



**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, November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024**  
6:00 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  
Adella Harris, Helena High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees

Rex Wertz, Superintendent  
Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent  
Janelle Mickelson, Business Director  
Todd Verrill, Facilities Director  
Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director  
Gary Myers, Director of Educational Technology  
Kaitlyn Hess, Assessment and Federal Programs Director  
Justine Alberts, Curriculum Director  
Jane Shawn, HEA President  
Tim McMahon, Activities Director  
Lona Carter, Student Health Services & Special Education Director  
Karen Ogden, Communications Officer  
Brian Kessler, Helena High School Principal  
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 6:00 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**II. REVIEW OF AGENDA**

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

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

**III. RECOGNITIONS**

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

**A. Montana Business Education Association’s Outstanding Business Teacher of the Year**

Congratulations to Helena High Educator Samantha Humphrey who was recognized at the MEA Conference as the Montana Business Education Association’s Outstanding Business Teacher of the Year!!

**B. 2024 All-State Honor Musicians- Capital High School**

Congratulations to the following Capital High students who were selected to the Montana All-State Honor Music Festival. Special thanks to educators Thomas Baty, Kevin Cleary, and Duane Zehr for all that they do to support these amazing musicians.

CHS Band

Meika Arensmeyer

Thomas Byron

Josiah Todd

CHS Orchestra

Vivian James

Mason Whitney

Adeline Walters

Hollis Elliott

Charlie Snellman

Fox Rowland

Alternate - Claudia Cook

**C. 2024 All-State Honor Musicians-Helena High School**

Congratulations to the following Helena High students who were selected to the Montana All-State Honor Music Festival. Special thanks to educators Kevin Cleary, Cody Hollow, and Molly Kohoutek for all that they do to support these amazing musicians.

HHS Choir

Nadja Bolotsky

Brady Lay

Ella Nasset

Lily Pierson

Leila Zentz

HHS Band

Carson Payne

HHS Orchestra

Elliot Cleary

Isabel Ward

Nailah Freeman

Freya Elias

Emeline Jefferies

**IV. PRESENTATION**

**Youth Ambassador World Tsunami Days Conference Presentation**

The Board of Trustees reviewed a presentation given by Helena High Educator Lauren Gustafson. In October, Gustafson and three of her AP Geography students took an 8-day trip to Kyūshū island, this time to the city of Kumamoto, to study a topic that resonates with cultures the world over – natural disasters. They joined students and educators from 42 countries around the world for a summit on “World Tsunami Awareness Day.” Sessions at the conference focused on a wide range of disaster prevention and response topics, including disaster mitigation, economic impacts, response times, population density and environmental factors. The conference was designed to educate and inspire future leaders who will build resilience in their communities while deepening ties between countries all over the world. Helena High students Evelyn Callery, Kenzi Criswell, and Eva Skibicki represented Helena well, becoming the first known group from a mainland U.S. high school to attend the summit. Funded largely by the Japanese government, with the remainder paid for by the students’ families, the trip offered our students a unique perspective on disaster response and international collaboration. Before the summit, the group toured the Kumamoto area, learning about responses to the 2011 tsunami and the 2016 earthquake. Armed with this knowledge, they collaborated with other students at the summit to create action plans to help mitigate future disaster impacts. Ms. Gustafson concluded her presentation by expressing a strong request for continued support on their journey, emphasizing the importance of inspiring future generations who will care for the world. She highlighted the opportunity to be a beacon for others and stressed the collective nature of the effort. While disaster prevention, relief, and response were central to their journey, she also noted the significant exploration of environmental, culinary, cultural, linguistic, historical, and demographic aspects.

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

## V. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Superintendent Weltz moved on to give his Superintendent Report to the Board of Trustees.

