



**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, December 10th, 2024**  
5:30 p.m.

### MINUTES

**ATTENDANCE – Present unless otherwise noted.**

Siobhan Hathhorn, Chair  
Jennifer McKee, Vice Chair  
Jeff Hindoien, Trustee  
Jennifer Walsh, Trustee  
Kay Satre, Trustee  
Rachel Robison, Trustee  
Janet Armstrong, Trustee  
Charlie Snellman, Capital High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees

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  
Justine Alberts, Curriculum Director  
Kaitlyn Hess, Data and Federal Programs  
Director  
Jane Shawn, HEA President  
Lona Carter, Student Health Services & Special Education Director  
Karen Ogden, Communications Officer  
Lisa Cordingley, HEF Director  
Tim McMahan, Activities Director  
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 5:33 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 was presented with an insightful overview of the NASA LiftOff Institute experience by Ms. Megan Lane, an educator at C.R. Anderson Middle School. Ms. Lane had the distinct honor of being selected to attend the prestigious 2024 NASA LiftOff Institute this past summer in Houston, Texas, alongside 35 other teachers from across the nation. Her participation was fully funded by the Montana Space Grant Consortium, which required her to share her experience and demonstrate how the knowledge gained would be integrated into her classroom.

Ms. Lane explained that one of the primary focuses of the institute was NASA's Artemis program, with its ambitious goal of establishing a human presence on Mars. A key component of the 2024 LiftOff Institute was exploring the challenges of growing plants in space. Ms. Lane elaborated on the collaboration between NASA and the Fairchild Tropical Botanical Gardens in Florida, which began a decade ago. Fairchild received a grant to develop plant growth chambers and distribute them to middle and high schools, enabling students to contribute to NASA's research on plant cultivation in space.

To conclude her presentation, Ms. Lane shared that, in October of this year, she received a new vegetable growth chamber for her classroom. This advanced chamber allows her students to grow plants and collect data within a simulated International Space Station environment, providing them with a hands-on opportunity to participate in space research.

Ms. Lane thoughtfully addressed all questions posed by the Board of Trustees regarding her presentation, providing further insight into her experience and the ways in which it will benefit her students' learning.

## **IV. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

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

- Recognition
  - Capital and Helena High Schools-Handling Threats that Occurred Last Thursday
  - Special thanks to our Parent-Teacher Organization volunteers who provided dinner for our educators during Parent-Teacher Conferences over the past couple weeks.

- Congratulations to Capital High Educator Lauren Tholt for being named the Montana Association of Student Councils High School Advisor of the Year at the state conference in Billings.
  - Congratulations to Charlie Snellman who has been selected to the United States Senate Youth Program.
  - Congratulations to the Capital High Bruins football team on winning the State AA Football Championship!!
  - “Harvest of the Month” program national grant-thank you St. Peter’s Health.
  - Robert Worthy, Sodexo Manager- “Montana Menu Day”.
  - Thank you to volunteer judges for the “Valley of Gold Speech & Debate Tournament”. Congratulations to all participants and thank you Principal Zanto and Capital High School for hosting the event.
  - Thank you to Principal Matt Carey, and the staff and students at PAL for hosting a Thanksgiving Celebration.
  - Thank you to Lisa Cordingley and the Helena Education Foundation for hosting a wonderful evening at the Great Conversations event.
  - Thank you to the participants of the District Wide Consensus Training and our facilitators Dr. Rob Watson, Larry Nielsen, and Diane Groves.
  - Thank you to Principal Kathleen Prody, Assistant Principal Erin Hunt, and Assistant Principal Sol Jones, and the staff and students at C.R. Anderson Middle School for a great Board of Trustees Work Session.
- New Business
    - District Wide Consensus Training
    - Registration for Fall 2025 Kindergarten starts Wednesday, January 8<sup>th</sup>, at Noon
    - 340b Rx Discussion
    - Montana’s Innovative Educational Program (IEP) Tax Credit
    - Upcoming 2025 Session – Preparing
      - School Funding
      - Advocacy for Public Schools
    - High School Master Schedule Planning – Mr. McKay
    - Data/Federal Programs/Curriculum Lunch Listening Sessions at Sites
    - Master Facility Planning
      - Boundary Discussions
      - New Construction
- Outreach/Meetings
    - Parent Advisory Committee
    - Teacher Advisory Committee
    - School Funding Meeting
    - AA Superintendents
    - Board Leadership
    - Biweekly HSD/CMS Meeting

- Hometown Helena
  - Consensus Training Workshops
  - Quarterly Meeting with the City of Helena
  - HSD/HEA Meeting
  - HEF
  - HEF-Executive Committee
  - Cabinet & Leadership
  - TV, Print, Radio Media
- Other
    - December 23<sup>rd</sup> -January 3<sup>rd</sup> Winter Break-No School

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

## **V. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT**

Ms. Sarah Dramstad gave general public comment. Ms. Dramstad is a music educator for Helena Public Schools. Ms. Dramstad’s general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to the background of recent budget reductions and their impact on music education. She explained the current music instruction model and outlined the challenges it has introduced, such as scheduling conflicts, a lack of continuity in instruction, and difficulties in building meaningful relationships with students due to the infrequent nature of lessons. Additionally, she discussed the challenges faced by P.E. teachers under the new model.

