



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, October 8th, 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 Director
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
Lona Carter, Student Health Services & Special Education
Karen Ogden, Communications Officer
Brian Kessler, Helena High School Principal
Wynn Randall, Rossiter Elementary 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 5:31 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. REVIEW AGENDA

The Board of Trustees reviewed the agenda and there were no suggested changes.

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

III. PRESENTATION

The Board of Trustees reviewed a presentation given by Ms. Janet Riis, Executive Director of the Angel Fund. Ms. Riis shared some amazing highlights from Angel Fund for the 2023-2024 year:

- \$47,978 was granted to Helena area schools to purchase much needed supplies in bulk locally.
- 909 students had new school clothes to start school and feel confident!
- 17 students were awarded post-secondary scholarships totaling \$38,000 to attend Montana college (10 freshman and 7 renewals).
- 167 students received new running shoes for PE class and for playing outside.
- \$11,747 raised from their Greater Helena Gives Campaign.
- \$17,620 fundraised at their On Broadway dinner and silent auction surpassing all previous years!
- \$16,968 fundraised at their inaugural Dueling Pianos appearance!
- 26 Angel Coordinators in the Helena School District helped students buy brand name clothes October through November through our local partners (Walmart, Old Navy, Target & TJ Maxx).

Ms. Riis answered any questions the trustees had regarding her presentation. The Board of Trustees moved on to hear the Superintendent's Report.

IV. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

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

- Recognition
 - o Walk, Bike, & Roll To School Day
 - o September 17th National IT Professional Day
 - o October 2nd National Custodian/Maintenance Appreciation Day
 - o October 6th National Coaches Day
 - o October is National Principal Month
 - o Thank you to Lisa Cordingley and the Helena Education Foundation for hosting "Fabulous Firsts" literacy events across the district.
 - o Congratulations to our CHS and HHS National Merit Semi-Finalists!!

- o Thank you to Principal Nick Radley and the staff and students at Central Elementary School for a great Board of Trustees Work Session at Central.
- o Thank you to members of the CTE departments at both Capital High School and Helena High School for creating an opportunity for students to explore construction jobs and interact with members of those industries through the Digger Days Event. Special thanks to the Helena Area Chamber of Commerce, Freedom Fabrication and Excavation, Valley View Lawn and Landscape, and all the local business participants who made this event possible.
- o Fourth-graders from across the district visited the fairgrounds for a sneak peek at the pre-pow wow Demonstration Day for teachers and students. This yearly outing is part of our district's Indian Education for All program—a day of celebration, learning and fun as students explore Native American culture.
- o Project for Alternative Learning Charter School students took their annual field trip to explore the Gates of the Mountains. Thank you, Rocky Mountain Credit Union, for making this adventure possible!
- New Business
 - o October 10th Steering Committee-HPS Compensation Philosophy Meeting
 - o Teacher / Staff & Administration Mental Health Support Initiative
 - o Adult/Community Education Focus
 - o 504 Training For Principals & Administrators with Bea Kaleva
 - o Official Enrollment Count
 - o Statewide Health Trust Discussion
 - o 2024 Fall Conference-MASS, MCASE, MACSS
 - o Budget Update
- Outreach/Meetings
 - o Parent Advisory Committee
 - o Teacher Advisory Committee
 - o AA Superintendents
 - o Lincoln Center District Updates
 - o Board Leadership
 - o Rotary Club
 - o CMS Comp. Study
 - o Hometown Helena
 - o MQEC Board of Directors Meeting
 - o Lifetime Sports CHS Class Fieldtrip
 - o HSD/HEA Meeting
 - o Cabinet & Leadership
 - o TV, Print, Radio Media
- Other
 - o October 17th and 18th – MFPE Educator Conferences- No School

Superintendent Wertz shared that the district would like to run a 10-year technology levy in May of 2025 and Mr. Gary Myers, Director of Educational Technology, presented additional information to the Board of Trustees regarding the proposed levy. Mr. Myers highlighted the need for increased funding for technology in the district, contrasting current expenditures with the original technology levy passed in 2004. Currently, the district allocates approximately \$1.9 million for technology, while full funding needs are estimated at nearly \$3.5 million. This funding is necessary for essential replacements and staffing for repairs. The current levy provides about \$1.1 million, leading to an impact on interlocal funding of approximately \$900,000. If all technology needs were met, this impact would rise to around \$2.4 million. Mr. Myers emphasized the importance of effectively communicating these needs to the community in anticipation of a proposed new levy, ensuring clarity about the district's technology funding situation.