- Recognition
  - Cabinet Team
    - Superintendent Weltz acknowledged the support of his team during a difficult personal time following the death of his mother, expressing gratitude for their efforts in maintaining the district's operations while he was away. He specifically thanked Barb, Josh, and the rest of the team for their support.
  - Superintendent Mr. Jack Copps
    - Superintendent Weltz reflected on the celebration of the life of former Superintendent Jack Copps, which took place at Central Elementary School today. He described Copps as a passionate and remarkable educator, leader, father, and husband. Superintendent Weltz expressed appreciation for the Helena Education Foundation, Lisa Cordingley and her team, Barb Ridgway, and Nick Radley and his staff at Central for their contributions to organizing the event. He highlighted that in his final days, Jack Copps had specifically requested the celebration take place in a school, which made the event even more meaningful.
  - Native American Heritage Month
    - Buffalo Harvest: Superintendent Weltz invited Terri Johnson to the podium to discuss the buffalo harvest with the Board of Trustees. Terri Johnson is one of our Title VI Indian Ed Tutors at Helena High and Capital School. For the first time this year, our Title VI Indian Ed Tutors at Helena High and Capital High, Terri Johnson and Joe Pichardo, will take students on a field trip to the Big Sky Bison Ranch near Great Falls. Led by Blackfeet Tribal Elders, 39 students will experience a traditional bison harvest, start to finish.
  - November 11-15 National School Psychology Week
  - November 22 Substitute Appreciation Day
  - Samantha Humphrey – Outstanding Montana Business Teacher of the Year
  - State Basketball Special Olympics Nov 7-9 Throughout Helena and HPS
  - Congratulations to both Capital High and Helena High for making the national AP School Honor Roll, reaching silver and bronze status, respectively.
  - Thank you to Helena College for hosting Bryant Elementary's Helena College Honorary Student program for 5th grade students.
  - Thank you to Principal Wynn Randall and the staff and students at Rossiter Elementary School for a great Board of Trustees Work Session at Rossiter.
  - Congratulations to the following 105.3 KMTX Teacher of the Month Recipients:
    - Ms. Jody Branting-Four Georgians Elementary School - September
    - Ms. Kim Ziska-Rossiter Elementary School - October
  - Thank you to Lisa Cordingley, and the Helena Education Foundation, for awarding Spark Grants across the district, and surprising teachers who were selected for Let's Talk About Great Teachers recognition!! The "Let's Talk" award was begun in 2007 as part of the Foundation's popular "Great Conversations" event. Each of this year's honorees will be recognized at this year's event on November 20.

- New Business
  - Steering Committee-HPS Compensation Philosophy Update
  - Science of Reading – Statewide Workshop Hosted By HPS
    - Superintendent Weltz invited Ms. Alberts to the podium. Ms. Justine Alberts, Curriculum Director, provided an update on her work with Dr. Rob Watson, Executive Director of the School Administrators of Montana (SAM). Dr. Watson is organizing a "Science of Reading" showcase, which will be held in Helena on November 13th. The event will bring together around 34 educational leaders from across the state, including curriculum and instructional leaders. The day will include a networking lunch and a series of visits to schools across our district. These visits will provide an opportunity for participants to observe and engage in the instructional practices happening in the district. In the evening, from 4:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., Renaissance, an educational vendor, will sponsor a session featuring a national speaker on the Science of Reading, followed by a panel discussion. Legislators, including those from the education committee, will also attend to learn more about current trends in education and gain insights for future policymaking. Ms. Alberts emphasized the importance of collaboration, noting that this event is an opportunity to showcase Helena Public Schools' efforts while also learning from other districts across Montana. The event promises to be an exciting and informative opportunity for all involved.
  - Consensus Training Workshop – District Wide
  - National School Bus Safety Week Ride Along
  - Winter Program Update – Elementary
  - Boundaries Discussion
  
- Outreach/Meetings
  - Parent Advisory Committee
  - Teacher Advisory Committee
  - AA Superintendents
  - Board Leadership
  - CMS Compensation Steering Committee
  - Hometown Helena
  - MQEC Board of Directors Meeting
  - HSD/HEA Meeting
  - HSD/Helena Symphony Meeting
  - HEF
  - HEF-Executive Committee
  - Cabinet & Leadership
  - TV, Print, Radio Media
  
- Other
  - November 27-29 Thanksgiving Break-No School

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

## VI. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Nicole Thuotte gave general public comment. Ms. Thuotte has had eight children attend Helena Public Schools, two of which are current students. Ms. Thuotte's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to concerns with levies, concerns about program cuts, budget versus staffing issues, suggestions for solutions, and appreciation for staff. Ms. Thuotte thanked the district for supporting the Special Olympics and expressed understanding of the financial challenges facing the district. She expressed concerns about the affordability of the previously proposed 10 million dollar levy that the district attempted to pass and the impact of program cuts, particularly on special education students. Ms. Thuotte suggested alternatives to the cuts, such as splitting the winter program into smaller sessions and utilizing volunteers and urged the district to clearly communicate whether staffing or budget issues are the cause. She concluded by recognizing the efforts of Jim Darcy staff in shaping her children's education.

That concluded 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 (Non-Resident Students Attending HPS)
4. Acknowledge FY 2024-25 Out-Of-District Attendance Agreements (Helena Resident Students Attending Other School Districts)
5. 10.8.24 Board of Trustees Full Board Meeting Minutes
6. Resolution to Dispose of Personal Property-HHS Workout Equipment 24-25

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 Item for Action.

