ms. Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff, presented the action item *Policy 3410: Student Health/Physical Screenings Examination* to the Board of Trustees. This policy has been revised to clearly establish that the District will not conduct physical examinations without parental consent unless ordered to do so by a court or there is concern for the health or safety of the student or others is in question. Ms. Ridgway answered any questions the trustees had regarding this policy.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve *Policy 3410: Student Health/Physical Screenings Examination* as presented.”

**Motion:** Trustee Jennifer McKee moved to approve *Policy 3410: Student Health/Physical Screenings Examination* as presented. Trustee Kay Satre seconded the motion.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Vote:** 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

## 2. ~~Smith Elementary HVAC Design Contract~~

During the review of the agenda this evening Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn stated that the agenda item: *B. Items for Action-2. Smith Elementary HVAC Design Contract* will be removed from the agenda this evening as the *Smith Elementary HVAC Design Contract* needs further review and will come before the Board of Trustees at a future date.

## 3. ESSER Funds Spend Down 2024 Report

The Board of Trustees reviewed the 2024 ESSER Funds Spend Down Report and had a robust discussion about ESSER funds. In 2024 we had around \$280,000 of ESSER funds remaining which had to be spent down to zero. The report shows that ESSER funds were spent on Title I chrome carts for instruction, iReady, recoding of two HS employees, SPED program (CRA) curriculum support, Tier 2 Curriculum, Side By Side Consulting, summer curriculum, YAM, Handwriting Without Tears, tools for instruction/math lessons/printing, middle school (SIMS) writing material, a charger, summer school salaries benefits, ESY transportation costs, and indirect costs. The Board of Trustees and Superintendent Weltz had a robust discussion about the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) allocating \$1.5 million in federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to Montana teachers for math and reading projects and the fact that OPI partnered with DonorsChoose, a 501 ( c ) ( 3 ) charitable non-profit, to offer \$500 direct grants to all K-12 public school teachers in Montana, and out of every grant given DonorsChoose receives fifteen percent. Superintendent Weltz answered any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding the 2024 ESSER Funds Spend Down Report.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the *2024 ESSER Funds Spend Down Report* as presented.”

**Motion:** Trustee Linda Cleatus moved to approve the *2024 ESSER Funds Spend Down Report* as presented. Trustee Jennifer McKee seconded the motion.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Vote:** 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

That concluded the Items for Action, and the Board of Trustees moved on review the Items For Information.

## C. Items for Information

### 1. Compensation Philosophy

Mr. Jim Kerins with Communications Management Services, LLC (CMS) gave a presentation to the Board of Trustees about the Compensation Philosophy that his firm has been asked to help develop for the Helena Public School District. Mr. Kerins reviewed his agenda which included the topics of: *Value of a Compensation Philosophy, Defining HPS’s Preliminary Compensation Philosophy, Classification and Pay System Discussion, and Next Steps*. Mr.

Kerins stated according to the Society of Human Resource Management, “*A compensation philosophy is simply a formal statement documenting [the organization’s] position about employee compensation. It explains the “why” behind employee pay and creates a framework for consistency. Employers use their compensation philosophy to attract, retain, and motivate employees.*” The compensation philosophy will drive decisions through the classification plan design process. It is important to articulate a pay philosophy and have stakeholder buy-in from the outset. Mr. Kerins shared factors to consider when developing the compensation philosophy:

#### Market Competitiveness

- **Benchmarking:** Compare compensation levels with those of similar organizations and regions to ensure competitiveness.
- **Industry Standards:** Consider prevailing wage rates and benefits packages in the public and private sectors, specifically in equivalent school districts.
- **Do we want to lead, match, or lag the market?** Being a market leader means that you pay more for your jobs than your competitors to gain an advantage or to attract talent away from its competitors. Matching the market is paying roughly the same as competitors.

Mr. Kerins stated that the compensation philosophy is not going to be so limiting that it will interfere with employees right to collective bargaining, in fact, it should support collective bargaining efforts. Mr. Kerins stated that the components of a compensation philosophy must have internal equity and defensibility which means that classification and pay systems must conform with the *Federal Equal Pay Act of 1963* and *Montana Code Annotated 39-3-194*. These legal obligations will be major considerations in defining HPS’s classification and pay system.