Mr. Myers discussed the technology budget and stated that key areas heavily impacted by funding constraints include licensing services, which are essential and cannot be significantly reduced. Staffing also poses challenges; a position was cut a year and a half ago, and further reductions would hinder the ability to repair devices effectively. Mr. Myers pointed out critical funding gaps in device replacement and infrastructure improvements. Annual spending of around \$800,000 is needed for replacing Chromebooks and teacher laptops, as well as for network upgrades like wiring and switches. Without consistent annual funding, the district risks facing large expenditures every few years, potentially \$5 million for wiring upgrades across elementary schools or \$2-3 million for device replacements. This approach is inefficient and complicates long-term budget planning.

Mr. Myers introduced the concept of the "device cliff," highlighting concerns about the aging technology in the district. During COVID, the district utilized ESSER and emergency connectivity funds to purchase a significant number of Chromebooks and teacher devices, resulting in a temporary surplus. However, as the pandemic recedes, many of these devices are now three to five years old, which is considered a long lifespan for student technology. Mr. Myers noted that devices have faced substantial wear and tear, especially as they were frequently sent home with students. While most students take care of their devices, the impact of frequent use is evident. Teacher laptops, many of which are six to seven years old, are becoming inefficient due to insufficient memory, affecting their usability in the classroom. Mr. Myers expressed concern about the lack of funding for necessary device replacements, emphasizing that this issue is a significant worry for the future of the district's technology infrastructure.

Mr. Myers discussed that the proposed 10-year technology levy for the elementary will be around \$2,711,000 and the existing levy is \$520,500 for an increase of \$2,190,500. In the high school the proposed 10 year technology levy will be \$1,442,000 and the existing levy is at \$559,500 for an increase of \$882,500. The total proposed 10-year levy increase will be around 17.22 mills in the elementary, and 8.38 in the high school. For a \$100,000 house it will be an increase of \$23.25 a year for the elementary, a \$69.74 yearly increase for a \$300,000 house, and a yearly increase of \$139.48 for a \$600,000 house. In the high school for a \$100,000 house, it will be a yearly increase of \$11.31, for a \$300,000 house it will be a yearly increase of \$33.94, and for a \$600,000 house it will be a yearly increase of \$67.88.

Mr. Myers shared election results and informal election feedback from the most recent levy and stated that only 1,200 additional votes would have been needed for the levy to pass. Some of the informal feedback included concerns about the property tax burden, the overall high cost of the previous levy compared to other AA districts, and the nature of the safety and security levy as a permanent request. Additionally, there were sentiments expressed about the expectation for state-level funding for certain needs. Mr. Myers emphasized the importance of giving the community an opportunity to support the district's funding needs while recognizing the challenges ahead in garnering that support.

Trustee Janet Armstrong asked Mr. Myers to paint the picture of what it looks like in our classrooms for our students when we cannot keep up with replacing Chromebooks. Mr. Myers explained that currently, there is approximately one device for every two students in elementary schools. This scarcity necessitates a strict scheduling system for state-mandated assessments, which disrupts classroom activities and increases planning demands on teachers. Furthermore, accessing the online components of the curriculum and conducting digital assessments has become more complicated, leading to difficulties in lesson delivery.

Mr. Myers concluded his presentation by answering any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding the proposed technology levy.

Superintendent Wertz and the Board of Trustees had a robust conversation about the Steering Committee that has been formed for the Helena Public Schools Compensation Philosophy development. With direction from the board to move ahead with as much equity and predictability as possible, the district hired CMS consultants, a local, third-party Human Resource firm, to provide employee compensation data and salary recommendations. The steering committee was established to address compensation within the school district, responding to the need for a clear compensation philosophy. The committee includes representatives from various employee groups (custodians, secretaries, teachers, paraeducators, administrators, and trustees) with about 20 to 25 participants. The committee aims to create a philosophy that outlines salary ranges to ensure consistency and inform future decisions. CMS will compile recommendations based on stakeholder input, which will then be presented to the board for review and approval. The process is ongoing, with a second steering committee meeting planned for October 10, indicating a commitment to transparency and stakeholder engagement in compensation discussions. The discussion emphasized the importance of a consistent approach to compensation, especially during challenging budgetary times.

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

V. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Emily Petrik gave general public comment. Ms. Petrik is an educator at Helena High School. Ms. Petrik’s public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to stress and mental health, stress contagion and its effects, and how stress can impact students’ mental health and behaviors. Ms. Petrik concluded her public comment by expressing a desire to return to a future meeting and present further research on how stress affects teachers and students, with the goal of fostering a supportive and interconnected school community. She urged the board to prioritize mental health and well-being as part of their vision for the future.

