



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, January 14th, 2025
5:30 p.m.

MINUTES

ATTENDANCE – Present unless otherwise noted.

Siobhan Hathhorn, Chair
Jennifer McKee, Vice Chair
Linda Cleatus, Trustee
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
Adella Harris, Helena High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees
Rex Wertz, Superintendent
Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent
Janelle Mickelson, Business Director
Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff
Todd Verrill, Facilities Director
Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director
Gary Myers, Director of Educational Technology
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
Many guests of the public as well as Helena School District Staff

I. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. REVIEW AGENDA

The Board of Trustees reviewed the agenda and 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 students and staff listed below.

2024 All Northwest Honor Orchestra

Congratulations to the following students for their acceptance into the prestigious All Northwest Honor Orchestra: Elliot Cleary (violin) and Freya Elias (cello) from Helena High School, and Hollis Elliott (cello) and Charlie Snellman (cello) from Capital High School. These talented musicians were selected from a competitive pool of students from Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming. We celebrate these students' exceptional achievements and express our gratitude to educator Kevin Cleary for his dedication and support in guiding these young musicians to success.

National Board-Certified Teachers

The Board of Trustees would like to extend its sincerest congratulations to the following exceptional educators in the Helena School District for their outstanding achievement of earning National Board Certification: Kellen Alger, Jody Branting, Emily Lynn, Hermes Lynn, Kaci Matthies, Jean Placko, Andrew Roberts, Jennifer Schaefer, Andrew Sund, and Holly Westerberg. This prestigious certification is a testament to their dedication to the highest standards of teaching and their unwavering commitment to fostering excellence in education. The Board is proud to recognize their hard work, perseverance, and exceptional contributions to the educational community. We congratulate each of these individuals for their remarkable accomplishment and thank them for their continued dedication to enriching the lives of students in our district.

The Board of Trustees moved on to review the Superintendent's Report.

IV. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

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

- Superintendent Wertz acknowledged the recent passing of former Trustee Terry Beaver's wife and extended his heartfelt condolences to Trustee Beaver and his family during this difficult time.

- Superintendent Weltz acknowledged the ongoing fires in Southern California and extended his thoughts to those affected by the disaster.
- Recognition
 - Mr. Snellman
 - I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to all our staff and students for their incredible efforts in supporting our community and students this holiday season. Through food drives, toy collections, fundraisers, and various service projects, their generosity has made a meaningful impact on those in need. We are truly grateful for their dedication to making this time of year brighter for others. In addition to helping families in need, these annual projects allow our students to experience the joy of giving and plant the seeds of community spirit.
 - Congratulations to the following 105.3 KMTX Teacher of the Month Recipients:
 - Mrs. Libby Kenney-Central Elementary School-November
 - Mrs. Dana Richards-C.R. Anderson Middle School-December
 - January-School Board Recognition Month
 - January 9th-National Law Enforcement Appreciation Day
 - Thank you to the Helena Education Foundation for their generous distribution of grants to our exceptional educators across the district this past December.
 - Congratulations to Kyle Mihelish who has been selected as the AA Football Coach of the Year by the Montana Coaches Association (MCA).
 - Congratulations to Capital High School educators Jake Warner and Sarah Urban who have received the Presidential Award for Excellence in mathematics and science teaching.
- New Business
 - Registration for Fall 2025 Kindergarten started Wednesday, January 8th
 - Montana's Innovative Educational Program (IEP) Tax Credit
 - Transportation – Winter Conditions
 - Summer Jumpstart Program
 - Continuing Work with CMS To Develop Compensation Manual and Classification Tool
 - Office Of Civil Rights Report
 - 2nd Enrollment Count
 - Power School Incident – Technology
 - Food Service RFP
 - Work Compensation RFP
 - Copier RFP
 - Accreditation Process
 - 2025 Legislative Session
 - Priorities – School Administrators of Montana
 - Legislative Bills
 - Technology Levy Planning 3-2-1
 - Master Facilities Planning
 - Pre Bond-Work - SMA
 - Helena High School

- Capital High School
 - Kessler Elementary
 - Activity Facilities Pre-Planning
- Outreach/Meetings
 - Parent Advisory Committee
 - Teacher Advisory Committee
 - 340b Rx Discussion
 - SAM
 - AA Superintendents
 - Board Leadership
 - Hometown Helena
 - Quarterly Meeting with the City of Helena
 - HSD/HEA Meeting
 - HEF
 - HEF-Executive Committee
 - Cabinet & Leadership
 - TV, Print, Radio, Media
 - Shodair Children's Hospital – Projects and Support
- Other
 - January 20th, Martin Luther King Jr. Day-No School K-12
 - January 27th, HS Staff In-Service & Records Day, No School K-12

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. Jennifer Skogley gave general public comment. Ms. Skogley is an elementary music educator for Helena Public Schools. Ms. Skogley's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to challenges associated with the scheduling this year such as challenges with pacing in music curriculum, a delay in establishing classroom routines, increased behavior management issues, and instructional gaps due to schedule interruptions.