Mr. Kerins reviewed a few sample compensation philosophy statements from Saint Paul Public Schools, Houston Independent School District, the University of Iowa, the Montana Legislative Branch, and the City of Missoula. Next, Mr. Kerins reviewed compensation philosophy related excerpts from the July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024, School Board discussion regarding compensation. The excerpts do not represent any formal position or statement for the compensation philosophy. Rather, they represent ideas the board may wish to discuss during the compensation philosophy development exercise. Some of the topics the Board of Trustees discussed were concerns about pay, compression, concerns about equity across all occupations, and concerns about how we compensate our leaders.

Next, Mr. Kerins shared compensation philosophy considerations from the August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Staff Representative Work Session regarding compensation philosophy considerations. Mr. Kerins stated that staff representatives and the Union were very upfront that all employee groups should benefit from wage adjustments and that they were concerned about standardized and equitable pay adjustments. They were also concerned about compression, and they talked about how it may be demotivating for administrative staff that we don't have pay ranges, and we don't have a mechanism for kind of moving those people's wages through.

Next, Mr. Kerins stated that 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. 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. Mr. Kerins pointed out budget value statements number four and five: 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)*. Mr. Kerins answered any questions the trustees had regarding the presentation up to this point and there was a robust discussion about wage compression, annual salaries, daily rates, number of days worked in a year, equitability across all employee groups, administrators that may work a dual role such as part-time administrator and part time teacher, flexibility options for staff members, and economic conditions.

Mr. Kerins and the Board of Trustees had a more robust discussion about market competitiveness and discussed the Houston Independent School District compensation position which states, “*Compensation Position: For non-teacher, central administration, and business support positions, HISD targets compensation at market competitive levels for which HISD competes for talent. Compensation for teachers and school-based administrators is targeted at the top quartile for large urban Region IV school districts and the school districts surrounding the greater Houston area.*” The trustees also discussed that it is important that we remain fiscally solvent while remaining competitive and that the message we project to the community about our district is something that we are actually capable of.

Next, Mr. Kerins shared the salary survey participants which included Belgrade School District, Billings School District, Bozeman School District, Butte School District, Great Falls School District, Kalispell School District, Missoula School District, Carroll College, City of Helena, Lewis and Clark County, Montana Executive Branch, Montana Legislative Branch, Montana Judicial Branch, Montana State Fund, and St. Peter’s Hospital. Mr. Kerins shared additional factors to consider when developing the compensation philosophy:

Budgetary Constraints:

- Fiscal Health: Align compensation with HPS’s financial capacity and long-term fiscal health.
- Sustainability: Ensure that compensation policies are sustainable over the long-term without leading to budget deficits.
- Affordability concerns will influence where we want to be regarding the market. We need to think about the cost of the compensation program to the organization versus the need to attract and/or retain talent.

Equity and Fairness:

- Internal Equity: Ensure pay equity among employees performing similar work or with similar responsibilities.
- Is the overall program defensible and perceived by employees as fair? Are the programs the organization offers fair, competitive and in line with the compensation philosophy and policies?



#### Employee Retention and Attraction:

- Retention Strategies: Offer competitive pay and benefits to retain experienced and skilled employees.
- Talent Attraction: Create appealing compensation packages to attract top talent from diverse backgrounds.

#### Total Compensation Package:

- Benefits: Include comprehensive benefits such as health insurance, retirement plans, paid leave, and other perks.
- Non-Monetary Rewards: Consider work-life balance, professional development opportunities, and career advancement.

#### Legal and Regulatory Compliance:

- Labor Laws: Adhere to federal, state, and local labor laws and regulations.

#### Collective Bargaining:

- Union Agreements: Comply with collective bargaining agreements if applicable. Support collective bargaining efforts. The Compensation Philosophy will serve as a guidepost and will articulate the district's management interests but will not limit or otherwise affect employees' ability to collectively bargain.

