



*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 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024

11:30 a.m. Tour of Central Elementary followed by  
Business & TEAMS Portion of the Meeting at 12:00 p.m.

### MINUTES

#### ATTENDEES

<i>Trustees</i>	<i>Others</i>
Siobhan Hathhorn, Board Chair	Rex Wertz, Superintendent
Jennifer Walsh, Trustee	Janelle Mickelson, Business Manager
Linda Cleatus, Trustee	Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent
Rachel Robison, Trustee	Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director
Kay Satre, Trustee	Candice Delvaux, Executive Assistant
Janet Armstrong, Trustee	Gary Myers, Director of Educational Technology
Charlie Snellman, Student Board Representative	Jane Shawn, HEA President
	Nick Radley, Central Principal
	Lisa Cordingley, HEF Director
	Karen Ogden, Communications Officer
	Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff
	Kaitlyn Hess, Assessment & Federal Programs
	Tim McMahon, Activities Director
	Sol Jones, C.R. Anderson Assistant Principal
	Kathleen Prody, C.R. Anderson Principal
	Lona Carter, Student Services Director
	Wynn Randall, Rossiter Principal
	Several Guests of the Public
	Several Central Elementary Staff Members
	Several HSD Employees

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

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn called the meeting to order at 12:01 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 suggested changes.

The Board of Trustees moved on to General Public Comment.

**III. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no general public comment.

The Board of Trustees moved on to view a presentation given by Principal Nick Radley, Principal of Central Elementary School.

**IV. PRESENTATION**

Principal Nick Radley shared a brochure about Central Elementary and reviewed the details of the brochure. The brochure begins with the mission of Central Elementary. The primary purpose of Central School is to provide a high-quality education. It is our goal to provide that education in a safe, respectful learning environment that supports the lifelong process of becoming a productive, caring citizen. Next, Principal Radley discussed the core leadership teams at Central Elementary. The School Leadership Team designs action plan goals around teaching and learning, and regularly reviews data around engagement, learning and WIN. The MTSS-B team provides a framework designed to help students reach their full academic and social-emotional potential. Academic behavior includes the actions, attitudes, and habits that lead to success in school. The Care Team is dedicated to enhancing school morale by organizing engaging activities and fostering a supportive environment for students and staff. They aim to create a vibrant and inclusive school community year-round through thoughtful planning and collaboration.

Principal Radley reviewed the school demographics at Central Elementary. There are 32 students enrolled in kindergarten, 18 in kindergarten Montessori, 33 students enrolled in 1<sup>st</sup> grade, 34 students enrolled in 2nd grade, 35 students enrolled in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, 36 students enrolled in Lower Montessori, 36 students enrolled in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, 34 students enrolled in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, 24 students enrolled in Upper Montessori, 10 students enrolled in the Functional Life Skills program, 11 students enrolled in the Trailhead 1 program, and 9 students enrolled in the Trailhead 2 program for a total enrollment of 312 students.

Principal Radly reviewed action plan goals for Central Elementary.

Reading:

- By May 2024, 73% of students will score on/above benchmark on iReady (71%)
- Move 13 students from below benchmark to on/above benchmark
- Move 2 students per classroom from below benchmark to on/above benchmark
- By May 2024, 60% of students will score on/above benchmark SBAC (60%)

Math:

- By May 2024, 57% of students will score on/above benchmark on iReady (64%)
- Move 23 students from below benchmark to on/above
- Move 2 students per classroom from below benchmark to on/above benchmark
- By May 2024, 50% of students will score on/above benchmark on SBAC (47%)

Additional Goals:

Care Team: Students/student focus groups provide a voice in decision-making in the school.

- Student Council
- 5th Grade Focus Group

IEFA: Indian Education for All is integrated into all grade-level subjects and courses.

- Family Engagement
- IEFA Monthly Email

SLT: Students are involved in setting individual learning goals.

MTSS: Blending the tools and strategies on MTSS and PAX.

Next, Principal Radley review academic performance data for Central Elementary including Smarter Balanced ELA, Smarter Summative Math, Smarter Balanced Science, iReady Reading, and iReady Math.