Ms. Moffie Funk gave general public comment. Ms. Funk is a parent of two Helena Public School District graduates and a grandparent to a kindergartener in the district. Ms. Funk’s general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to gratitude for educators, advocacy for public schools, stressing the importance of securing adequate funding for public schools, and praising the testimony given by the Board of Trustees Student Representatives Charlie and Adella during the session of the Education Interim Budget Committee.

That concluded general public comment, and the Board of Trustees moved on to recognitions.

## **VI. RECOGNITIONS**

The Board of Trustees proudly recognized Coach Kyle Mihelish and the Capital High Bruins football team for their outstanding achievement in winning the State AA Football Championship. This remarkable accomplishment highlights the hard work, dedication, and teamwork demonstrated by both the coaches

and athletes throughout the season. The Board extends its heartfelt congratulations to Coach Mihelish and the entire Bruins team for their exceptional performance.

The Board of Trustees moved on to review the consent action items.

## VII. NEW BUSINESS

### A. Consent Action Items

1. Personnel Actions
2. Warrants
3. Approval of FY 2024-25 Out-Of-District Attendance Agreements (Nonresident Students Attending Helena School District)
4. 11.7.24 Steering Committee-HPS Compensation Philosophy Meeting Minutes
5. 11.12.24 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:** 7-0 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 of HPS Compensation Philosophy

Superintendent Wertz introduced Jim Kerins, Managing Consultant with Communication & Management Service, LLC who presented the action item, *Approval of HPS Compensation Philosophy*. In the full board meeting agenda packet Mr. Kerins shared a memo stating, “*Enclosed for your action and potential approval is the Compensation Philosophy for Helena Public Schools developed by a Steering Committee. This work began with a discussion at the September 10, 2024 meeting in which Communication and Management Services, LLC (CMS) shared information to the Board of Trustees on the concept of a compensation philosophy and feedback was provided of the key elements for inclusion. A Steering Committee of diverse stakeholders was then formed to draft a compensation philosophy statement for Helena Public Schools. The Steering Committee met in open meetings on October 10, 2024, and November 7, 2024. The sessions were a productive collaboration among staff, union representatives and administration. The Compensation Philosophy will serve as a guiding framework that will direct efforts in designing effective classification and pay policies and methods. This Compensation Philosophy will be an invaluable tool for communicating HPS’ goals and approach to stakeholders and supports a compensation plan that is understandable and aligns with our district’s mission and values.*” Also included in the

full board agenda meeting packet is the proposed HPS Compensation Philosophy which states:

*“The Helena Public School District recruits, retains, and motivates a highly qualified workforce through an understandable and competitive compensation structure. Our compensation philosophy supports our mission to educate, engage, and empower each student to maximize his or her individual potential with the knowledge, skills, and character essential to being a responsible citizen and life-long learner through the following objectives:*

- *Recognize and reward employees through a compensation structure that values professional development, enhanced qualifications, and positive contributions to the organization. Ensure our compensation structure attracts new talent and promotes longevity.*
- *Maintain external competitiveness to honor our obligations to students, employees, taxpayers, and the community. Ensure the compensation plan is strategic and based on relevant market data and our recruitment and selection experience.*
- *Ensure compensation planning is fiscally responsible, recognizing local, state, and federal funding sources pose challenges. Strive to align compensation with the needs and goals of the district and our community.*
- *Ensure compensation for employees reflects experience and levels of organizational responsibility.*
- *Support employees holistically through benefits that include health insurance, retirement plans, paid leave, and professional development opportunities. Ensure employees feel valued and supported both personally and professionally.*
- *Ensure our plan adheres to legal standards, including state and federal laws regarding the compensation and benefits of certified and non-certified staff.*
- *Ensure our plan is tenable and actively promote understanding of the plan among all stakeholders, including employees, supervisors, and the community.*
- *Honor the collective bargaining process and foster collaborative decision-making.*
- *Ensure that compensation practices are sustainable, consistent, and respectful of all employees.*
- *Foster continuous improvement of our compensation system including regularly assessing the market and updating the system to reflect district needs and best practices.*

Mr. Kerins addressed all question proposed by the trustees regarding the *Approval of HPS Compensation Philosophy*.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the *HPS Compensation Philosophy* as presented.”

**Motion:** Trustee Kay Satre moved to approve the *HPS Compensation Philosophy* as presented. Trustee Janet Armstrong seconded the motion.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Vote:** 7-0 motion carries unanimously.

## 2. Approval of HPS-Para Educators Collective Bargaining Agreement

Ms. Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director, presented the action item *Approval of HPS-Para Educators Collective Bargaining Agreement* 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 Education Association reached a tentative agreement on November 21, 2024. The para educators ratified the tentative agreement to the contract and notified us on December 10, 2024. The District negotiation team recommends ratification.

The two (2) year agreement was open for wages only for July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025. A summary is noted below. Upon the Board's approved, a final copy of the wage scale will be made available electronically.