Ms. Courtney McAdams gave general public comment. Ms. McAdams is the parent of a Capital High School graduate and the parent of a middle school student in the district. Ms. McAdams’s public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to her belief that there is a lack of academic performance discussions at the board meetings, a lack of board focus on academic priorities, concerns regarding middle school academic performance, curriculum and instructional concerns, and requesting for the district and board to share more academic data and provide clear plans to address the achievement gaps, especially in middle school.

Mr. Thomas Baty gave general public comment. Mr. Baty is an educator in the district and the parent of a first-grade student in the district. Mr. Baty’s public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to the financial challenges facing the district, urging the Board of Trustees to take a more active leadership role in advocating for changes to the state’s school funding model, and the urgency of addressing funding and support for public education.

Ms. Moffie Funk gave general public comment. Ms. Funk is a parent of two Helena Public School district graduates and has a grandson in kindergarten in the district. Ms. Funk’s public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to appreciation for district and board leadership and efforts, teacher stress and support, the importance of funding for teacher support, addressing student stress and anxiety, advocacy for legislative action, and Ms. Funk praised the strong advocacy and leadership of the two Student Board Representatives.

That concluded general public comment, and the Board of Trustees moved on to review the Consent Action Items.

VI. 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. 9.10.24 Board of Trustees 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 Kay Satre seconded the motion.
Public Comment: None.
Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

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

B. Items for Action

1. Approval and Ratification of the Helena Secretaries Association and Helena Public Schools Collective Bargaining Contract

Ms. Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director for Helena Public Schools, presented the action item, *Approval and Ratification of the Helena Secretaries Association and Helena Public Schools Collective Bargaining Contract*, to the Board of Trustees.

Background:

Pursuant to MCA 39-31-306, an agreement reached by the public employer and the exclusive representative must be reduced to writing and must be executed by both parties. The Helena School District and the Helena Secretaries Association Local #8500 of the Montana Federation of Public Employees (MFPE) reached a tentative agreement on July 30, 2024. The Secretaries ratified the tentative agreement to the contract on September 13, 2024, and notified us on September 19, 2024. The District negotiation team recommends ratification. The three (3) year agreement was open for language and wages for July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2027, with an agreement for annual wage reopeners. A summary of the conditions of the contract is noted below. Upon the Board's approval, a final copy will be made available electronically.

- The District shall continue to contribute to the employee cafeteria plan an amount of \$1,031.90 per month/\$12,382.80 per benefit year for 12-month staff and \$1,238.28 per month/\$12,382.80 per benefit year for 10-month staff.
- A one and a half percent (1.5%) increase in each cell of the salary schedule for the 2024-2025 fiscal year. The Grade II base wage increases from \$18.16 to \$18.43 per hour and the Grade III base wage increases from \$18.85 to \$19.13 per hour. Grade I on the salary schedule to be removed.
- Allowance for all secretaries to have the option to have vacation credits in excess of 130 hours cashed out once per year to be paid in June.
- Seniority will be calculated based on an employee's length of continuous service with the District, not the employee's assigned department.
- The total estimated salary cost of this settlement is approximately \$28,088 for the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

Considerations:

- HPS and the Secretaries have a collaborative relationship and productive negotiations history.
- This agreement supports the directive of the Board to support our staff members and address issues relative to the district budget.

Superintendent recommendation: Approve and ratify the collective bargaining agreement as agreed upon between HPS and the Secretaries.

Ms. Mizell answered any questions the trustees had regarding the Helena Secretaries Association and Helena Public Schools Collective Bargaining Contract.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the *Helena Secretaries Association and Helena Public Schools Collective Bargaining Contract* as presented.”

Motion: Trustee Linda Cleatus moved to approve the *Helena Secretaries Association and Helena Public Schools Collective Bargaining Contract* as presented. Trustee Jennifer Walsh seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

2. **Policy 5255: Disciplinary Action**

Ms. Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff, presented the action item *Policy 5255: Disciplinary Action* to the Board of Trustees. 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 trustees had regarding this policy.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve *Policy 5255: Disciplinary Action* as presented.”