## **B. Item for Action**

### **1. Approval of RFQ For Smith Elementary HVAC Design and Project Management**

Mr. Todd Verrill, Facilities Director for Helena Public Schools, presented the action item *Approval of RFQ For Smith Elementary HVAC Design and Project Management* to the Board of Trustees. Mr. Verrill is respectfully requesting the Board of Trustees approve Con'eer Engineering, Inc. for design and contract administration of a new HVAC system at Smith Elementary School. The cost of the design and contract administration services is \$180,300. The lead engineer is Mr. Gruizenga, PE who is very familiar with the school's current system as he contributed to the district's 2022 Deferred Maintenance Report. The report listed the Smith system's replacement as a high priority project due to its inefficiency and outdated design. The total estimated cost of the HVAC project is approximately \$2M, which includes the 10% design and contract administration service fees listed above. The facilities office posted a Request for Qualifications for this project and Con'eer Engineering, Inc. was the only firm to submit a packet. Having reviewed their statement of qualifications and proposed costs, Mr. Verrill is confident Con'eer is highly qualified, and their costs are reasonable and customary for this type of project. Mr. Verrill addressed any questions the trustees had regarding the action item.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, "At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the *RFQ For Smith Elementary HVAC Design and Project Management* as presented."

**Motion:** Trustee Jeff Hindoen moved to approve the selection of Con'eer Engineering for the provision of design and constructions services for a new HVAC system at Smith Elementary School. Trustee Jennifer McKee seconded the motion.

**Public Comment:** None.

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

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

## **C. Items for Information**

### **1. Fall Enrollment 2024/2025 Update**

Assistant Superintendent Josh McKay presented for information a fall enrollment 2024/2025 update to the Board of Trustees. Mr. McKay began by reviewing a PowerPoint presentation with the Board of Trustees which displayed an age pyramid for Lewis and Clark County with population projections provided by the Department of Commerce Population website comparing data from 2024 to 2050. The data shows an expanding population in the 20-40 age range, while there is a decline in those aged 45-60, with a narrower population distribution among older age groups. The projections for 2050 indicate that the population under 20 will remain narrow, with the majority of the population in the middle age bands. Assistant Superintendent McKay noted that in Lewis and Clark County, the population of 0-18-year-olds

remains stable, with growth primarily occurring in older age groups, reflecting a broader trend in Montana.

Next, Assistant Superintendent McKay reviewed population protection trends for five years old through the year 2040. While the state's five-year-old population peaked in 2021 and is expected to decline before rising again, Lewis and Clark County's population trend differs. The county's curve mirrors the state's trend until 2025, after which it remains stable. Based on this data, no significant growth in the five-year-old population is anticipated in the county.

Assistant Superintendent McKay moved on to review population projection trends through 2040 for 5- to 18-year-olds. The data indicates that both the statewide and Lewis and Clark County populations are currently at a relative peak, with Lewis and Clark County possibly having reached its peak in 2024. Both projections expect a decrease in this age group over time, particularly after 2025. Assistant Superintendent McKay discussed a population projection for individuals aged 5 to 100, highlighting that while Montana's overall population is growing, in Lewis and Clark County, the growth is occurring primarily in the population over 18 years old, not in children. This indicates an aging population trend in the county. Mr. McKay reviewed another piece of data that shows that the number of five-year-olds peaked in the county, with next year's projection around 779 to 780. By 2040, the number is expected to be roughly 778, indicating minimal change. The overall trend for five-year-olds in the county is relatively flat, as predicted by the Department of Commerce Population website. Mr. McKay also noted that the district serves around 500 kindergarten students.

Assistant Superintendent McKay moved on to review the fall student enrollment summary with projections. The chart includes students with partial enrollments and is not an ANB count. Assistant Superintendent McKay expressed concern about potential declines in kindergarten enrollment but acknowledged that trends suggest stable numbers moving forward. He also mentioned challenges such as high school migration, with students transferring out of state, to homeschool programs, or to other in-state schools, and highlighted a decrease in overall district enrollment to around 7,569 students, which will require adjustments in district organization and planning. Mr. McKay reviewed the next PowerPoint slide, which presents enrollment projections through the fall of 2032, followed by a slide detailing enrollment number by site, followed by a key planning document used by the district. He concluded his presentation by addressing questions from the Board of Trustees.