Principal Radley concluded his presentation by discussing Central's family engagement. Central School offers a strong Title I family engagement plan designed to involve and enrich the school community. The plan includes engaging activities like Family Reading and Math Nights, where families come together to support student learning. It also features hands-on science experiences in coordination with STARBASE, bringing STEM learning to life for students and families alike. In addition, Central promotes cultural learning through Indian Education for All, providing opportunities for families to explore and engage with our shared history and heritage. These programs aim to strengthen family connections to the school, fostering an enriching, collaborative learning environment for students and their families. Family engagement events at Central include: Heritage Month, Ruby Bridges (parent council), Bike to School, ReStore/Central Essentials, Coffee with the Principal, Monthly Make and Take, I Love to Read Month, Family Folk Dance, STEM Night with STARBASE, Resource Fair, Beyond Earth Family Event, Sweetie Pie (parent council), and 90's Bash (parent council).

Principal Nick Radley answered any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding his presentation or about the school. Principal Radley recognized the school's strong sense of community and the importance of diverse perspectives in enriching the educational experience. The Trustees expressed appreciation for the staff's dedication to connecting with students on a personal level and for their ongoing efforts to create a supportive learning environment.

A few of the Central Elementary staff members commented and emphasized the importance of maintaining connections with students and discussed the challenges of managing classrooms with over 30 students, and expressed there is a need for effective strategies to engage all students. Concerns were raised about the impact of staffing changes on classroom management and the ability to implement targeted instruction. Innovative teaching approaches were shared, including small group rotations and whole group instruction and emphasis was placed on adjusting teaching methods based on student needs and goals. The concept of building relationships as foundational to effective teaching was highlighted, underscoring that understanding students as individuals enhances instructional success. There was a robust discussion about the Eureka Math implementation and the challenges faced with the new curriculum, and the educators noted a significant learning curve as they adapted to teaching this new material. They acknowledged that adapting to a new curriculum often leads to initial struggles, with expectations for a temporary decline in performance as teachers and students adjust. There is a shared commitment among educators to continue improving their teaching strategies and support one another through this transition. There was also a discussion on the need for more staff to reduce student-to-adult ratios, enhancing the ability to meet educational needs effectively. The current funding levels were noted as a barrier to achieving this. There were also concerns raised regarding budget cuts affecting music and physical education (P.E.) programs, leading to a more rigid schedule and reduced student experiences. It was brought up that staff shortages, particularly in paraprofessional support, have led to operational challenges within the school, including lunch supervision issues.

The trustees stated that they are committed to advocating for better funding and resources, with several board members serving as delegates to the legislature. The board recognizes the tough times and ongoing challenges but appreciates the staff's efforts to maintain a positive educational environment for students. There was a robust conversation on the challenges staff face regarding mental well-being, particularly due to additional responsibilities and second jobs. Many educators are working long hours and feel the pressure of financial constraints, leading to burnout and stress. The rising cost of living has led to many staff members taking on second jobs to make ends meet. This trend is becoming increasingly common and affects morale, and concerns were raised about how the district's funding affects teacher retention and recruitment, with some educators feeling the impact of low salaries compared to inflation.

There was a robust conversation about budget cuts. Budget cuts have resulted in reduced programs (e.g., music and P.E.), leading to a more rigid schedule and fewer opportunities for student engagement and the board acknowledged the difficulties of navigating budget constraints while striving to maintain educational quality. Superintendent Weltz and the

trustees discussed the need for increased advocacy for better funding and support from state legislators to address these issues. The importance of having representatives who understand educational needs and challenges was emphasized.

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

## V. NEW BUSINESS

### A. Consent Action Items

1. Approval of Multidistrict Cooperative Agreement 2025-2027
2. Approval of FY 2024-25 Out-Of-District Attendance Agreements (Non-Resident Students Attending HPS)
3. Personnel Actions

Siobhan Hathhorn, Board Chair, commented. "I would entertain a motion for the Consent Action Items as presented."

**Motion:** Trustee Kay Satre moved to approve the Consent Action Items as presented. Trustee Janet Armstrong seconded the motion.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Vote:** 6-0 motion carries unanimously.