Motion: Trustee Kay Satre moved to approve *Policy 5255: Disciplinary Action* as presented. Trustee Jeff Hindoien seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

3. **Policy 7055: Operation and Maintenance of District Facilities**

Ms. Ridgway presented the action item *Policy 7055: Operation and Maintenance of District Facilities* to the Board of Trustees. This policy is being recommended for repeal. It is redundant given that there is a District Safety Policy (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 trustees had regarding this policy.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to repeal *Policy 7055: Operation and Maintenance of District Facilities*.”

Motion: Trustee Jeff Hindoien moved to repeal *Policy 7055: Operation and Maintenance of District Facilities*. Trustee Jennifer McKee seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

4. **Policy 7515: Fund Balance**

Ms. Ridgway presented the action item *Policy 7515: Fund Balance* to the Board of Trustees. 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 trustees had regarding this policy. Trustee Kay Satre asked if the rationale for wanting to increase the range could please be explained. Ms. Janelle Mickelson, Business Director for Helena Public Schools, explained that this is the operating reserve in the general fund and by law you can have up to 10% in there. There are some exceptions that you can go above 10%, but 10% is the max, and we are approaching that in the high school and so it made sense to increase the range so we are not limited.

The Board of Trustees listened to public comment for this action item.

Public Comment: Ms. Jane Shawn gave public comment. Ms. Shawn is the HEA President and stated that she is reading comments tonight from the HEA bargaining team. Ms. Shawn’s public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to expressing concerns about increasing reserve levels, the existing challenges facing educators including financial strain, urging the district to focus on using funds to meet immediate needs, rather than increasing reserves, and suggesting the board reassess reserve levels when the district is in a more stable financial position.

Ms. Janelle Mickelson commented on topics including but not limited to stating that this is just the range and it is just saying that if we wanted to go to 10% we can. We are not increasing the operating reserves with this policy, we are increasing what we could go to. Ms. Mickelson explained to the Board of Trustees what the committed general fund balance is.

The trustees commented on topics including but not limited to acknowledging the concerns of the staff and while trustees were generally in favor of ensuring financial stability through reserves, there was a shared concern about balancing immediate needs with long-term sustainability, especially given the district’s current financial challenges and uncertainties around future state funding.

Ms. Erika McMillin gave public comment. Ms. McMillin is an employee of the school district and a member of the bargaining team. Ms. McMillin’s public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to concerns about the district’s financial priorities. Ms. McMillin emphasized that while the district may be striving to maintain certain reserve levels, many elementary schools are struggling, and budget cuts have directly impacted students’ daily experiences and urged the board to consider the impact on students, especially if further budget cuts are anticipated in the future.

Ms. Mickelson, and the Board of Trustees had a robust conversation about the use of reserves with a recognition of the complexities and pressures involved in financial decision-making.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve *Policy 7515: Fund Balance* as presented.”

Motion: Trustee Linda Cleatus moved to approve *Policy 7515: Fund Balance* as presented. Trustee Janet Armstrong seconded the motion.

Public Comment: The Public Comment was given above.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

5. **Board of Trustees’ Response to Staff Communication Regarding Administrator Compensation**

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn presented the action item *Board of Trustees’ Response to Staff Communication Regarding Administrator Compensation* to the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees discussed the topic of administrator compensation, with a particular focus on sending an informational letter to all district staff regarding the history of administrator pay and address concerns about recent compensation adjustments. The Superintendent and other staff members provided context for the board, explaining that administrators had experienced stagnant compensation for an extended period—about 20 years—prior to recent adjustments. This led to concerns about recruitment and retention, and in response, the district adjusted administrator pay, including market analyses and compensation studies. The board also froze compensation for several years after addressing initial pay disparities.

The trustees had a robust discussion about several important issues including but not limited to public education, its funding, and the broader societal challenges that impact it, the complexity of information and communication in the district, statewide effort and community support, and the importance of fostering mutual understanding and cooperation for the benefit of the students and the community. Chair Hathhorn discussed several important issues including not but limited to praising the board’s commitment and transparency in serving the district, highlighting that the board members are volunteers who dedicate significant time and effort, concerns about recent public statements and clarification of that information. Chair Hathhorn urged staff and community members to verify information before making public statements and encouraged reaching out to union

representatives or board members to clarify any misunderstandings. Chair Hathhorn stressed the importance of district staff and the board working together to resolve issues and concluded by underscoring that school financing is a complex issue and emphasized the need for all stakeholders to seek a full understanding before making judgments or engaging in public criticism.