## 2. **Fall Academic Data Presentation**

Ms. Kaityln Hess, Assessment & Federal Programs Director, and Ms. Justine Alberts, Curriculum Director gave a Fall Academic Data Presentation to the Board of Trustees. Ms. Hess began by reviewing the vision, mission, and guiding principles for Helena Public Schools. Next, they reviewed the comprehensive assessment system at Helena Public Schools. The Helena Public Schools Comprehensive Assessment System is designed to ensure that all students receive a high-quality education that meets rigorous academic standards. Our mission is to provide accurate, meaningful assessments that support student learning, inform instructional practices, and guide decision-making at every level of our school district. Ms. Hess reviewed the district benchmarks and state assessments that take place in the district. Next, Ms. Hess reviewed Acadience fall benchmark trends with the Board of Trustees. Ms.



Hess explained that our District K-8 literacy TOSA has been working with teams to set goals tied to progress monitoring within Acadience and Pathways of Progress. This tool charts student growth more clearly and gives teachers tangible progress metrics. Next Ms. Hess reviewed fall benchmarks for grades 1-5. Fall benchmarks serve as a foundational assessment tool to gauge students' initial understanding at the beginning of the academic year. These criterion-referenced assessments evaluate students' comprehension of grade-level standards prior to their exposure to the associated content and curriculum for the year. All elementary schools have adopted the rigorous Eureka Math2 curriculum, which focuses on procedural and conceptual understanding. This is expected to help many students improve from the yellow to green band. Teachers report an intense pace but appreciate the curriculum, noting that students enjoy the new instructional approach. Ms. Hess discussed that we are developing training for our ELA curriculum that integrates the Science of Reading and reading instruction research. There's a focus on enhancing phonics instruction and explicit teaching for educators. While assessments target broader understandings, they may overlook foundational skill gaps. We have processes to identify these gaps through WIN groups and diagnostic assessments. The K-8 TOSA is working to drill down into student gaps with progress monitoring. Thus far she has visited 5 schools, 19 teachers, and is impacting 429 students. She is continuing to expand this work.

Ms. Hess moved on to review national norms for grades 1-5. In math, overall grades 1-5 are coming in stronger at the start of the school year than the national norm. In reading, grades 3-5 are coming in stronger at the start of the school year than the national norm. Ms. Hess and Ms. Alberts reviewed fall benchmarks in iReady for grades 6-8 and reviewed national norms for grades 6-8. In math, grades 6-8 were above the national norm last year and this year for incoming fall grade level readiness. In reading, grades 6-8 were above the national norm last year and this year for incoming fall grade level readiness. Next, Ms. Hess discussed a focus on stretch growth and reviewed data for reading and math which displayed grade, placement category, and the number of students who will place mid on grade level if they reach their typical growth goal, and the number of students who will place mid on grade level if they reach their stretch growth goal. Next, Ms. Hess discussed pandemic growth and reviewed fall pandemic trend by cohort reading (Acadience/iReady) and fall pandemic trend by cohort in math (iReady).

Next, Ms. Hess and Ms. Alberts discussed ACT & college and career readiness. This year, HPS 10th graders will take the PreACT in the spring. All 11th graders have access to a paid subscription for ACT Online Prep, which allows them multiple practice tests, study tools, and instructional lessons. Ms. Hess and Ms. Alberts reviewed data that showed the percent meeting all four college readiness benchmarks by cohort for Helena High School, Capital High School, and PAL. Next, they reviewed data for various schools which displayed the percent at or above benchmark 2025-Cohort ELA, 2025-Cohort Science, and 2025-Cohort Math. Ms. Hess and Ms. Alberts discussed increasing ACT performance. By focusing on students who are just 1-2 points below the benchmark, we can elevate our benchmark scores, enhancing our competitiveness with AA high schools throughout the state. Everyone will benefit from a targeted approach to instruction. Also, HPS is beginning to align the state standards with the college and career readiness standards to align instruction. Lastly, Ms. Hess discussed how we are preparing students for post-secondary in the district and reviewed performance measures. Ms. Hess and Ms. Alberts addressed all the questions the Board of Trustees had regarding the presentation.

### 3. **Board of Trustees Work Session Meeting Times**

The Board of Trustees discussed whether to continue holding work session meetings at noon or shift to late afternoon starting at 3:30 p.m. Some trustees expressed that noon meetings allowed them to see schools in action, which they valued, but others noted that mid-day meetings were challenging for both trustees and staff due to work schedules. There were concerns about public participation, as noon meetings are less convenient for the public. Additionally, holding meetings in the afternoon may provide more flexibility for staff and trustees, while also allowing for more efficient decision-making without time constraints. A suggestion was made to alternate between noon and afternoon meetings to balance both needs. The Board of Trustees determined they would begin holding the meetings in the late afternoon beginning with tours at 3:30 p.m. as the majority of the board expressed a preference for holding work sessions in the late afternoon rather than at noon. This timing was seen as more convenient for both trustees and staff, allowing for better participation and more flexibility in scheduling.