Mr. Christopher Nevinski gave general public comment. Mr. Nevinski is a middle school music educator for Helena Public Schools. Mr. Nevinski's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to challenges associated with the scheduling this year such as concern about the incoming 6th graders lacking essential music background due to reduced instruction time, and apprehension regarding the future of the school's music program if current trends continue.

Mr. Kevin Cleary gave general public comment. Mr. Cleary is a high school music educator for Helena Public Schools. Mr. Cleary’s general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to sharing his concerns about the impact of reduced elementary music instruction on middle and high school students' skills and highlighted the importance of a strong elementary music program, referencing the positive impact it had on his own children and its value in supporting students' progression through the school system.

Ms. Moffie Funk gave general public comment. Ms. Funk is a parent of two Helena Public School District graduates and a former teacher. Ms. Funk’s general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to acknowledging the importance of community involvement and advocacy for public education, emphasizing the need for a strong presence at the Capitol to influence legislative decisions and encouraged board members, parents, community members, and students to engage with legislators directly, noting the effectiveness of personal interaction in driving change.

That concluded general public comment, and the Board of Trustees moved on to review the consent action items.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Consent Action Items

1. Personnel Actions
2. Warrants
3. Approval of FY 2024-25 Out-Of-District Attendance Agreements (Nonresident Students Attending Helena School District)
4. 12.10.24 Board of Trustees Full Board Meeting Minutes
5. Resolution to Dispose of Personal Property-HMS Work Out 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 Items for Action.

B. Items for Action

1. Approval of Autism and Cognitive Disorder Certification

Ms. Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director for Helena Public Schools, introduced the action item, *Approval of Autism and Cognitive Disorder Certification*, to the Board of Trustees.

Background:

The Collective Bargaining Agreement between Helena School District and the Helena Education Association (HEA) states that all certification applications recommended for inclusion for lane advancement must be approved by the Board of Trustees and the HEA Board of Directors. If approved, the inclusion would be effective for the 25-26 fiscal year. Currently, there are ten certifications approved for a Board Certification Lane:

- National Board Certification from the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards
- Certification of Clinical Competency for Speech Pathology
- Nationally Certified School Psychologists Credential from the National Association of School Psychologists
- The Board-Certified Behavior Analyst Certification from the Behavior Analyst Certification Board
- Board Certification through the National Board for Certified Occupational Therapists
- Board Certification for Physical Therapists through the Montana Board of Examiners and the American Physical Therapy Association
- Registered Nurse License from the National Council of State Boards of Nursing
- Board Certification from the National Board for Certification of School Nurses
- Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor from the Montana State Board of Behavioral Health
- National Certified Counselor from the National Board of Certified Counselors

The Board Certification Committee reviewed the submission for inclusion of the Autism and Cognitive Disorder Certification from the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES). On December 12, 2024, the Board Certification Committee recommended inclusion. The HEA Board of Directors approved the recommendation on December 17, 2024.

Currently, one educator has requested lane movement for the successful completion of the certification at an estimated cost of \$8,235.86 for the 25-26 fiscal year.

Recommendation:

Approve the inclusion of the Autism and Cognitive Disorder Certification from the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES) for a Board Certification Lane.

Ms. Mizell addressed all questions proposed by the trustees regarding the action item *Approval of Autism and Cognitive Disorder Certification*.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the *Autism and Cognitive Disorder Certification* as presented.”