The Board of Trustees had a robust discussion on important topics including but not limited to emphasizing the importance of informing staff about the history and rationale behind administrator compensation. One trustee expressed the view that staff should take some responsibility for staying informed by reviewing meeting minutes and board agendas. Trustees discussed the time and effort they personally dedicate to their roles, including attending meetings, doing research, and making sacrifices in their personal lives. They conveyed that despite their voluntary status, they are committed to serving the district and being available for communication. The trustees were in agreement to move forward with a communication letter to ensure staff are informed about the history of administrator compensation.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item *Board of Trustees’ Response to Staff Communication Regarding Administrator Compensation.*”

Motion: Trustee Linda Cleatus moved to approve the action item *Board of Trustees’ Response to Staff Communication Regarding Administrator Compensation.* Trustee Kay Satre seconded the motion.

Trustee Jennifer Walsh acknowledged a previous comment she made at a work session expressing surprise about an agenda item. She clarified that despite her initial surprise, she took proactive steps to reach out to someone for further information and gain a better understanding of the issue before the meeting. Trustee Walsh emphasized that this effort allowed her to be well-informed and prepared to vote appropriately on the matter.

Board Chair Hathhorn discussed the structure and purpose of the board's work sessions, explaining that these sessions are designed to address more complex issues that require in-depth discussion. She noted that the sessions are scheduled during the school day, a decision made to accommodate staff, especially administrators and teachers, who appreciated the opportunity to present without needing to attend after-hours meetings. However, Chair Hathhorn, suggested the board may want to revisit the format and timing of these sessions to better handle complex discussions in the future.

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. Policy 3015: Attendance and Truancy

Ms. Ridgway presented for information to the Board of Trustees *Policy 3015: Attendance and Truancy*. When the Policy Committee reviewed this policy they determined with the advice of Ms. Kaleva, Legal Counsel for the District, Montana Code Annotated citations would be added to the policy along with cross references to policies 3010 and 3141. Ms. Ridgway answered any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding *Policy 3015: Attendance and Truancy*.

2. Policy 3020: Education of Homeless Youth

Ms. Ridgway presented for information to the Board of Trustees *Policy 3020: Education of Homeless Youth*. When the Policy Committee reviewed this policy it was determined that some of the language in the policy was outdated and changed the language on line 12 which states *welfare hotels* to be changed to *temporary housing* and changed the language on line 13 which states the *mentally ill* to be changed to *those with mental illness*. Ms. Ridgway answered any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding *Policy 3020: Education of Homeless Youth*.

Trustee Janet Armstrong discussed the district's policy on the education of homeless youth, emphasizing that while it is a positive initiative, it also reflects broader issues related to administrative responsibilities. Trustee Armstrong pointed out that districts are often accused of "administrative bloat" due to the expansion of roles and responsibilities, but in this case, the directive to appoint a liaison for homeless youth and ensure their enrollment and attendance is a mandate from the state. Trustee Armstrong noted that while the policy is important for supporting vulnerable students, it highlights how districts are increasingly tasked with duties that were previously handled by other social services. This shift results in additional administrative functions that the district must staff and manage.

3. Policy 3023: Education of Children in Foster Care

Ms. Ridgway presented for information to the Board of Trustees *Policy 3023: Education of Children in Foster Care*. When the Policy Committee reviewed this policy, it was determined that some of the language in the policy was outdated and changed the language throughout the policy that states *child welfare agency* or *child protective agencies* to be updated to *child protective services*. Ms. Ridgway answered any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding *Policy 3023: Education of Children in Foster Care*.

4. Activities & Athletics Update-Tim McMahon, Activities Director

Mr. Tim McMahon, Activities Director for Helena Public Schools, provided a summary of the district's athletics and activities programs, including participation data for last year and this year, as well as an update on the driver's education program. Last year, 636 students at Capitol High School participated in activities, with 48% female and 52% male and at Helena High, 786 students participated in activities, with 52% male and 48% female, reflecting a gender balance

similar to the overall student population. Mr. McMahon emphasized that this aligns with Title IX proportionality requirements, which ensure equal participation opportunities. These numbers reflect students involved in athletics, cheer, dance, and speech/debate, though they exclude other school activities like music and drama. This year, about 278 students at Helena High and 325 students at Capital High are currently participating in various activities, totaling approximately 1,000 students district-wide. About 25% of the student body participates in these activities, though music participation is not included in this count. Both high schools offer a range of activities, including multiple sports teams (e.g., volleyball, soccer, football, and cross country), speech and debate, and other clubs. The fall season includes up to 17 teams per school across various sports and activities. Last year, 418 students completed the driver's education course. This year, there are currently 136 students enrolled in five fall classes, with students ranging from 14.5 to over 17 years old. The program's eligibility was expanded to allow students as young as 14.5 years to enroll, addressing a drop in enrollment due to changes in state law. Mr. McMahon also mentioned that the fleet of vehicles used for the program has been reduced from nine to five cars, with plans to add two more cars in the coming months. Mr. McMahon discussed that St. Peter's Health has enhanced its financial support for the district's activities program through a new contract. The new partnership brings in around an additional \$17,000 annually to support student engagement and activities and in exchange for the increased funding, St. Peter's Health will receive more prominent advertising in district facilities. Mr. McMahon answered any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding his presentation. The Board of Trustees and Superintendent Wertz expressed their appreciation to Mr. McMahon for his expertise and leadership in the district.