- The District shall continue to contribute to the employee cafeteria benefits plan the amount of \$1,031.90 per month for twelve (12) month employees and \$1,238.28 per month for ten (10) month employees.
- An increase of \$0.30 per hour to each cell in the salary matrix for the 2024-2025 fiscal year, effective July 1, 2024.
- The total estimated salary cost of this settlement is approximately \$63,951.57 for the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

Considerations:

- Helena Public Schools and Helena Education Association have a collaborative relationship and productive negotiations history.
- This one year wage 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 agreement as agreed upon between Helena School District and Helena Education Association Para Educators.

Ms. Mizell answered any questions the trustees had regarding the *Approval of HPS-Para Educators Collective Bargaining Agreement*.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item, *Approval of HPS-Para Educators Collective Bargaining Agreement* as presented.”

**Motion:** Trustee Jeff Hindoien moved to approve and ratify the tentative agreement reached with the Helena Education Association para educator bargaining unit for their 24/25 salary agreement. Trustee Jennifer McKee seconded the motion.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Vote:** 7-0 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 3150: Tobacco Free Schools**

Ms. Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff, presented for information to the Board of Trustees *Policy 3150: Tobacco Free Schools*. The Policy Committee is recommending the repeal of this policy as Policy 8225, which addresses similar issues, already covers much of the same content. Ms. Ridgway addressed questions the Board of Trustees had regarding *Policy 3150: Tobacco Free Schools* and stated this policy will come before the board next month with a recommendation to repeal.

#### **2. Policy 2070: Network Information and Communication System Policy**

Ms. Ridgway presented for information to the Board of Trustees *Policy 2070: Network Information and Communication System Policy*. This policy has not been revised since 1997, and the updated language reflects the current reality that the district now has established networks, rather than being in the process of implementing them. Key changes to the policy include updated language on responsible online behavior and modifications to the previous statement regarding student access to equipment and networks. Originally, the policy stated that the district may withdraw student access to its network and the internet. However, this was revised, as it was noted that students can still access the internet via personal devices, such as phones. Additionally, the updated policy includes standard language concerning warranties and indemnification, clarifying that the district is not responsible for any lost or damaged information or unauthorized charges related to student devices. Ms. Ridgway addressed questions the Board of Trustees had regarding *Policy 2070: Network Information and Communication System Policy*.



3. **Policy 2170: Significant Writing**

Ms. Ridgway presented for information to the Board of Trustees *Policy 2170: Significant Writing*. When the policy was initially developed in 2017, the Board of Trustees opted not to implement a significant writing program as outlined in the Administrative Rules of Montana (10.55.701). Given that the policy is no longer necessary, the Policy Committee is recommending its repeal. Ms. Ridgway addressed questions the Board of Trustees had regarding *Policy 2170: Significant Writing* and stated this policy will come before the board next month with a recommendation to repeal.

4. **Policy 3100: Publications and Distribution or Posting of Materials**

Ms. Ridgway presented for information to the Board of Trustees *Policy 3100: Publications and Distribution or Posting of Materials*. Ms. Ridgway stated a minor change was made on line 43 which makes it clear that distributing materials to our students or posting materials in our schools must be approved by the Assistant Superintendent's office. Ms. Ridgway addressed questions the Board of Trustees had regarding *Policy 3100: Publications and Distribution or Posting of Materials*.

5. **Update on Growing Art in HSD Elementary Schools This School Year**

Board Vice Chair Jennifer McKee expressed her interest in growing arts education within the Helena School District's elementary schools this year. She acknowledged the challenges posed by limited funding and the need for community involvement in addressing these gaps. Rather than waiting for long-term policy changes, she emphasized the importance of exploring what can be done immediately within the district's control.

Through outreach to local organizations, such as the Holter Museum of Art and Omerta Arts, Trustee McKee discovered significant interest and enthusiasm from the community to support arts initiatives. She noted that a successful artist-in-residence program, already implemented in several schools, could serve as a model for expansion. This program, which involves assigning artists to work directly with schools and their principals, has proven effective in enhancing the arts curriculum and could be scaled up to include more schools.

While she acknowledged the complexities of scheduling and resource allocation, Trustee McKee suggested that with proper coordination and private fundraising, this program could grow within the district. She emphasized that while this initiative would not solve all challenges, it could serve as a meaningful step forward in enriching the arts education available to students, and she would put together a plan to bring forward at a future meeting.

6. **High School Deferred Maintenance Analysis**

Mr. Todd Verrill, Facilities Director for Helena Public Schools, delivered a comprehensive presentation on the deferred maintenance analysis for the high schools to the Board of Trustees. He began by providing an overview of the annual construction inflation trends specific to nonresidential construction, setting the stage for the discussion.

Following this, Mr. Verrill presented a detailed breakdown of the deferred maintenance costs for both Helena High School and Capital High School, which together total approximately \$51,195,140.72. He then proceeded to identify and examine the top five building systems, ranked by the cost of deferred maintenance, for each of the two schools.

In the final portion of the presentation, Mr. Verrill highlighted the condition of the HVAC system at Helena High School. Notably, the school houses one of the last two remaining steam systems in the district, serviced by three boilers, of which only two are operational. These boilers operate at an efficiency rate of 45-55%, while many of the steam and return condensate pipes and fittings are experiencing significant failure.