#### Internal hierarchy and wage infrastructure:

- What is the appropriate relationship between the highest-paid teacher and the entry rate for a principal? Pay differentials should reflect the increased responsibilities and leadership expectations of principals while maintaining fairness.

#### Merit:

- Implement pay structures that recognize experience with and contributions to HPS's goals. Provide opportunities for salary increases based on merit (e.g., experience and education).

#### Public Perception and Accountability:

- Transparency: Ensure transparency in compensation practices to build trust and accountability.
- Public Perception: Consider the public's perception of school district compensation and address concerns about fairness and efficiency.

#### Economic Conditions:

- Economic Environment: Adapt compensation policies to reflect current economic conditions, such as inflation rates and employment levels.
- Cost of Living: Consider the local cost of living when determining appropriate compensation levels.

Organizational Goals and Strategic Alignment:

- Strategic Objectives: Align compensation policies with HPS’s strategic goals and objectives.
- Workforce Planning: Consider future workforce needs and how compensation can support strategic workforce planning.

Stakeholder Input:

- Employee Feedback: Solicit and consider input from employees regarding compensation and benefits.
- Community Input: Engage with community stakeholders to understand their expectations and concerns.

After all the information presented this evening, the Board of Trustees determined they would like a Steering Committee to be formed, and with the assistance of Communications Management Services, LLC (CMS), would develop the compensation philosophy for the district. Mr. Kerins answered any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding the information presented this evening.

2. **Annual Safety and Security Report**

Mr. Gary Myers, Director of Educational Technology, and Mr. Todd Verrill, Facilities Director, shared the Annual Safety and Security Report with the Board of Trustees and reviewed the information listed below:

**CYBERSECURITY**

- Updated Cybersecurity Incident Response Plan
- Attended tabletop training exercises for Cybersecurity response
- Migrated staff to 16 character, CISA-compliant passwords
- Updated half of district wireless access points to Wi-Fi 6 devices
- Implemented BrightArrow parent, staff, and student messaging system
- Conducted numerous “phishing” campaigns for staff detection training

**OTHER TECHNOLOGY / SECURITY**

- Provided training for new administrators and secretaries on access control and cameras
- Conducted yearly audit of doors and buzzers to ensure system integrity
- UPS battery audit for access systems
- Trained building administrators on scheduling door lock/unlock system

**SAFETY & SECURITY SYSTEMS**

- Added 21 new keyless entry points and 40 cameras at various schools
- Upgraded to InformaCast Fusion for rapid distribution of emergency notifications
- “Red” phone staff training completed (HHS, CHS, BRY). Planning to expand to the middle schools this year
- Quarterly tests of automated security systems and emergency dial codes. All systems functioned as expected
- New hallway security doors and quiet rooms for Bryant SPED

## **DRINKING WATER SAFETY**

- Schools are in compliance with State and Federal standards for water quality
- Started drinking water sampling for lead in April. All schools complete except CHS, HHS, CRA, HMS, BRY, CEN. The sampling deadline is December 2024
- Replaced Warren chlorination system. New chemical pumps and analytical instruments ensure water quality
- Replaced old sink fixtures and drinking fountains with new DEQ reimbursement

## **FIRE AND MEDICAL SAFETY**

- All buildings passed Fire Marshal inspections for 2023-2024
- Abraham Construction completed fire escape repairs and upgrades on six staircases at HMS, HHS, and CHS
- Fire extinguisher training with custodians, summer 2023 and 2024
- Installed 19 AEDs (donated by HPD). Worked with HSD nurses to develop SOP for inspections and training

## **GENERAL SAFETY**

- New playground structure installed at Hawthorne. Old structure was unsafe
- Completed annual playground inspections. Trained custodial staff and conducted weekly playground safety inspections throughout the school year
- Both high schools passed inspections by Montana Department of Labor

## **TRAINING AND EDUCATION**

- All schools completed their required practice emergency drills for the year which included 4 fire drills and 4 others.
- Conducted monthly new employee safety training
- Certified 50+ HSD employees in AED and CPR resuscitation
- District Crisis Procedure Manual updated and renamed Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)
- Participating in Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC), and MCRT with Lona Carter