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, "HHS ended September on a fantastic note. A homecoming filled week with dress up days, Mr. Kessler decked out as Bengi at the Student Council assembly, and a very fun homecoming dance. As we enter October, Helena High is thriving with new initiatives and activities that enhance student learning and engagement. Three of our students, Eva Skibicki, Evelyn Callery, and Kenzie Criswell, alongside one of our staff members, Mrs. Lauren Gustafson, will be traveling to Japan in less than two weeks to serve as representatives of the United States at the World Tsunami Days Student Conference in Kumamoto, Japan. This is due in large part to the hard work of Mr. Thennis and Mako Sakaguchi, who have been working on building our sister city relationship with Kumamoto Prefecture, who is hosting the event. Our team will be participating in discussions and learning sessions. Additionally, the team will present on the Mann Gulch Fire and how that event changed response protocols nationwide. We look forward to this great experience for our students and staff as well as the continued growth of the relationship between our two schools and communities. HHS was named to the AP Honor Roll once again, earning the bronze designation this year. This designation is a testament to the work being done,

not only in our AP classes, but throughout a student's careers as teachers are ensuring rigorous coursework and preparation to have the skills necessary to be college and career ready. Thank you to all our staff for what they do to give our students the best opportunities possible. We rely heavily on benchmark assessments and utilize the data to help ensure students are receiving the right interventions. Making sure that the conversations being held within grade levels and departments look at the area's students are struggling with the most. This is to help adjust what is being taught to include additional practice and access to needed information. This could not be done without the hard work of Mrs. Meghan Schulte. We are fortunate to have Mrs. Schulte working tirelessly to analyze data and put it into an understandable format to be used in PLCs and Grade Level meetings. A big congratulations to our National Merit Semifinalists – Eva Skibicki and Evelyn Callery! Another congrats to our girls' golf team who placed 2nd at the Divisional Tournament a few weeks ago and 5th place at the State Tournament. We also had four individuals place in the Top 20 at Divisionals – Mia Taylor, 4th and Mya Helvik, 7th, Sofia Cetraro, 11th, and Glacia Lucchetti, 13th. Congratulations to our Lady Bengals Volleyball team on their crosstown win 3-0 last week. Additionally, members of our HHS football team, volleyball team, and soccer teams took the time out of their Wednesday morning last week and participated in walk to school day with Warren and Smith elementary. Our Bengals continue to be involved in our lower elementary's to build up Bengal pride and foster connection. This week we are working through our first round of mental health screenings at the high school. This has been a great tool for us in the past to help recognize the importance of taking care of our students and staff's mental health while also providing support for students and families if needed. Cross country will compete in their 7v7 meet this Thursday at Bill Roberts Golf Course. Bengal football will host their senior night football game at Carroll College this Thursday against Sentinel. Many of our music students will be heading to the All-State Music Festival next week in Billings to participate in learning sessions and performances. Lastly, DECA is preparing to attend a leadership conference in Seattle this month. This month's report highlights both students and staff continuing to pour intention and Bengal pride into everything they do. The first quarter ends on November 1, which is fast approaching! We want to continue to foster and support the amazing things Helena High is doing as we go throughout this busy month.” 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, “Good evening, Trustees, Capital High School students are thriving as we progress past midterm week and continue through quarter one. We recently wrapped up an incredible Homecoming week, filled with school spirit and enthusiasm. Students embraced dress-up days and participated in a door decoration competition—my own door for Mrs. Stone's AP Literature class displayed some impressive creativity, if I may say so! CHS Student Council hosted a BBQ featuring club “sampler” activities: HOSA organized an organ-themed cornhole game, Science Club ran competitive trivia, Fly Fishing Club practiced their casts in the courtyard, and our staff band rocked a Led Zeppelin performance, adding a special touch to the festivities. The Homecoming assembly was electric, and the underclassmen-led dance capped off a week of Bruin pride. To top it all off, CHS defended the den at the Homecoming football game with a monumental upset, destroying Glacier with a score of 31-14. In other updates, the RBHI Screener (Rural Behavioral Health Institute) has been administered in all 2nd period classrooms over the past two weeks. We have a few students who still need to complete the screening on make-up day this Wednesday. Students who identify as needing support are referred to a school counselor or therapist for follow-up. Looking ahead, the PSAT will be administered to interested juniors next