Throughout the presentation, Mr. Verrill thoroughly addressed all inquiries from the Board of Trustees, providing insightful responses to the questions regarding the deferred maintenance analysis for both high schools.

## 7. **Facilities Master Plan Update**

Superintendent Rex Weltz gave a facilities master plan update to the Board of Trustees. Superintendent Weltz provided an update on the ongoing process for addressing the district's facility needs, particularly regarding the high schools. Reflecting on past discussions, he noted that following the construction of three new elementary schools in 2017, the need to focus on the high school facilities became evident. While the district prioritized elementary schools at that time, it was acknowledged that attention would eventually turn to the high schools.

Superintendent Weltz emphasized that the district had collaborated with SMA on a master facility planning process. This collaboration has resulted in a comprehensive roadmap for addressing the district's facility needs, with a particular focus on new construction and potential remodels. Superintendent Weltz expressed his commitment to ensuring that the current planning process leads to tangible outcomes. He emphasized that the district is poised to take actionable steps, with the support of the community, to address the high school facilities in a meaningful way.

Superintendent Weltz outlined a proposed timeline for addressing the district's facility needs, particularly focusing on the potential replacement and remodeling of the high schools. Superintendent Weltz explained that the district would begin the process by collaborating with architects and planning experts in January, with the pre-bond work taking about six months. This early phase will involve discussions with administrators to assess current instructional needs and determine the scope of work required for facility improvements.

The timeline for campaigning and engaging the community is projected to span nearly ten months, with active efforts beginning in January and continuing through October, including informational campaigns and public education. A potential bond vote would take place in late September 2025 or early October 2025, with the goal of obtaining community approval for the necessary bond.

If the bond is approved, the district would enter a lengthy design and construction phase, requiring about a year to secure architects, develop plans, and begin groundwork. Vertical

construction would begin in the fall of 2026, with a projected move-in date for new facilities in the fall of 2028. The Superintendent emphasized that while the process is lengthy, it is crucial to begin now to address the district's long-term facility needs.

Superintendent Weltz provided comprehensive responses to all questions raised by the Board of Trustees regarding his presentation. The Board actively engaged in a robust and thoughtful discussion on the district's facilities and facility planning, the potential bond measure, and the broader implications for the community. Following this constructive dialogue, 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, was not in attendance this evening, therefore, Mr. Charlie Snellman, Capital High School Student Representative, gave the report on her behalf.

Helena High might be approaching the last month of the year; however, December is filled with many annual events and new activities that include the whole Bengal community.

One of the best parts of this time of year is the amazing concerts our school organizes! Our students and teachers work incredibly hard to prepare for these performances, and the result is a testament to the time they pour in. While the band concert is taking place this evening, the Helena community still has an opportunity to see our choir students perform in the Capitol Rotunda on Monday, December 16 at 12:30 p.m. Our orchestra will perform on Tuesday, October 17 at 6:00 p.m. at CHS, and Thursday, December 19 at 6:00 p.m., in the Capitol Rotunda.

This past Friday, we hosted our second major family engagement activity. Increasing family engagement within HHS has been and will continue to be one of our main goals this year. It is highly encouraging to see families wanting to be part of their child's education. Our culinary students put together an amazing bison chili thanks to the bison our students helped harvest. The chili, loaded potato soup, and treats were shared by many at the feed. During the event, we were able to showcase the amazing art pieces our students have been working on and introduce our winter sports teams to the community. Thank you to everyone who was able to attend. Moving forward, Helena High is working on a parent learning night to be able to gain input from families on events they would like to see us put together. Our next big task will be Breakfast with Bengals, a spin on the Donuts with Dads events you may have seen across the country. During semester finals, we will invite parents to be at the school one morning to hand out donuts and wish students luck as they sit for finals. All of you are welcome to attend and help if you would like. Donuts will be handed out from 7:45-8:20 a.m. on Thursday, January 23.

Each year, clubs, departments, and individuals put together holiday food and gift baskets for families in need at our school. Currently, we have 32 baskets that will be gifted to identified

families the week prior to the winter break. These baskets typically contain games or other family activities, necessary food items to prepare a Christmas dinner, additional food to last the break, and other goodies that the group organizing feels may be helpful. We are incredibly thankful to the HHS community for their long-standing support for this initiative. Along with the holiday baskets, our Student Council has been helping with a Toys for Tots drive at the school. Many new, unwrapped toys have been donated and given to the Toys for Tots coordinator in our community.

This month we would like to recognize student athlete senior Birdie Heuser. Birdie was selected as the Western AA Conference Volleyball Player of the Year. This is a tremendous honor and demonstration of Birdie's continued hard work. Additionally, we would like to recognize the cast of *She Kills Monsters*. Our thespian students did an amazing job with their production and poured a great deal of effort and dedication into the piece.