Motion: Trustee Jeff Hindoiien moved to approve the inclusion of the Autism and Cognitive Disorder Certification from the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES) for a Board Certification Lane in the collective bargaining agreement between the school district and HEA. Trustee Linda Cleatus seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

2. **Approval of the Montana Advanced Opportunity Grant-Elementary District**

Mr. Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent for Helena Public Schools, presented the action item *Approval of the Montana Advanced Opportunity Grant-Elementary District* to the Board of Trustees. The Advanced Opportunities Grant in the Helena School District for Grades 9-12 provides funding to reduce student and family costs for educational opportunities. The grant, amounting to around \$200,000 annually, covers 75% of expenses like AP test fees and online course fees. The remaining 25% supports career and technical education (CTE) expenses, including materials, safety equipment, and certifications. This funding helps make advanced courses more accessible and offsets costs associated with college credit and CTE programs, benefiting students' academic and career preparation.

Mr. McKay shared this evening he is asking the board for approval of an Advanced Opportunities Grant in the Helena School District for grades 6-8. This grant is similar to the one for high school students but focuses on middle school. While the grant currently does not have state funding, the district anticipates that the legislature may fund it, and they want to have a pre-approved plan in place. The grant would support initiatives like career exploration, financial literacy, and career fairs, as well as enhance career preparation software and CTE programs for middle school students. If funded, it will provide valuable resources for these programs.

Mr. McKay addressed all questions proposed by the trustees regarding the action item *Approval of the Montana Advanced Opportunity Grant-Elementary District*.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item *Approval of the Montana Advanced Opportunity Grant-Elementary District*, as presented.”

Motion: Trustee Kay Satre moved to approve the action item *Approval of the Montana Advanced Opportunity Grant-Elementary District* as presented. Trustee Linda Cleatus seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 7-0 motion carries unanimously. *(Please note, Trustee Jennifer Walsh abstained from voting due to the fact that she is a trustee strictly for the high school district, and this action item only pertained to the elementary district.)*

3. **Policy 2070: Network Information and Communication System Policy**

Ms. Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff for Helena Public Schools, presented the action item *Policy 2070: Network Information and Communication System Policy* to the Board of Trustees. 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. There have been no further changes since the policy was presented to the full Board of Trustees for information. Ms. Ridgway addressed all questions proposed by the trustees regarding the action item *Policy 2070: Network Information and Communication System Policy*.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve *Policy 2070: Network Information and Communication System Policy*.”

Motion: Trustee Jennifer McKee moved to approve *Policy 2070: Network Information and Communication System Policy* as presented. Trustee Janet Armstrong seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

4. **Policy 3150: Tobacco Free Schools-Repeal**

Ms. Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff for Helena Public Schools, presented the action item *Policy 3150: Tobacco Free Schools* to the Board of Trustees. The Policy Committee is recommending the repeal of this policy as Policy 8225, which addresses similar issues, already covers much of the same content. There have been no further changes since the policy was presented to the full Board of Trustees for information. Ms. Ridgway addressed all questions proposed by the trustees regarding the action item *Policy 3150: Tobacco Free Schools*.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the repeal of *Policy 3150: Tobacco Free Schools*.”

Motion: Trustee Linda Cleatus moved to repeal *Policy 3150: Tobacco Free Schools*. Trustee Kay Satre seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

5. **Policy 2170: Significant Writing-Repeal**

Ms. Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff for Helena Public Schools, presented the action item *Policy 2170: Significant Writing* to the Board of Trustees. 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. There have been no further changes since the policy was presented to the full Board of Trustees for information. Ms. Ridgway addressed all questions proposed by the trustees regarding the action item *Policy 2170: Significant Writing*.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the repeal of *Policy 2170: Significant Writing*.”

Motion: Trustee Jeff Hindoien moved to repeal *Policy 2170: Significant Writing*. Trustee Jennifer Walsh seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

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

Ms. Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff for Helena Public Schools, presented the action item *Policy 3100: Publications and Distribution or Posting of Materials* to the Board of Trustees. This policy has a minor change on line 43 noting that materials in schools must have prior approval from the Assistant

Superintendent. There have been no further changes since the policy was presented to the full Board of Trustees for information. Ms. Ridgway addressed all questions proposed by the trustees regarding the action item *Policy 3100: Publications and Distribution or Posting of Materials*.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve *Policy 3100: Publications and Distribution or Posting of Materials*.

Motion: Trustee Kay Satre moved to approve *Policy 3100: Publications and Distribution or Posting of Materials*. Trustee Jennifer McKee seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

7. **Authorization of Trustees to Advocate for MTSBA’s Legislative Platform in the 2025 Legislature**

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn presented the action item *Authorization of Trustees to Advocate for MTSBA’s Legislative Platform in the 2025 Legislature* and addressed any questions regarding the action item.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item *Authorization of Trustees to Advocate for MTSBA’s Legislative Platform in the 2025 Legislature*.