Thursday during the MEA break. This exam is crucial for students aiming to qualify as National Merit Scholar Semi-finalists, and we're expecting a strong turnout. This year, our National Merit Scholar Semi-finalists are Adeline Walters and Mason Whitney. This scholarship is a very high honor, and we should be proud! In an additional nod to our academic prowess, CHS was just awarded the AP Honor Roll Silver Medal. For the future, we're going for gold. A special shout-out to Mr. Canney, our industrial tech teacher, for organizing Digger Day last Monday. This event provided students with invaluable hands-on experience in construction, allowing them to explore real-world skills. It was a great success, and we hope to continue offering more experiential opportunities like this. Last week was College Application Week at CHS. Our counselors met with all seniors during their English classes to guide them through applying to Montana's public colleges and universities. This initiative ensures that our students are well-prepared as they transition into their post-secondary education. On the arts front, our CHS music concerts have kicked off! Yesterday, our choir students performed their first concert of the year. Next Monday, the band will perform at 7:00 PM in the CHS auditorium, followed by the orchestra concert next Tuesday at the same time and place. We're excited to support our talented musicians, and we encourage the community to attend and show their support. Next week, during the Thursday and Friday that students have off, a select number of students will be attending the band, choir, and orchestra All-State Honors ensemble festivals in Billings. It is a high honor to be selected for this festival, as students must prepare an audition, be selected based on their audition out of hundreds of applicants, and prepare repertoire that far exceeds the typical level of a high school musician. Though my role is officially as student representative to the board, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge a growing concern among CHS staff. While student morale appears high, there's significant discouragement among teachers. Teachers are continually asked to do more with less, and it's vital that we, as a community, show our appreciation for the people responsible for educating the future leaders, professionals, and citizens of Helena. Based on our robust conversations this evening and at past board meetings, I know that teachers and administrative workers are considered our greatest asset. I urge our community to become informed and I urge our board to remain as transparent as ever. Tomorrow, Adella and I will be meeting with students at PAL, where we hope to learn about their unique challenges and include their voices in future reports. There is always room for improvement, but I'm happy to report that, overall, the school year is off to a successful and spirited start. We look forward to keeping the momentum going." 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**

There was no Facilities & Technology Committee Report this evening, because the committee will be meeting on Monday, October 14th.

4. **Budget and Finance Committee Report**

Trustee Janet Armstrong gave the Budget and Finance Committee Report. Trustee Armstrong stated at the Budget and Finance Committee there was a discussion about running a potential technology levy. Despite facing an unanticipated \$200,000 in expenses, the district's budget

remains in a healthy position and the financial outlook remains positive despite unexpected challenges. Trustee Armstrong answered any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding her report.

5. **Policy Committee Report**

Trustee Jennifer Walsh gave the Policy Committee Report. Trustee Walsh highlighted the productive discussion that the Policy Committee had and the opportunity to dive deeper into important topics. Not all policies listed on the Policy Committee Agenda were reviewed as they had run out of time to review them all at the meeting, but the remaining policies would be addressed in future meetings. No major changes were made to Policy 3040: Search and Seizure but a detailed discussion took place to better understand the parameters around student searches, including property searches and the legal boundaries. The committee discussed policies surrounding CPS (Child Protective Services) and law enforcement interviews with students, as well as the roles of custodial versus non-custodial parents in student release procedures. Trustee Walsh noted the importance of Policy 3060: Misconduct by Students with Disabilities that addresses how misconduct is handled for students with disabilities, particularly in relation to behavior linked to their disability versus other behavioral issues. This policy aims to clarify disciplinary actions in these contexts. Trustee Walsh answered any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding her report.