Thank you to our staff who attended the consensus training this past month. Since then, many incredible conversations have occurred on how we utilize the process moving forward. Winter sports have now started for our student-athletes. We wish luck to each one of our teams. The Student Council will host the annual HHS Winter Assembly on Friday, December 20 from 10:00-10:50 a.m. in the gym. This assembly highlights our music programs, recognizes our clubs and activities, and involves high-energy student games. Please feel free to stop by and experience this fun event! Helena High looks forward to an exciting and joy-filled end to the year.

Mr. Charlie Snellman, Capital High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees, gave his Student Representative Report. Mr. Snellman commented, "Good evening, Trustees, as we head into the holiday season, Capital High School has been bustling with achievements, events, and community engagement. This November may have been one of the busiest and most successful months yet, and December is shaping up to be even better! Here's a chronological recap of the latest updates:

#### Leadership Helena Event

Approximately 50 individuals from the Leadership Helena program toured CHS, learning about our diverse course offerings and career pathways through a presentation by Mr. Zanto. The visitors left impressed with the opportunities we provide to our students.

#### CHS HOSA Thanksgiving Donations – Pre-Break

CHS HOSA donated three full Thanksgiving meals—amounting to 120 pounds of food—to Helena Food Share. This act of kindness underscores the spirit of service among our students.

#### Winter Formal – Saturday, November 23rd

Thanks to Lauren Tholt, Sharon Hunt, and Student Council, over 550 students enjoyed the Winter Formal at the Exhibition Hall. The night was filled with music, dancing, and laughter, ending on a high note just before Thanksgiving break.

#### CHS Football State Championship

Congratulations to Coach Mihelish and the Bruins for clinching another state football title a couple of weeks ago! This victory is a testament to the hard work, resilience, and team spirit of

our athletes and coaches.

#### CHS Safety Meeting – November

Staff attended a safety meeting to review protocols for emergencies, including the use of classroom phones and the InformaCast App. These updates ensure that our school remains prepared and proactive.

#### Consensus Training – Monday, December 2nd

During PLC time, staff participated in consensus training focused on Intervention Time (IT). Departments explored best practices and committed to fostering IT success as part of their academic “Course Projects.”

#### CHS Musical Auditions – Tuesday, December 3rd

Auditions for CHS’s first-ever winter musical, "Mean Girls," were held on December 3rd. Rehearsals are already underway, and performances are scheduled to begin in February. We can’t wait to see our students shine in this new and exciting production.

#### Speech and Debate Tournament – Friday and Saturday, December 6th-7th

CHS hosted the Valley of Gold Speech and Debate Tournament, welcoming 15 “AA” high schools and over 450 student competitors. With the help of more than 200 volunteer judges, the event showcased incredible talent and teamwork.

#### DECA’s Night to Shine Auditions – Ongoing Through January 8th

Auditions for DECA’s annual Night to Shine talent event are now open and will run through January 8th. We’re eager to see the creativity and skill our students will bring to the stage! (I will have more information next month!)

#### Upcoming Holiday Concerts

Our talented music students are preparing to fill December with festive cheer:

Monday, December 9th: Band Concert, 7:00 PM, CHS Auditorium

Tuesday, December 10th: Choir Concert, 7:00 PM, CHS Auditorium

Tuesday, December 17th: Crosstown Beginning Orchestras, 6:00 PM, CHS Auditorium

Thursday, December 19th: Crosstown Intermediate and Advanced Orchestras, 6:00 PM, Capitol Rotunda

We encourage everyone to attend these performances and celebrate the hard work of our student musicians.

#### CHS National Honor Society and Toys for Tots

The National Honor Society recently wrapped up a very successful canned food drive.

Additionally, the annual Toys for Tots drive is still going strong, ensuring that many families in our community will have a brighter holiday season.

Next week, Student Council will host the 2024 CHS Winter Assembly, featuring highlights from sports, music, clubs, and fun games for staff and students to enjoy together, or often at the expense of one another... The top acts from the CHS Talent Show will also have the opportunity to perform for the entire student body of CHS and win a \$100 cash award!

As always, Capital High School continues to lead with excellence, generosity, and a sense of community. From championship wins and artistic achievements to meaningful service projects, our students and staff exemplify the best of what public education and teamwork can accomplish. Thank you for your continued support, and we look forward to sharing more successes in the new year!” Mr. Snellman addressed questions the Board of Trustees had regarding his report.

2. **Helena Education Association Report**

Ms. Jane Shawn, HEA Director, gave the Helena Education Association Report. Ms. Shawn shared that the para educators voted to approve the tentative agreement, which includes a flat rate increase, as opposed to a percentage-based increase. While the increase is appreciated, Ms. Shawn acknowledged that it is not fully reflective of the work expected from the para educators. Ms. Shawn also reported that the Calendar Committee held its first meeting, with future sessions scheduled regularly to finalize the school calendar. The committee has been a productive and engaging process, filled with fresh ideas and forward-thinking discussions. Ms. Shawn was pleased to announce that the district has nine newly certified National Board teachers, including Kellen Alger at Jefferson, Jody Branting at Four Georgians, Emily Lynn at Jefferson, Kaci Matthies at Jim Darcy, Jean Placko at Capital High (currently on a leave of absence), Andrew Roberts at Helena Middle School, Jennifer Schaefer at Jim Darcy, Andy Sund at Jefferson, and Holly Westerberg at Jim Darcy. Additionally, Maria Foot at Capital High successfully renewed her National Board Certification for another five years. Helena School District now boasts a total of 59 National Board-Certified Teachers, the highest number in any district in Montana. Ms. Shawn addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding her report.