## **SECURE ENVIRONMENT CONSULTANTS (SEC) REPORT (Executive Summary Points)**

- The district has put forth effort in developing and executing safety and security plans, and it currently provides a generally safe and secure environment for its staff and students
- SEC strongly recommends the district continue to pursue safety levy funding as the current state of security is desperately in need of updates
- The district has done a remarkable job of maintaining a safe and secure environment despite a lack of ability to make significant investments in improvements
- SEC commends the district on its strategy to enhance existing physical security measures and to expand on both safety and security related equipment and emergency protocol training regimens

## **SAFETY AWARD**

Helena Public Schools has been selected to receive the 2024 Governor’s Safety Achievement Award.

Mr. Myers and Mr. Verrill answered any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding the Annual Safety and Security Report.

### **3. Policy 5255: Disciplinary Action**

Ms. Ridgway presented for information to the Board of Trustees *Policy 5255: Disciplinary Action*. This policy is being revised to clarify that a supervisor does not have the authority to reprimand the Superintendent. Ms. Ridgway answered any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding *Policy 5255: Disciplinary Action*.

### **4. Policy 7055: Operations and Management of District Facilities**

Ms. Ridgway presented for information to the Board of Trustees *Policy 7055: Operations and Management of District Facilities*. This policy is being recommended for repeal. It is redundant given that there is a District Safety Policy (7060). Since the adoption of this policy the Board has adopted an entire series of policies that address School Facilities (9000 Series). Ms. Ridgway answered any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding *Policy 7055: Operations and Management of District Facilities*.

### **5. Policy 7515: Fund Balance**

Ms. Ridgway presented for information to the Board of Trustees *Policy 7515: Fund Balance*. This policy is being revised to increase the range the District maintains in the Committed General Fund Balance from 3% - 6% to 5% - 10%. The title Administrator for Business Operations has been revised to reflect the position’s current title – Director of Business Services / Clerk. Ms. Ridgway answered any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding *Policy 7515: Fund Balance*.

The Board of Trustees moved on to hear Reports.

## **D. REPORTS**

### **1. Student Representatives Report**

Ms. Adella Harris, Helena High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees, gave her Student Representative Report. Ms. Harris commented, “September at Helena High is always kicked off with the hum of the first week buzz, the excitement of Friday night lights, and homework. As students adjust to their new schedules and teachers and staff welcome them

with warm faces, our Bengal community is ready for the 2024-2025 school year. Big thank you to Mrs. Lunnon, Mrs. Lindgren, and Mrs. Walsh for another successful Bengal Beginnings Day. Each teacher brought an incredible amount of energy to welcome the Class of 2028 to Helena High and helped us start our school year off on an exciting note. Recently, Principal Brian Kessler was approached by one of our students who was hoping to find a way to build stronger connections between HHS students and those in our elementary schools on the East Side. From this, the Bengal Buddies program was born! We look forward to the growth of this club which will start to build ways for our high school students to spend time in our East Side elementaries, reading with students, forming a pen pal connection, engaging with kids at recess, and building the pride and excitement of becoming a Bengal one day. Through the great work of our school-based occupational therapist, Mrs. Marty Verrill, a grant has allowed us to open our resiliency lab this year. This lab space will allow for group training for both students and staff to work through coping strategies, resiliency work, and building a cooperative space for all to utilize when support is needed. Through this grant, we will also concentrate on using Heart Math Heart Rate Monitors. These heart rate monitors will help track student heart rates and be a visual representation for the students, when they are in a heightened state. The monitors will demonstrate how the various coping strategies help the students regulate and be able to work through tough situations. We would like to give a shoutout to our Indian Education Tutor, Ms. Terri Johnson, for the work she has been putting in the past few weeks. She has been in the process of meeting with the Office of Public Instruction, Helena Indian Alliance, Department of Labor and Industry, Helena Education Foundation, and more. Her goal is to continue building connections with these outside agencies to find ways to help our Native students find success and connection in school and to build awareness for all students in our building. There is a very exciting project brewing within this group that we will be excited to share more about at a later meeting once everything has been finalized. If you know our Bengals, you know they are always involved. Students who are part of the HHS choir sang the national anthem at the kickoff white out football game. Our year after year incredible pep band will make their first debut of the year at our homecoming football game and assembly the week of the 16th. Class of 2025 senior girls will be meeting Wednesday the 18th in a local park to spend time celebrating senior year together while they paint senior jeans for the homecoming game and assembly the following Friday. Lady and men Bengals soccer team face the Flathead Braves this upcoming Friday the 13th at Sibel Fields. Our golf team is hard at work competing two days a week across Montana upholding the Bengal name. The team is hosting the Helena Invite Tournament this Thursday and Friday. The lady's volleyball team faces Kalispell this Friday and Saturday. Bengals Cross Country hosts the biggest Helena invite of the season on October 10th at Bill Roberts Golf Course. It is a 7v7 meet where each of the top 7 varsity runners from the girls' and boys' teams have their own race against the other top competitors in the AA schools. This meet acts as a preview of the state meet for our Bengal runners. On top of keeping the competition on their toes, each and every one of these teams is busy fundraising for equipment and travel costs. If you are close with a Bengal athlete, we encourage you to seize the opportunity to support their passion and donate to their success! As for the current events within the school building: September 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> are our first major school-wide testing days. Freshmen and Sophomore students are taking their MAP assessments, while our juniors are getting practice through our online ACT Prep tests. September 17<sup>th</sup> will be our inaugural Open House and Block Party at HHS. Thanks to the excitement and desire of our staff to want to build an event that can help bring families to the building, we are attempting something new this year that will involve food trucks and games, a chance for parents to meet and interact with their student's teachers,