6. **Teaching & Learning Committee Report**

Board Vice Chair Jennifer McKee gave the Teaching & Learning Committee Report. Vice Chair McKee provided an overview of the Teaching and Learning Committee meeting that was held highlighting key discussions around assessment tools and the PDSA cycle (Plan-Do-Study-Act). The PDSA cycle was described as a continuous planning and improvement structure, ensuring that the district consistently analyzes assessments, identifies gaps, and adjusts strategies to improve student outcomes. A variety of assessments were discussed, including i-Ready, MAP assessments, and ACT scores, with a focus on using data to inform teaching practices and support student growth. Trustee McKee and Ms. Kaitlyn Hess, Assessment and Federal Programs, discussed the new MAST assessment in great detail. Trustee McKee answered any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding her report.

7. **Health Benefits Committee Report**

Trustee Kay Satre stated that the Health Benefits Committee did not meet, but she did have information about the health trust. Trustee Satre provided an update on a Health Trust information meeting held on September 12th, where John Doran, Chief Strategy Officer for the Montana School Insurance Services Alliance (MTSIA), outlined the structure and goals for a new health trust. The trust is a nonprofit initiative created with \$40 million in funding from HB332 and aims to improve stability and predictability in insurance premiums while enhancing benefits for school district employees. To access the funding, 150 districts and 12,000 employee members are required to join, with a 5-year commitment needed from districts. Trustee Satre discussed the structure of the trust, and benefits of joining the trust that was discussed at the meeting. MTSIA is currently gathering data from districts to refine the specifics of the health trust plans, including premiums, benefits, and administrative costs. Districts will have the opportunity to review how their current benefits compare to those in the new trust. The

commitment window for joining the trust will open in June/July 2025, with coverage beginning in July, August, or September 2026. Trustee Satre and Superintendent Weltz answered any questions the Board of Trustees had regarding the information presented.

8. **Wellness Committee Report**

Ms. Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff, gave the Wellness Committee Report. The Wellness Committee continues to promote healthy eating and community engagement through initiatives like the Harvest of the Month program. This month's focus is on apples, with potatoes next month. The committee is also working on introducing healthy vending machines in high schools. Helena's Summer Food Program exceeded its meal-serving goals, providing 92,048 meals this summer, an increase of 30,000 meals from last year. Additionally, the district celebrated Montana Crunch Day with 4,000 apples, and another school was added to the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. The committee is exploring hydroponic gardens and pursuing a Farm to School Grant, with a focus on expanding wellness efforts to middle schools. Ms. Ridgway praised Robert Worthy and his team for their exceptional work, especially in light of challenges with district kitchen facilities.

9. **Montana School Boards Association Report**

There was no Montana School Boards Association Report this evening.

10. **Parent Council Visit Reports**

Trustee Kay Satre gave a report from her Parent Council Visit to Helena High School. During a recent visit to Helena High School, Trustee Satre had the opportunity to hear from new principal Mr. Kessler, who shared insights on the school's goals and initiatives. Key focus areas included academic goals (ACT, math, and reading proficiency), social-emotional learning, and community engagement. Mr. Kessler emphasized fostering a stronger school community and exploring new approaches to energize the campus. Highlights included the Benge Buddies program, where high school students connect with elementary students, and upcoming activities for Indian Education for All, such as a pow wow and a month of related events. There was also discussion on College Application Week and the recent shelter-in-place incident. Concerns were raised about the lack of intercom systems and digital clocks at the high school, as well as parking lot safety for students returning late after activities. Finally, there was interest in increasing alumni engagement in school events. Overall, the visit provided valuable insights into the school's ongoing initiatives and the challenges and opportunities it faces.

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

VII. UPCOMING MEETINGS

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

- Thursday, October 10th, Steering Committee-HPS Compensation Philosophy, Lincoln Center, Noon
- Monday, October 14th, Facilities & Technology Committee Meeting, 12:00 p.m., Lincoln Center
- Tuesday, October 22nd, Board of Trustees Work Session, Rossiter Elementary, 11:30 a.m.
- Tuesday, November 5th, Policy Committee Meeting, 12:00 p.m., Lincoln Center

VIII. BOARD COMMENTS

Mr. Charlie Snellman, Capital High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees, expressed how inspiring it was to participate in the meeting and engage in constructive discussions. Mr. Snellman contrasted the respectful dialogue observed with the negativity often portrayed in mainstream media, such as arguing, name-calling, and misinformation. The representative shared that the experience has been motivating and encouraging moving forward. The Board of Trustees expressed their appreciation for the two high school student representatives and expressed how much they enjoy having them on the board. Lastly, Superintendent Weltz expressed his appreciation to Assistant Superintendent Josh McKay, and Lona Carter, Student Health Services & Special Education, for all their hard work around mental health support in the district.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn adjourned the meeting at 10:15 p.m.

Candice Delvaux, Recording Secretary Date