Motion: Trustee Jennifer McKee moved to approve the action item *Authorization of Trustees to Advocate for MTSBA’s Legislative Platform in the 2025 Legislature*. Trustee Janet Armstrong seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

8. **Authorization of Superintendent and/or Authorized Designees to Advocate in the 2025 Legislature**

Superintendent Rex Weltz presented the action item *Authorization of Superintendent and/or Authorized Designees to Advocate in the 2025 Legislature* and addressed any questions regarding the action item.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item *Authorization of Superintendent and/or Authorized Designees to Advocate in the 2025 Legislature*.

Motion: Trustee Linda Cleatus moved to approve the action item *Authorization of Superintendent and/or Authorized Designees to Advocate in the 2025 Legislature*. Trustee Kay Satre seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

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

C. Items for Information

1. Policy 1075: Records Management and Access to Public Records

Ms. Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff, presented for information to the Board of Trustees *Policy 1075: Records Management and Access to Public Records*. After a thorough review of the policy, the committee determined that they would like to extend the general length of time allowed to respond to a public records request from 10 business days to 20 business days. Ms. Ridgway addressed questions the Board of Trustees had regarding *Policy 1075: Records Management and Access to Public Records*.

2. Policy 2000: Student Instructional Goals

Ms. Ridgway presented for information to the Board of Trustees *Policy 2000: Student Instructional Goals*. Following a thorough review of the policy, the committee determined that the category of gender identity, as required under Title IX, would be added on line 12. Ms. Ridgway addressed questions the Board of Trustees had regarding *Policy 2000: Student Instructional Goals*.

3. Health Insurance Bill 332-John Doran

Mr. John Doran, Chief Strategy Officer for the Montana Schools Insurance Alliance (MTSIA), presented information to the Board of Trustees regarding Health Insurance Bill 332 and MTSIA. Health Insurance Bill 332 allocates \$40 million in funding to establish the first public school health insurance trust, which must meet specific minimum requirements by June 30, 2026. These include participation from at least 150 districts, coverage for a minimum of 12,000 Employee Lives (distinct from member lives), a cap of 12% on annual administrative spending, an equitable distribution of assessment risk among members, and a five-year initial commitment with a subsequent five-year lockout period. Early exit from the trust is possible, contingent upon renewal and claims performance.

Mr. Doran provided an overview of the Montana Schools Insurance Alliance (MTSIA), which is the leading organization in the state working toward the approval of the first public school

health insurance trust. MTSIA is composed of key education partners, including MFPE, MQEC, MREA, MTSBA, MSBO, and SAM, along with employee benefit experts and school administrators. The alliance is collaborating with schools, teachers, the governor, the state auditor, legislators, carriers, and health vendors with the aim of retaining more funding within education, offering better and sustainable benefits, and doing so at the most competitive price possible in a transparent manner. MTSIA is designed with a profound understanding of the critical role education plays in Montana’s future. Mr. Doran presented a new model for schools to be introduced by MTSIA, which includes a proposed two-tier structure. He also outlined the program goals for MTSIA. Following the presentation, the Board of Trustees engaged in a thorough discussion regarding the information shared. Mr. Doran addressed several questions from the Board, particularly those related to Health Insurance Bill 332 and MTSIA.

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, gave his Student Representative Report. Mr. Snellman commented, “Good evening, Trustees, as we readjust to school routines after winter break and approach semester finals, students are enjoying the snow, or at least I am, and we are all eager to have a successful 2025. Though I do not have much to share today, Capital High students are still engaged in their communities, winning awards, and making the world a better place.

With semester testing beginning next week, parents were reminded that yesterday, January 13th, was the final Intervention Time (IT) opportunity of the semester. This structured time is crucial for students to complete makeup work, get academic assistance, or prepare for finals.

Thanks to the incredible generosity of our families and community, the Bruin Pantry provided food cards to 20 families for Thanksgiving and another 20 families for the holiday break. These efforts reflect the compassionate spirit of CHS and our commitment to supporting one another.

At the recent holiday assembly, CHS celebrated the talents of our students with a Talent Show. Congratulations to Charlie Snellman and Hollis Elliott, who earned first place with their exceptional performance and to all finalists who performed at the assembly.