complete with a pep rally closing. We will highlight our fall teams, student musicians, and other clubs throughout the night. Everyone is invited to stop by and check out the great things we have going on at HHS! Lastly, and might I place an emphasize on most importantly, September is for homecoming at Helena High. The Student Council has been working class after class to make the week of the 16<sup>th</sup> special. The week will start with a dress up theme for students each day. On Friday, the students will meet for the first student council assembly of the year to highlight our sports teams, high achieving students, and new teachers. The festivities will continue when our Bengal football players take on the Hellgate Knights at our annual homecoming football game, where students will pack the stand dressed in Bengal gear. Student council members will be outside both entrances with spirit stations to guarantee Bengal fans are decked out to cheer the players onto victory. Lastly the week will end with our second Helena High homecoming dance on Saturday the 21<sup>st</sup>. September is certainly not a slow start for Bengal Country, and we wouldn't want it any other way.” Ms. Harris answered any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding her report.

Mr. Charlie Snellman, Capital High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees, gave his Student Representative Report. Mr. Snellman commented, “Capital High is off to yet another strong start! All classes have begun to pick-up pace after the review of course materials, syllabuses, and expectations. Most clubs have already met for the first time and will continue to get acquainted with new leaders and new members this week. I can already tell that this year will be ground-breaking and astronomically successful! CHS had its first instance of “intervention time” yesterday. Intervention time is a dedicated allotment of time that occurs every Monday between 2nd and 3rd periods. It is designed to provide targeted support and enrichment for all students. More specifically, all teachers will work closely with students to address specific areas of difficulty and provide enrichment opportunities to dive deeper into subjects of interest or more advanced topics. All freshmen will have a dedicated teacher/staff mentor that will take attendance and check-in with Capital’s youngest Bruins to help with any academic troubleshooting. The goal of intervention time is to improve overall academic performance on various assessments by addressing learning gaps and reinforcing key concepts. Academic performance will be evaluated considering skills that teachers determine essential during Monday PLC time discussions. For safety purposes, CHS held the first evacuation drill last Friday to the primary evacuation area – Northwest Park, which (despite the name) is located southeast from the main entrance to the school. This week we will be practicing the “shelter in place” drill and next week the “lock in place” drill. CHS HOSA officers are working on installing two enhanced Stop the Bleed stations that contain life-saving materials like tourniquets and gauze - a project that will help staff be better equipped to handle an incident of excessive bleeding. One kit will be placed in the main foyer directly adjacent to the AED and the other will be placed at a convenient location in the CTE building/shops. In the activities realm, CHS has already been particularly successful this year. So far, Bruin cross country has competed twice in preseason meets with a team of about 55 total runners. Bruin boys’ soccer is off to a positive start and only two games have been played thus far but we won them both by scores of 3-0 and 10-0. CHS is in the top two of the Western Conference currently and have a big game this Friday at home against Glacier who has always played us competitively. Bruin ladies’ soccer is also off to a great start, tied for 2nd in the Western Conference, and they have not lost a game yet! CHS Football has only played non-conference games thus far, with a record of 1-1. The first conference game is this Friday! While not at practice or the weight room, football athletes can be seen getting involved in small fry football, helping coach and mentor