The Board of Trustees moved on to hear Reports.

## **D. REPORTS**

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

Mr. Charlie Snellman, Capital High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees, was not in attendance this evening, therefore, Ms. Harris gave his report on his behalf. Ms. Harris commented, “Good evening, Trustees, as we wrap up beautiful October and lean into the chilly weather of November, students at Capital High are continually getting involved in school activities at a deeper level. The administration at Capital High is doing great things to ensure that students and staff are successful in all that they do. It sure has been an eventful month at Capital High, with new programs and many achievements to share! First, our Bruin Pantry received a huge boost thanks to CHS students Ava Meldrum and Mary Irby, who secured a \$5,000 grant from the Town Pump Charitable Foundation! This grant supports our pantry’s daily operations, meeting an increasing need this year. With the annual Winter Break Food Drive underway, the Bruin Pantry is seeking donations to continue its tradition of supporting CHS families over long breaks. During Thanksgiving and Christmas last year, we provided 48 families with grocery-only gift cards thanks to community generosity. This year, our goals include:

1. Stocking classrooms with snacks
2. Providing daily meals and weekend packs for students in need
3. Distributing 48 holiday gift cards to CHS families.

Donations can be made in cash or check at the Bookkeeping Office or through the RevTrak system online. Know that your donation will be used to help students locally and every bit helps us continue this essential work! Our Speech and Debate team kicked off the season with a strong start at their first tournament. We're now preparing to host the Valley of Gold Speech &

Debate Tournament on December 6-7 and are reaching out for community support to help judge. With over 70 judges needed each round, this event is a massive operation, and no experience is necessary to help with judging. Judges can sign up at <https://tinyurl.com/2024ValleyOfGold>, and optional training is available. We hope the board and our community will join us in supporting these talented young orators! In the performing arts, “Just Another High School Play” has had its run extended this week due to popular demand! Performances will be held in the CHS Auditorium this Thursday through Saturday at 7:00 p.m. It’s been a fun, high-energy production, and tickets are available at the door for anyone looking to catch an evening of student theater. In academics, Intervention Time (IT) has expanded this quarter to support students more strategically. This targeted academic time every Monday now includes seniors needing graduation requirements, sophomores with credit deficiencies, and freshmen struggling with a class in the first quarter. Counselors and administrators have collaborated to adjust schedules, and families were notified about these changes last week. IT aligns closely with our 4 PLC pillars for student learning:

1. What do we want students to learn?
2. How will we know if they learned?
3. How will we respond if they do not learn the material?
4. What will we do when students have demonstrated proficiency?

On the activities front, Bruin football is headed to the semifinal playoff this Friday! Coach Mihelish and the team will host Billings West at Vigilante Stadium at 7:00 p.m. Please note that regular school activity passes are not accepted for MHSAA playoff games, but tickets are available both at the gate and online. We were also honored with a visit from Billings West High School staff who came to observe our MTSS framework and Intervention Time program. Our guests were impressed with the initiatives they observed, and they left with ideas to bring back to their own classrooms. Though I am biased, it is obvious to see that Capital’s new initiatives are inspiring and leading to great success in the classroom and beyond! During PLC sessions, teachers have been leading great professional development exercises. This month sessions covered training on EdPuzzle, Canva, SchoolAI resources, and PreACT data analysis. PLC is a great example of the collaboration and knowledge-sharing that makes CHS such a vibrant learning environment. Finally, we launched our “You Rock!” program this month, which celebrates staff members for their positive impact on CHS. Each week, the award passes to a new staff member chosen by the previous recipient. So far, we’ve recognized Laura Brayko, Sarah Urban, Jamie Toivonen, and Sue Stone for their incredible contributions to our school. As always, I’m grateful to represent such a dedicated and dynamic school. This month has truly showcased the strength of our school spirit, collaboration, and commitment to academic excellence. Thank you for your ongoing support, and here’s to more successes as we head into the winter months!”