3. **Facilities & Technology Committee Report**

Trustee Jeff Hindoien gave the Facilities & Technology Committee Report. Mr. Hindoien shared information from the technology update that was given by Gary Myers, Director of Educational Technology. Cybersecurity threats have generally declined post-election, with one successful defense against an attack, thanks to well-maintained systems. The district continues to record both regular and work sessions of board meetings, as required by statute, to ensure an official record. While board committees are not required to post their meetings, they are still recorded for internal purposes. The district is applying for a \$220,000 cybersecurity grant through the FEMA State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program, which would significantly enhance the district’s security capabilities. A decision has been made to discontinue support for network printers older than five years due to security and maintenance concerns. Issues related to Chromebook charging carts, which had been problematic due to cable and equipment malfunctions, have now been resolved. Additionally, a new Tier 1 technician has joined the team to address front-line tech support issues. In November, around 400 support tickets were created, with nearly two-thirds resolved on first contact.

Next, Mr. Hindoien shared information from the facilities update given by Todd Verrill, Facilities Director. Current facilities projects include the installation of a new fence at CR and ongoing interior painting at Rossiter. The committee acknowledged the departure of Katie Ott,

who has been with the district for 16 years and Mr. Verrill stated her departure is a significant loss to the district. Seven new hires have been added to the facilities team, an important development considering the ongoing staffing challenges in this area. Special recognition was given to Riley Medley and HR for their support in filling these positions. Staff safety training continues at CHS, with a focus on emergency notification systems. Playground assessments are being conducted by Great Western Recreation, providing a resource to evaluate the district's current playground conditions. All Valley schools are in compliance with water sampling regulations. In addition, efforts are underway to replace old water fixtures and drinking fountains with lead-free alternatives through a DEQ program, which currently offers 100% reimbursement. The district is aggressively pursuing this program to replace outdated fixtures before the reimbursement window closes at the end of June. Trustee Hindoi addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding his report.

#### 4. **Budget and Finance Committee Report**

Trustee Janet Armstrong gave the Budget and Finance Committee Report. The Budget and Finance Committee was briefed on the current status of the interlocal fund, which has become crucial in covering the district's deficit. At the beginning of the year, the fund balance stood at \$6 million. Currently, it is projected to decrease to \$4 million, with approximately \$2 million being spent from the fund. These funds are being allocated across several areas, with the largest expenditure being for property and liability insurance, which accounts for almost \$1.2 million. This reflects a 17% increase in insurance costs from the previous year. Additional spending includes technology supplies, curriculum, a small amount for assessments, contracted services, and minimal allocations for field trips and professional development. It was emphasized that the interlocal fund cannot be exhausted entirely. While it is not a perpetual funding source, it has been critical in helping the district manage its budgetary shortfalls. However, there is a finite amount, and the funds come in irregular increments. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the fund saw an increase due to ESSER funding, but those days are behind us. Careful management of these funds remains necessary to ensure the district's financial stability.

A discussion also took place regarding potential changes in state funding, particularly in light of upcoming legislative actions. Although the legislature is currently out of session, there are potential shifts in funding mechanisms that could impact the district. One significant consideration involves the state's approach to funding, which has traditionally been tied to student enrollment numbers. Due to declining enrollment, the state is exploring an alternative method of allocating funds, which would be based on the number of "qualified educators" in the district. These educators include not only teachers but also counselors, psychologists, and other licensed staff members. Currently, the district receives approximately \$3,700 per qualified educator. The state is proposing an increase in this amount to \$41,600 per qualified educator. However, while this increase is promising, it would primarily serve to address the current budget deficit, rather than providing additional funds for new programs or services. It is important to note that even with this increase, the funds would largely be used to fill existing gaps, rather than expanding the district's capacity. There are also specific criteria attached to this funding proposal. To qualify, the district's starting teacher salaries must be at 62% of the average teacher salary. This percentage would gradually increase to 70% by 2030. However, there are still many uncertainties around how the state will define "qualified educators" and how this will apply to different types of staff, such as full-time employees versus long-term

substitutes. Additionally, while the funding proposal is promising, it could have significant implications for how salary negotiations are handled at the local level. Another legislative proposal, sponsored by Representative Melissa Romano, seeks to address the funding disparity between 6th and 7th graders. Currently, 6th-grade students are classified as elementary students and receive \$6,000 per pupil in funding, whereas 7th graders in the same building, with similar teachers and structures, receive \$8,000 per pupil. If the district could receive the same level of funding for 6th graders as it does for 7th graders, this would amount to an additional \$1.1 million in funding. However, the superintendent has indicated that this change is unlikely to occur in the near future.

Following Trustee Armstrong's report, the Board of Trustees and Superintendent Weltz engaged in a thoughtful and comprehensive discussion regarding the ongoing conversations concerning the issue of cell phone distractions in the classroom.