younger athletes. At the annual Carnival Classic event on Sunday, CHS was well-represented among curricular and extracurricular clubs and activities like HOSA, STUCO, Key Club, Theater, orchestra, and football. The highlight of the event featured CHS football players and thespians performing their best Zumba moves on the Memorial Park band shell stage. On behalf of the staff and students at Capital High, we are excited to continue our fun and productive school year!” Mr. Snellman answered any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding his report.

2. **Helena Education Association Report**

There was no Helena Education Association Report this evening.

3. **Facilities & Technology Committee Report**

Trustee Jeff Hindoien gave the Facilities & Technology Committee Report. Trustee Hindoien commented, “Madam Chair, we met yesterday and as part of that meeting, we had the presentation and same safety and security report that was presented to the full board this evening. So, we went through that for a portion of our meeting, but we also had a separate technology update from Mr. Myers who noted that for September we started off the school year with a systemwide outage that we were able to resolve quickly and got things up and running. We went through a list of some of the things they've been doing in September. We have had to redeploy some of the Chromebook carts from the elementary to the middle school because, bluntly, not passing the tech levy has put us in that space with our hardware. The side effect of that is that there are fewer Chromebooks available in the elementary so now we are going to see more difficulty as far as getting through the standardized testing pieces that require those devices. The other thing we talked about is again not having the resources available to keep the hardware inventory rolling over. We’re now getting into a space as we move forward, we're going to have more and more devices that are just too old to continue to update and they're just going to be dropping off and out of the inventory. It is just a recognition of some of the realities we already talked about why we went out for a tech levy in the first place. The second portion of the meeting was Mr. Verrill providing us a very nice PowerPoint on all the extensive work that was done over the course of the summer, and I'd encourage everybody to go look at that. It's not until you sit through one of those meetings that you really realize and see the pictures and see the stats about how much work gets done by facility staff during that brief window of time when students aren't in the schools. We had multiple partial roof projects, the solar project at Bryant, and tons of work done in multiple elementaries and at both middle schools. Mr. Verrill touted about how many bathroom remodels were done that look brand new, and we also talked about the emergency exit stairs that were part of safety work that was done over the course of the summer. It was a great overview of everything that has been done over the course of the summer.” Trustee Hindoien answered any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding his report. Trustee Janet Armstrong asked if we have procedures in place for when there is lightning occurring outside during sports, and Mr. Tim McMahon discussed the procedures in place that the Helena Public Schools has for when there is lightning occurring during outside sports.

4. **Budget and Finance Committee Report**

Trustee Janet Armstrong gave the Budget and Finance Committee Report. Trustee Armstrong stated that the Board of Trustees was presented the ESSER Spend Down Report this evening which is what the Budget and Finance Committee discussed.