Ms. Adella Harris, Helena High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees, gave her Student Representative Report. Ms. Harris commented, “As HHS transitions into the second quarter, November has been a month marked by both reflection and progress. Our student body has continued to show resilience and dedication, balancing academic responsibilities with extracurricular engagement. HHS was once again a host site for the Special Olympics Basketball Tournament on November 8 and 9. Prior to the event, 20 National Honors Society Students helped prepare lunches for the athletes. As we work to become a Unified Champion School, hosting events like Special Olympics allows teachers the opportunity to bring classes

down to be fans in the stands. Making signs and cheering on the participants is a great way for everyone to be part of something bigger than themselves. This is a great community event that we are excited to be able to help host and love watching the excitement on the court and in the stands from all involved. American Welding Society has their annual ornament sale going on. One of the most anticipated emails in the district each year is the release of the ornaments from our AWS club. These ornaments have become a tradition in most households and serve as a great Made in Montana gift for all families. These do sell out quickly, though, so if you are interested in getting one, you should reserve yours today! To celebrate the anniversary of the taking down of the Berlin Wall, the German Club students from both high schools participated in building a replica portion of the wall, placed on display at the Holter Museum of Art. On November 9, our German Club students participated in a lecture from the MSU German department. The lecture was followed by a demonstration of breaking down the wall, signifying the work and emotion present for those who had to live through that difficult time in Germany. With the wall, a theme is chosen each year with this year's message centered around building connections and the importance of working collectively for everyone to feel accepted and supported in our community. This is a great inclusive activity put on by Mrs. Browning, that helps to bring learning alive for our students. Four of Helena High's DECA students: Grayce Liska, Claire Eaton, Kenzie Groom, and Michael Leyva alongside advisor Kacey Askin traveled to Seattle, Washington to attend the Western Region Leadership Conference November 8th and 9th. The team had the opportunity to participate in competitions and attend sessions which focused on leadership, motivation, business, accounting, and more. The team met representees from Hawaii to Alaska and made many new friends. Our soccer teams both participated in the State Soccer Tournament over the past few weeks. Our boys travelled to Kalispell and faced off against a tough Glacier High team, battling to the end, but ultimately coming up short. Our girls, who came into the tournament as the sixth seed from the West, started their tournament with a major upset of the third seed. The girls later narrowly lost in overtime to the second seed from the East, and eventually lost out in the quarterfinal match-up. There was much to cheer for at the State XC Meet in Missoula! Our girls were first up and had many amazing performances! We finished one point out of 4th place with one runner, Isabel Ward, just a few seconds behind earning an All-State recognition (top 15 runners). Our boys had an incredible afternoon by earning the overall 2nd place team trophy behind Bozeman High School, with 3 of our runners breaking the top 15 to earn the All-State recognition – Milo Kaufman in 4th, Henry Sund in 5th, and Elliot Stimpson in 10th. Both cross country teams had an incredible season and built a strong foundation for years to come. Good luck to our volleyball team who participates in the State Tournament this weekend. The Bengals are the 1-seed from the West and look to fight their way to an appearance in the Saturday games and bring home a trophy. Our HHS football team faced their final game last Friday at Bozeman taking on the Gallatin Raptors. Even with each team's stats comparing well, our athletes fell to Gallatin under the lights. Our seniors leave a great legacy, again in hopes of building up the next generation of players. One of the best things for our students is when teachers make outside connections with amazing individuals in the Helena Community and invite them in to give hands-on experiences. For example, our culinary students took a walk to Grateful Bread and learned about the bakery business. Students learned key steps in making baked goods from the lead chef and owner. These skills were then applied in class the next day when making their own scones. In science, our Bio 2 students were able to do a live Teams chat with a scientist and her assistants in Colorado who are currently conducting groundbreaking research on the biomes present in our digestive system. The scientists are looking at how these biomes might relate to disease, our ability to metabolize, and other amazing aspects. Meanwhile, our Bio 1