Trustee Armstrong addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding her report.

5. **Policy Committee Report**

Trustee Jennifer Walsh gave the Policy Committee Report. The Policy Committee continues its diligent work reviewing and updating district policies. Under the leadership of Ms. Ridgway, the committee has been systematically addressing the policies on the agenda. Most of the policies discussed during the recent meeting did not require substantial changes. The revisions that were made were primarily minor, such as updates to vocabulary and language to improve clarity and consistency. The committee extends its gratitude to Ms. Ridgway for her continued efforts in preparing and organizing the policies for review. Her work has been instrumental in ensuring that the committee can address these updates efficiently and proactively. Looking ahead, the committee is preparing for an anticipated influx of legislative changes. Given the expected developments with the upcoming legislative session, the committee aims to complete as many policy revisions as possible before these changes take effect. Trustee Walsh addressed questions the Board of Trustees had regarding her report.

6. **Teaching & Learning Committee Report**

Trustee Kay Satre gave the Teaching & Learning Committee Report. At the meeting Ms. Lona Carter, Student Health Services & Special Education Director, and her team provided updates on the district's Special Education and Student Health Services programs. The district currently serves 1,338 students in Special Education, addressing needs such as learning disabilities, autism, and speech and language impairments across various sites, including Bryant, Central, Four Georgians, Trailhead Day Treatment, Mount Ascension, and PAL. A recent OPI audit reviewed over 1,300 student files, flagging only 14 for further review, reflecting strong district compliance. The district is also implementing early intervention programs like Child Find, which identifies children with behavioral challenges before they enter school, aiming to prevent future learning deficits. Additionally, pre-ETS employment transition services are being provided at all high schools to help students prepare for post-graduation employment. Other initiatives include unified P.E. classes and professional development for staff, including Crisis Prevention Institute training. Ms. Carter highlighted the expansion of mental health services, with PureView Health Center now offering support at Helena Middle School and continued services at Capital High School and PAL and we have



partnerships with the Helena Indian Alliance at HHS and CRA. We also have the Montana Cares App as well as the RBHI Health Initiative which continues to provide mental health screenings and case management for students in grades 6-12. Positive results from recent RBHI screenings indicate a decrease in anxiety, depression, and suicidality among students, showing the effectiveness of these efforts. Ms. Carter outlined several key needs, including a Pre-ETS coordinator at the high school level, K-5 case management services, and the development of behavioral support systems at all schools. She also emphasized the need for a district-wide crisis response team and increased state funding to sustain these services. Trustee Satre expressed her deep appreciation for the work Ms. Carter and her team are doing. Listening to them has made her even more aware of, and appreciative of, the serious commitment our district has to educating all of our students and meeting their diverse needs. The breadth of services and support provided to our students is impressive, and it's clear that our district is dedicated to creating a comprehensive and responsive educational environment. Trustee Satre addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding her report.

7. **Health Benefits Committee Report**

Trustee Kay Satre gave the Health Benefits Committee Report. On December 5th, the committee received a presentation from Amber Ireland of Allegiance, who shared detailed data on the district's health plan utilization and costs for the previous year. The data revealed some concerning trends. The district's health plan covered 871 employees and 1,778 members, showing a decline of 3% and 5%, respectively, compared to the previous year. This decrease in membership led to a reduction in premium revenue. Non-catastrophic medical claims, covering members with claims under \$100,000, increased by 24.7%, while catastrophic medical claims rose by 24%. Prescription drug claims saw a more modest increase of 3.8%. In total, medical and RX claims increased by 20%, resulting in an increase in the cost per member per month, from \$503 to \$605. The data showed a 3.7% rise in member utilization, with claims from using members growing by 6.8%. Non-catastrophic claims were most concentrated in mental health, musculoskeletal issues, and pregnancy-related disorders. Outpatient services, including imaging, radiology, surgery, and medical equipment, were the top services provided. In terms of catastrophic claims, which affected about 1% of members but accounted for 28.5% of total claims, pregnancy-related issues, mental health, cancer, and neurological disorders were the primary contributors. Chronic conditions affecting members included depression, hypertension, and lower back pain. Although depression remained the top chronic condition, there was a slight decrease in diagnoses from the previous year, as well as a small reduction in hypertension and lower back pain cases. The district's narrow network program, implemented through St. Peter's Health, showed positive results, saving members about \$550,000 in out-of-pocket expenses. Despite these efforts, Amber expressed concern about the difficulty in controlling rising healthcare costs, noting that the district's situation is not unique. She suggested more outreach and communication, especially targeting preventative care visits for children and adults in specific age groups (10-19 years, 20s, and 50s), as well as efforts to reduce unnecessary emergency room visits. However, she cautioned that these measures would not fully address the 20% increase in overall claims. To explore potential cost savings, the district is issuing an RFP for both medical and RX plans. Proposals will be reviewed starting in January, with decisions expected by March. In conclusion, the overall outlook for the district's health plan remains challenging, and further strategic steps will be needed to address these rising costs effectively. Trustee Satre addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding her report.