The Board of Trustees moved on to review the Item for Action.

### B. Item for Action

#### 1. Approval of a General Wage Increase for Administrators

Background:

Attracting and retaining top talent in the current job market is more challenging than ever. Salary is a significant factor for candidates evaluating job offers and for current employees considering their long-term career prospects. To maintain our position as an employer of choice and attract the best candidates, we must align our compensation packages to reflect industry standards. Administrator positions have not seen a salary increase over the last four years. A general wage increase for the administrative staff is in line with current market conditions and will support maintaining competitive salaries. Investing in competitive salaries is a direct reflection of our commitment of acknowledging and rewarding the valuable contributions of our current employees. A well-compensated workforce is likely to be engaged, motivated, and dedicated to their roles, resulting in

increased productivity and higher morale across the organization. Moreover, competitive compensation fosters loyalty and reduces turnover risk, thereby promoting continuity and stability within our workforce. The total estimated salary cost to the general fund is \$45,000 for the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

Superintendent recommendation:

Approve a 1.5% increase to the salary matrix for administrators to remain competitive in the market, enhance recruitment efforts, retain our current talent, and promote equity across all employee groups.

Jim Kerins, Managing Consultant, with Communication and Management Services, LLC provided a memo for the Board of Trustees Work Session agenda. The memo states:

*After a thorough review of contemporary wage survey data and preliminary work on the district's compensation philosophy, we recommend a 1.5% wage increase for the administrative staff of the Helena School District. This adjustment is in line with current market conditions and will support the district in maintaining competitive salaries while not significantly exceeding the market rates for comparable roles. This adjustment aligns with the Helena School District's compensation philosophy by maintaining a competitive market position, helping to recruit and retain top talent. It reflects a commitment to internal equity, ensuring appropriate pay relationships based on experience and responsibility, while also addressing wage compression. The increase is fiscally responsible, considering budget constraints. This recommendation represents a balanced approach, maintaining competitiveness in the market and supporting the district's long-term financial and operational goals. This recommendation represents a conservative adjustment in consideration of wage growth and inflation during the past year. Please let me know if you have any questions or if you would like to further discuss this recommendation.*

Superintendent Weltz stated that the administrative team has not received a salary increase in four years, unlike other payroll groups that have had step increases. The recommendation of 1.5% serves as an attempt to provide some relief to the administrative staff who have been impacted by these freezes. A suggestion was made by a trustee for the district to create a chart outlining the groups that have received adjustments, which will help clarify the status of each group's compensation and ensure transparency. The trustees and Superintendent Weltz expressed their appreciation for the hard work of the administrative team and other staff during challenging times.

Siobhan Hathhorn, Board Chair, commented. "I would entertain a motion for action item number one, *Approval of a General Wage Increase for Administrators.*"

**Motion:** Trustee Janet Armstrong moved to approve action item number one, *Approval of a 1.5% General Wage Increase for Administrators.* Trustee Kay Satre seconded the motion.

**Public Comment:** Ms. Jane Shawn, HEA President, gave general public comment. Ms. Shawn commented on topics including but not limited to stating that she does not believe that the current administrative pay scale, with or without a 1.5% increase, is the best scale to continue to recruit and retain the quality administrators we need and deserve in our district. Ms. Shawn noted that percentage increases for different employee groups spell very different realities for our employees this past year and that with the administrators' increase the raise would more than offset their health insurance expenses, but in contrast, for paraeducators it would not cover their increased insurance costs, potentially resulting in lower overall compensation compared to the previous year. Ms. Shawn highlighted the current challenges in attracting paraeducators, noting that the pool of applicants has dwindled to zero and urged the board to consider these disparities and the overall compensation philosophy as they make decisions moving forward.

**Vote:** 6-0 motion carries unanimously.

The Board of Trustees moved on to hear any final board comments.

**VI. BOARD COMMENTS**

There were no further board comments.

**VII. ADJOURNMENT**

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn adjourned the meeting at 1:14 p.m.

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Candice Delvaux, Recording Secretary