students were introduced to the amazing ways our Native plants of Montana are used, by an expert at the Office of Public Instruction. In our social studies classes, our teachers have brought in the famous Mike Jetty to give incredible insight into native traditions and ways of living. Mr. Wigen brought in Mark Johnson, a professor at Notre Dame who specializes in the history of the Chinese in Montana. Mr. Johson has mined several large collections of primary documents left by Chinese pioneers. He was able to translate the documents into English here in Montana for the first time. We want to say a big congratulations to Mrs. Samantha Humphrey on earning the honor of the Montana Business Educator Association Outstanding Business Teacher of the Year! We thank Mrs. Humphrey for all the time and effort she puts in to make our business education classes applicable and meaningful for students. HHS is currently in the middle of our Rock Your Mocs Week. This is a week set aside to honor Native American Heritage and bring awareness to the amazing Native culture surrounding us. A spirit week has been put together in honor of this week. On Thursday, all students will be participating in a special event – Freshmen will learn traditional games, Sophomores will learn the history of drum circles and get a chance to be part of one, Juniors will hear from Chris LaTray, the Montana poet laureate, and our seniors will watch the documentary, Native Ball and hear from the creator of the film. Friday, we will invite the Bryant students over to participate in our Pow Wow demonstration assembly in the morning. Through the hard work of many individuals, most notably Terri Johnson and Joe Pichardo, students and staff from our building will be participating in a Bison hunt on November 22. This hunt has been a work in progress over the past year and will serve as another opportunity for students from multiple classes to learn the history of the buffalo in our state and recognize the importance of using the whole animal after a harvest. For the harvest, teachers and students will head up to Vaughn where they will hear from Knowledge Keepers on the importance of the buffalo to the Native tribes in our area and how they used every piece of the buffalo in some way. The harvest itself will be conducted by the individual who owns the land. Students and staff will help with the clean-up process and prepare the materials to be brought back to the school. The meat will be utilized in our culinary classes and for family engagement events throughout the year. The hide will be tanned in our chemistry classes, while the organs will be used for dissection in our biology two classes. The tanned hide will become part of our tipi in the courtyard throughout the year as well. This is an exciting opportunity that we hope will be incredibly educational and enjoyable for our students. The Student Council will be leaving this upcoming Sunday to attend the yearly Montana Association of Student Council conference in Billings. This is an opportunity for our young leaders to hear from inspiring individuals, vote for administrator and advisor of the year, and connect with other likeminded students. Two of our student body officers will be leading a workshop for the MASC students to participate and learn from. Additionally, this week the Student Council is hosting our annual fall food drive. This year grades are competing against one another in anticipation to receive an ice cream social, gift cards, and ultimate bragging rights. Helena High is happy to be hosting the AA Choir festival. There is an incredible amount of time and work that goes in to putting together a festival of schools in our area that allow our students to learn from top notch directors and work collectively with other musicians in anticipation of an amazing concert at the end of the two-day experience. Thanks to Mrs. Kohoutek for the work, she has put in to make this an incredible event! Our theater students have been putting in an incredible amount of time and effort the past three months in anticipation for their first show of the year. She Kills Monsters will debut on November 14 at 6:30 p.m. This show is a fantasy approach, utilizing the popular game Dungeons and Dragons to tell the story of dealing with loss, fighting through adversity, and working together to find a solution. We encourage everyone who can come see one of the six shows! (Dates – 11/14,

11/15, 11/16 (also a 2:30 pm matinee), 11/21, and 11/22 all at 6:30 p.m.) Lastly, on November 22 our students will be able to see A Midsummer Night’s Dream, a Shakespearean great! We appreciate the Shakespeare in the Schools program that allows students to have exposure to the arts and see these shows year in and year out. Thank you to Mrs. Jenna Clark for organizing the event each year! Helena High is once again committed, excited, and full of intention as we head into the rest of the month of November. Thank you again to every parent, staff member, and contributor who makes Helena High the best place to be. Go Bengals!” Ms. Harris addressed all the questions the Board of Trustees had regarding her report.

2. **Helena Education Association Report**

Ms. Jane Shawn gave the Helena Education Association Report. HEA is currently bargaining the 2024-2025 salary scale for paraeducators, taking time to carefully navigate the complexities of the budget, market analysis, and the challenges of recruitment and retention. While members are eager for a proposal, the focus remains on getting it right. Ms. Shawn has conducted nearly two rounds of lunch visits to schools, which provide valuable insights into the experiences of educators and help identify both building-specific and district-wide issues. These visits also allow for direct communication with Central Office administrators to address concerns. There continues to be a shortage of paraeducators and guest teachers, and efforts are underway to address these challenges. Additionally, over the next three days, more than 70 HEA members, along with other school staff and administrators, will participate in consensus training. This initiative, developed with Rex over the past year, aims to establish school-based teams that will contribute to shared governance and strengthen building communities. Ms. Shawn addressed all the questions the Board of Trustees had regarding her report.

3. **Facilities & Technology Committee Report**

Trustee Jeff Hindoien gave the Facilities & Technology Committee Report. The Facilities and Technology Committee received updates on both technology and facilities. In technology, there were ongoing cyber threats, but the district successfully repelled them due to timely system updates. New Chromebook carts were purchased to address device shortages, particularly in elementary schools, and there were cost savings in analytics through PowerSchool. However, the tech levy’s failure continues to impact device aging, and the district faces challenges with aging technology and insufficient resources to replace it. Regarding facilities, the Bryant Elementary solar project is complete, and various maintenance tasks, including mechanical work at schools and the painting of classrooms at Rossiter, were completed. The district also successfully sold surplus vehicles and is working on projects such as a new fence at C.R. Anderson and potential environmental grant opportunities for Rossiter. Mr. Hindoien addressed all the questions the Board of Trustees had regarding his report.