5. **Policy Committee Report**

Trustee Jennifer Walsh gave the Policy Committee Report. Trustee Walsh commented, “We had a great productive first meeting which was nice because it was concise and so we were able to get through the agenda and I think we were pretty effective in having the appropriate conversations for those. There were a couple that I wanted to pull out. The couple that we had today for information and for acting on, I'm going to kind of skip through those, but a couple of the fun ones were managing some of the communication type things. Talking about specifically email communication, when an email is deleted what does it look like for storage and when does it actually just come off everything so that we're not just completely clogging up all of our systems and so there were a lot of discussions about what that looks like and just kind of keeping in mind that we were developing the policy and then, of course, our awesome administration team was going through and actually taking care of the procedure process for that. I also liked the idea of when we looked at 7055 that we were looking for those redundancies, which I'm really hoping to continue and really make awareness of because oftentimes there's wording that's kind of this and kind of that. So, making sure that we're getting rid of those that are being addressed and oftentimes multiple other policies which don't necessarily need to be standalone. We did have conversations about drones, which also was pretty fun. There was a lot of questions about how that's defined, and drones have been an issue around public spaces, parks and that sort of thing, and it ventured out even further to say because we have the airport then those parameters expand out even further. Then we were talking about things like student privacy and being photographed. I think we did a pretty good job of looking through that, being thorough and then also looking at the school closure policy, we were making sure that we had a lot of good information surrounding what that looks like if we were to consider a school closure. It was inclusive of many things like with weather and some of the other stuff that might also mean that we need to have a school closure, but then also more of that permanency type thing too, when we must have notices and hearings and to me it felt very clear on what it looked like. Then finally, the 8100 Transportation Policy, is one we're trying to look at to see how can we expand and broaden the definition of the school to home because we have a lot of gaps when we're talking about moving like facility to facility or school to a program and then back to school and some of the challenges that come around with funding and things that are related to that.” Trustee Walsh answered any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding her report. The Board of Trustees and Superintendent Wertz had a robust discussion about transportation funding.

6. **Teaching & Learning Committee Report**

Trustee Kay Satre gave the Teaching & Learning Committee Report. Trustee Satre commented, “So we met on September 4<sup>th</sup>, and we did three main things during that meeting. First, we heard from Justine Alberts, who is our new Curriculum and Instruction Director, and Kaitlyn Hess who is our Data Assessment and Federal Programs Director about what to expect at our monthly Teaching and Learning committee meetings. Trustee McKee has always encouraged more of us to attend those because we get a good look at some of the nuts and



bolts that are going on in central activity in our district, and how teaching and learning is happening. Then they took us through a review of the district's seven main student achievement goals for the school year. Five of the goals are focused on skills in reading and math and they'll be tracked by a variety of assessments, given at first, third and seventh grade. Another goal focuses on eleventh grade ACT benchmarks and the last goal focuses on reducing suicidality across K-12. Overall literacy instruction will continue to be a key focus in the district, but math, it seems like it's moving into the foreground with the Eureka 2 curriculum adoption in K-5. Justine and Kaitlyn also presented the action plans that are in place to facilitate these goals for the district. They listed action plans for four main areas. The first one focused on instructional systems like school leadership teams, professional learning communities, and WIN groups. The second of those zoomed into thinking about how to make PLCs and WIN groups more effective and what I noticed about all the discussion in those two action plans was just emphasis on collaboration, communication being consistent across schools, across buildings, within buildings and then effectiveness. Two other focal points in the plans were community and family engagement and student belonging and safety. Then we heard briefly from the two TOSAs (Teachers On Special Assignment) Ashlie Buresh and Kayla Lunnon. They talked a little bit about how they're going to work across all facets of the district with central admin, principals, school leadership teams, professional communities, Math Instructional Coach Melissa Romano and the teachers. They are going to be the boots on the ground to enable progress on all the major teaching and learning goals. We concluded the meeting with the discussion of assessment tools. There was a little bit of talk about the benchmarking that had already happened the first days of school in reading and math. Then there was a review of the assessment tools that the district will be using this year: Acadience for grades K-1 reading, iReady for reading and math for grades 1-8, and then a new assessment tool called MAST for grades 9-10. Kaitlyn and Justine offered encouraging news that they felt like MAST had been improved over the summer since it's rollout last year. They also explained that the district would be continuing to use these other assessments, which marks student growth as opposed to the MAST assessment which kind of takes more of a look at a particular group of skills and knowledge. The hope is that we will be able to consolidate our testing with MAST once MAST adds on or is able to also incorporate tools that measure student learning growth. The last thing I wanted to do was just to acknowledge that earlier it was mentioned all the work that goes on during the summertime, it seemed like there was a lot of summer planning and professional development work that was put into motion by our curriculum and assessment people. It was shared that over 100 elementary teachers did summer professional development on Eureka 2, so that is pretty awesome. Thanks for all the good work here." Trustee Satre answered any questions the Teaching and Learning Committee had regarding her report. Ms. Kaitlyn Hess, Assessment and Federal Programs, gave a recap of the EL (English Learners) Community Night that Therese Tucker, EL Coordinator, hosted this evening.