Capital High is dedicated to preparing students for life after graduation. Below are two key events aimed at supporting students in their post-secondary plans:

- Scholarship Night:
 - Date: January 28th
 - Time: 6:00–8:00 PM
 - Location: CHS Library
 - This evening will provide information on scholarships, essay writing tips, the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE), and GI Bill Education Benefits.

FAFSA assistance will also be available to ensure families meet the March 1 preferential deadline.

- Trades/Career Night:
 - Date: February 26th
 - Time: 6:00–8:00 PM
 - Location: CHS Auditorium and CTE Classrooms
 - All students and parents are invited to explore career opportunities. This event will include resources for job shadows and internships, helping students "test the waters" in various career paths.

As the semester concludes, CHS remains focused on academic achievement and fostering opportunities for every student to succeed. Thank you for your continued support, and we look forward to sharing updates from a fresh new semester in February.”

Mr. Snellman addressed questions the Board of Trustees had regarding his report.

Ms. Adella Harris, Helena High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees, gave her Student Representative Report. Ms. Harris commented, “As Helena High jumps into the new year, January is full of exciting school events and honorable recognitions. The end of the first semester is fast approaching! Students and teachers are currently wrapping up their final units and preparing for the first round of semester testing. Tests will take place January 22-24 this year. We wish our students luck as they prepare for and sit for these exams. Mr. Kessler recently held a zoom call with Principal Watanabe from our sister school in Japan. There are exciting opportunities on the horizon for both schools that will include a virtual meet and greet with students. Mr. Watanabe is looking at planning a trip to Helena this spring to participate in our graduation ceremony. Finally, the Japanese Consulate will be in Montana later this month, hosting a community session at the Capitol. We have been asked to be present and be part of the discussions happening as we work to grow our connections with Japan.

The Montana High School Association has been visiting all 182-member high schools in the state over the past two years. The purpose of these visits is to observe the high school facilities across the state and chat with administrators about athletics in Montana. In recognizing the great success our two high schools have had; they chose Helena High and Capital High to be their last stop. It was great to have the MHSA staff in our building. Each member was invested in learning about what our school is working on and gaining our input on how we can help move high school athletics forward in the state.

Congratulations to our senior football players who were selected to represent HHS at this summer’s Shrine Game: Jaxan Lieberg, Cole Flugge, Trygve Braun and Dylan Mosness. Alternates that were selected include: Matt Marcille, Mac Lundstrom, Alex Swenson, Brady Swenson, and Carter Petre.

Quinn Guinyard was selected as an all-American cheerleader and performed in the Peral Harbor Parade in Waikiki this past month. Quinn is the first Helena cheerleader to be selected for and perform in this high-level event.

Eva Skibicki was awarded the Seal of Biliteracy from the Board of Public Education in the Spanish Language. Students who earn this seal must demonstrate their proficiency in the language and submit the evidence to the Board of Public Education to earn the award.

Thank you to our Student Council students for putting on an amazing Holiday Assembly! This group of students is working incredibly hard to help with our goal of building a positive culture in our school. It has been great to have the student voice in the decision-making process. The ideas that are brought forth are well developed; assisting in how we keep students in school and provide a positive experience for them.

Mrs. Koch has been doing an amazing job this year, preparing students for life in the culinary world. Besides the amazing food our students are producing under her instruction, she is also working hard to bring in professionals from the industry. This real-life experience that students gain is sparking interest and giving a glimpse into the culinary world outside of school.

As the feedback has made clear, the winter concerts were amazing! Some of the highlights include the HHS, CHS, CRA, and HMS choirs collaborating at the Capitol Rotunda for an amazing showcase of the talent we have in our schools. Our upper orchestra students also took advantage of that space and put on a concert that made it clear we have incredible musicians across our community. The small group ensembles that performed, showcased some of the best talent in the northwest region. Kudos to Mrs. Kohoutek, Mr. Hollow, and Mr. Cleary for the time they put in to prepare our students for these events!

Coming this Saturday, the student council will host our annual Winter Formal. January 18th, students will be welcomed to New York as they enter the Helena Civic Center dressed to dance.

On Monday January 27th the student council will also host our annual teacher breakfast. The breakfast takes place on the high school's in-service day after finals and serves as an encourager and act of thanks to our teachers as they work hard grading finals. The STUCO team has partnered with local Helena businesses to give out certificates, gift cards and goodies to teachers alongside their breakfast treats provided by our culinary students.