4. **Budget and Finance Committee Report**

Trustee Janet Armstrong gave the Budget and Finance Committee Report. The district's budgetary spending is on track, with a slight surplus compared to the same point last year. Regular briefings on the interlocal agreement are being provided to the public for better understanding and the district began the year in the interlocal with around \$6 million and plans to draw down \$2 million. Funds are being allocated towards technology and curriculum, and there is a 16% increase in property and liability insurance. The majority of the meeting

focused on the Assistant Superintendent's enrollment update. Trustee Armstrong addressed all the questions the Board of Trustees had regarding her report.

5. **Policy Committee Report**

Trustee Jennifer Walsh gave the Policy Committee Report. The Policy Committee discussed a busy agenda, and three policies will be presented at the upcoming work session: Policy 3015 (Attendance and Truancy), Policy 3020 (Education of Homeless Youth), and Policy 3023 (Education of Children in Foster Care). The committee also reviewed the Social Media Policy, which addresses staff, volunteers, and contractors' interactions on social media to ensure their posts align with district standards. Additional topics included periodic reviews of student charges, fines, fees, and the transfer of student records, particularly challenges in receiving timely transfers of confidential records. The committee also discussed guidelines for student use of district facilities for non-educational activities, requiring adherence to additional rules when activities are not district sanctioned. The committee aims to continue reviewing policies efficiently as they prepare for the legislative session. Trustee Armstrong addressed all questions the Board of Trustees had regarding her report.

6. **Teaching & Learning Committee Report**

Trustee Kay Satre gave the Teaching & Learning Committee Report. During the meeting Ms. Alberts and Ms. Hess provided a comprehensive review of the assessment data, which was the main focus. Our TOSAs were also present and shared additional examples of how this data is being used to support both individual students and groups. A key point discussed was how this data informs strategies to improve student learning outcomes. Several important updates were highlighted, including the launch of three new assessment tools this year, the introduction of a new math curriculum, and ongoing conversations about shifting to a more inquiry-based approach in ELA. The emphasis on strengthening unit plans and focusing more on writing was also noted. Additionally, the TOSAs shared valuable insights into how they are using assessment data at each grade level to drive improvements in academics, ensuring data is effectively translated into actionable strategies. Trustee Satre addressed all questions the Board of Trustees had regarding her report.

7. **Health Benefits Committee Report**

Trustee Kay Satre gave the Health Benefits Committee Report. During the Health Benefits Committee meeting on November 7th, Tom Quirk and Yvette Fields from Alliant provided an update on the upcoming RFP process for the plan this year. Key components of the process will include seeking bids for third-party administration (TPA), stop loss, and a pharmacy benefit manager (PBM). The committee discussed opportunities for cost savings, potential disruptions to current plans, and how the RFP process will provide useful information for comparing vendor options. Alliant will present proposals in January, with finalist interviews scheduled for March. Additionally, the committee reviewed the year-end financials, which showed a \$2.5 million dollar increase in plan expenses due to higher claims and additional costs in stop loss and pharmacy administration. As a result, the combined reserves and unreserves stand at \$6.9 million dollars, with the unreserves reduced to about \$1.1 million dollars, down from \$2.4 million dollars in previous years. The committee emphasized the need for prudent cost-reduction measures to ensure the plan remains solvent and affordable while maintaining quality

benefits. Trustee Satre addressed all questions the Board of Trustees had regarding the information presented.

8. **Wellness Committee Report**

There was no Wellness Committee Report this evening.

9. **Montana School Boards Association Report**

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn gave the Montana Schools Boards Association Report. During the Montana School Board Association meeting, key updates were provided regarding legislative priorities and funding goals for the 2025 and 2027 sessions. A major focus was on closing the inflation gap, with a proposed \$91 million dollar ask statewide, and increasing educator payments by 50%. There was also discussion around ensuring that the funding benefits not only certified staff but the entire educational system. Other priorities include increasing funding for post-secondary incentives, major maintenance, and property tax equity, which would reduce taxes for 70% of districts. There was mention of potential funds for high-cost communities, with the hope that this would benefit the district. Looking ahead to 2027, the association aims to reduce reliance on A and B funding, address funding inequities, and increase special education funding by 40%. The committee emphasized the importance of preparing for potential funding challenges and working to secure additional funds for the upcoming tough fiscal periods, particularly in May. Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn addressed all questions the Board of Trustees had regarding the information presented.

10. **Parent Council Visit Reports**

There were no parent council visit reports this evening.

That concluded the Reports portion of the agenda.

**VIII. BOARD COMMENTS**

The trustees had a robust conversation about the 2015 decennial study and legislative response and discussed challenges with school funding.

**IX. ADJOURNMENT**

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn adjourned the meeting at 9:58 p.m.

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Candice Delvaux, Recording Secretary

Date