7. **Health Benefits Committee Report**

Trustee Kay Satre gave the Health Benefits Committee Report. Trustee Satre commented, "We met August 29th and there was a pretty singular focus to this meeting, which was the renewal of our stop loss insurance, which is the insurance that our plan purchases. It basically takes over paying for claims after any individual on our plan has hit \$175,000 in claims. The committee had a presentation from Rob who is our Allegiance Rep, and we looked at several bids for our renewal. We decided to change our coverage from Unum to TMHCC. Our stop

loss insurance renewal is costing our plan more because a number of our members had very high claims over the past several years. So, moving our stop loss insurance to this other company would result in an overall 20% increase as compared with the 48% increase if we stayed with Unum. We had a good discussion about whether having stop loss insurance made financial sense because we have to pay around \$1.6 million for that stop loss insurance out of our plan. We discussed if our losses from high claims actually amount to the 1.6 million cost of premium, and guided by Allegiance and by Rich, we determined it does given high-cost treatments are becoming increasingly available and the fact that we don't have a deep enough unreserves account to offset unexpected but possibly very high cost. The unreserves at the end of June were at 1.7 million, so our unreserves account is not flush. We briefly raised the question of how people were responding to all the significant changes we made to the plan last year, and Rich said that we are still in open enrollment period and we are going to know more about what people are going to do with their plan when they come back to school. Rich said he had conversations with a few people who said they went to try and find other options and they came back and said what we are offering is less expensive than other options even though it has changed. Rich's office also sent out a health question survey to members which had been suspended during COVID, and I just think it's important to note that the survey is not about collecting individual data, but it's really for helping us get a sense of high need areas from our membership as a whole that we might want to target for additional support. We have identified some of those areas, but it helps us to know our people are self-reporting more concerns about mental health, diabetes, and other kinds of issues. Rex has said the state health trust discussion will be on Thursday of this week, so stay tuned on that topic.” Trustee Satre answered any questions the Trustees had regarding her report.

8. **Wellness Committee Report**

There was no Wellness Committee report this evening.

9. **Montana School Boards Association Report**

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn stated that the Montana School Boards Association is working on getting some delegates to work in the 2025 legislature and they have several people that are interested.

10. **Parent Council Visit Reports**

There was no Parent Council Visit Reports this evening.

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

## **VIII. UPCOMING MEETINGS**

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn reviewed upcoming meetings with the Board of Trustees.

- Wednesday, September 18<sup>th</sup>, Board of Trustees Staff Orientation, 10:45 a.m., Lincoln Center
- Tuesday, September 24<sup>th</sup>, Board of Trustees Work Session, Central Elementary, 11:30 a.m.
  
- Tuesday, October 1<sup>st</sup>, Policy Committee Meeting, 12:00 p.m., Lincoln Center
- Wednesday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>, Teaching & Learning Committee Meeting, 12:00 p.m., Lincoln Center
- Monday, October 7<sup>th</sup>, Facilities & Technology Committee Meeting, 12:00 p.m., Lincoln Center
- Tuesday, October 8<sup>th</sup>, Budget & Finance Committee Meeting, 12:00 p.m., Lincoln Center
- Tuesday, October 8<sup>th</sup>, Full Board Meeting, 5:30 p.m., Lincoln Center

## **IX. BOARD COMMENTS**

There was a brief conversation regarding if the Student Representatives can attend Board of Trustees Committee meetings if their schedules allow and there were no further board comments after that.

## **X. ADJOURNMENT**

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn adjourned the meeting at 8:40 p.m.

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Candice Delvaux, Recording Secretary      Date