Following Trustee Satre’s report, the Board of Trustees had a very robust conversation about the district’s health care plan and rising healthcare costs.

8. **Wellness Committee Report**

Ms. Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff, gave the Wellness Committee Report. The Wellness Committee has continued to prioritize student wellness, with a particular focus on enhancing healthy food options and fostering overall well-being within the district. A key initiative discussed was the introduction of healthy vending machines at the high school level. This has been a long-discussed topic, and the committee is now moving forward with it. Robert, in collaboration with the district, has researched successful implementations, reaching out to a food service director in Washington, who has had these vending machines in place for several years. The vending machines are internet-enabled, allowing students to use credit cards or enter their student ID number to purchase food, which eliminates the stigma often associated with free or reduced lunch programs. This innovative approach has not only provided healthier food options but has also proven financially successful, with the machines paying for themselves within six months. The district is in the process of having similar machines built and is working on placement in locations that can be connected to the internet. Initially, these vending machines will serve lunch, with the potential to expand to breakfast options in the future. Additionally, Lisa and Becca presented the committee's upcoming plans to address mental wellness, specifically focusing on *The Anxious Generation* and exploring strategies to help students manage anxiety. The committee expressed a strong interest in supporting these efforts. The district's MSU member is also pursuing a Farm to School grant, aimed at creating a deeper connection between students and the sources of their food. This program emphasizes the importance of understanding where food comes from and how it impacts overall health and wellness. Looking ahead, the Wellness Committee’s primary focus for the upcoming year will be on identifying and addressing the wellness needs of middle school students. Ms. Ridgway addressed questions the Board of Trustees had regarding her report.

9. **Montana School Boards Association Report**

There was no Montana School Boards Association Report presented this evening. Chair Hathhorn noted that the association is scheduled to begin their legislative work following the Christmas break and there will be more to report in the future.

10. **Parent Council Visit Reports**

Trustee Kay Satre gave a report from her Parent Council Visit to C.R. Anderson Middle School and then Broadwater Elementary School. At the C.R. Anderson Middle School meeting Principal Kathleen Prody provided a report that primarily focused on data from the recent i-Ready benchmarking assessments. In addition to the academic data, she engaged with the parents in attendance, discussing various topics including Halloween costumes, the school dance, and a few items on the school’s wish list that could benefit from parental support. One of the key areas of focus was a plan to explore the addition of new playground equipment. There was also a conversation about a C.R.A. parent Facebook page, with ideas on how to more effectively incorporate social media for better communication and engagement with the parent community. At the Broadwater meeting there was a productive discussion in October about several initiatives aimed at enhancing the school community. Notably, the parent-teacher

conferences were supplemented with food, and there were other exciting events, including a book fair, a "Walk to School" event with hot chocolate served at arrival, and a read-a-thon. The school also planned to host an artist-in-residence program and a game night, in addition to an extra opening of their Spirit Store. The Broadwater community expressed interest in enhancing outdoor spaces to provide more opportunities for outdoor learning and in finding ways to more effectively support teachers. They also discussed how best to use social media to communicate and promote school information and events. One suggestion from the parent group was to streamline communication for busy parents. While the newsletter and the "Five Things to Know" format were well-received, parents felt that a more concise format, perhaps with bullet points highlighting key information, would be even more effective. The suggestion was to include a few important bullets in an email subject line for quick reference, making it easier for parents to grasp key updates without needing to open the email.

Chair Hathhorn attended the Smith Elementary School Parent Council Meeting. At the meeting, the group engaged in a thorough discussion about their involvement in the Parent Advisory Council, which was particularly commendable for its depth and focus. The Parent Council members were enthusiastic about their upcoming Christmas program, specifically the "Jingle Show," and were busy preparing for the associated activities. One of the highlights of the meeting was the exciting announcement that the school would be receiving a new HVAC system, a long-awaited upgrade. The current system, visible in the library as a large, outdated unit, will soon be replaced, bringing much-needed air conditioning to the building. A significant portion of the meeting was dedicated to discussing the challenges faced by families in the surrounding apartment complex, where many residents had recently received eviction notices. The Parent Council expressed deep concern for these families and discussed ways to support them, reflecting the group's genuine care for the well-being of all students, not just their own children. This commitment to the broader school community is truly inspiring. The group also discussed plans to engage in a book study on *The Anxious Generation*, a topic that had been introduced earlier that day at the Wellness meeting. The book, which draws on substantial data, focuses on the mental health challenges faced by today's youth. The Parent Council members were enthusiastic about the study, and it was clear that the subject resonated with many. Additionally, the Parent Council discussed potential capital improvements to the school's playground. They explored ways to collaborate with the district's facilities team to address some of the needed updates. There were also offers from local parents to provide machinery and other resources to assist with the improvements, although the logistics and insurance details are still to be worked out.

Trustee Satre and Chair Hathhorn addressed all questions from the Board of Trustees regarding their reports.

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

## **VIII. BOARD COMMENTS**

There were no further board comments.

**IX. ADJOURNMENT**

Board Chair Siobhan Hathorn adjourned the meeting at 9:33 p.m.

---

Candice Delvaux, Recording Secretary      Date