AA Band and Orchestra festivals are coming up over the next few months. AA Orchestra will take place February 3-4, while AA Band will fall on March 3-4. Our orchestras and bands have started preparations for these events, and we look forward to hearing about their experiences.

Our Thespian Troupe and Theater students are diligently preparing for the Thespian Festival at the end of the month. Our Troupe hopes to bring home honors again this year with their rendition of *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Helena High looks forward to an exciting new semester next month, full of every event, aspect, and pride that makes the Bengals the best to be!"

Ms. Harris addressed questions the Board of Trustees had regarding her report.

2. **Helena Education Association Report**

Ms. Jane Shawn, HEA President, gave the Helena Education Association Report. Ms. Shawn began by congratulating the newly certified National Board teachers and the recent Presidential Award winners, praising them as some of the best educators in the district. She then provided an update on the Helena Education Association (HEA), sharing that 71% of its members have transitioned from payroll deductions to bank deductions for union dues. This change is a proactive measure in response to anticipated state legislation that may end payroll deductions for public sector unions. Ms. Shawn also discussed a recent meeting with Trustee McKee regarding her proposal to expand arts programs in Helena's elementary schools. Although the initiative is still in the early planning stages, local art educators have expressed support for the idea, including potential artist residency programs. She announced that on February 17th, HEA will participate in the "Save Our Students" rally at the Capitol, where union members and supporters from across the state will gather. The Kalispell Education Association has challenged HEA to bring over 150 participants, and Ms. Shawn encouraged all board members to attend. Following the rally, union members will visit with legislators to discuss important educational issues. Ms. Shawn concluded her report by inviting any questions from the board.

3. **Facilities & Technology Committee Report**

Trustee Kay Satre gave the Facilities & Technology Committee Report. Trustee Satre shared information from the technology update that was given by Mr. Gary Myers, Director of Educational Technology. Mr. Myers reported that the district successfully handled a recent cyber threat, with no impact on systems due to timely patches. A discussion followed regarding the PowerSchool cybersecurity incident from December 7th, which was identified as a PowerSchool-specific issue, not related to the district's systems. This incident affected over 1,000 districts and approximately one million students nationwide. The district has prioritized continued communication with parents to ensure transparency and keep them informed. Additionally, the technology team has streamlined new employee onboarding processes and improved substitute teacher access to network devices. Mr. Myers emphasized his team's efficiency, noting that the average time to resolve a technical issue is just 1.1 hours, with 409 of 419 reported tickets successfully resolved.

Next, Trustee Satre shared information from the facilities update given by Mr. Todd Verrill, Facilities Director. Mr. Verrill shared an update on various ongoing projects, including the replacement of the Helena High School circulation pump motor and hallway work. The district is awaiting news on an EPA grant submission. Mr. Verrill also highlighted improvements at the Lincoln Center, including the remodeling of the main reception office and new carpet installation in the PD Center. Mr. Verrill is consulting with a Billings engineer to explore options for addressing the Helena High HVAC system, and preparations are underway for summer projects such as HVAC work, roof replacements, and auditorium lighting upgrades. In staffing news, the facilities department has made significant progress in filling vacancies and is now only two positions short. A new administrative assistant has been hired, and interviews are ongoing for a new Safety and Security Manager, with Mr. Verrill expressing optimism about the quality of candidates.

Trustee Satre concluded her report by acknowledging the valuable work of Mr. Neal Murray, who recently moved on from his position as the district's Safety and Security Manager. Trustee Satre addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding her report.

4. **Budget and Finance Committee Report**

The Budget and Finance Committee did not meet in January, however, Trustee Janet Armstrong wanted to provide an update on the current budget and finance situation. Trustee Armstrong highlighted that the district is facing a deficit, which is being subsidized by the interlocal fund. Trustee Armstrong mentioned that the district is awaiting potential funding, including anticipated state funding and a potential increase in funding from the state, but clarified that while these funds would help offset the deficit, they will not fully cover the shortfall. Additionally, without any salary increases or step/lane adjustments, the district would still face costs such as those related to compensation, leaving limited remaining funds. A significant concern is the rise in property liability insurance, which has led to increased costs this year. Trustee Armstrong emphasized the importance of considering local funding options, such as a technology levy, due to the growing demands for technology funding. Trustee Armstrong stressed that the district is operating with minimal financial breathing room and will need to explore additional funding opportunities to maintain and improve services. Trustee Armstrong addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding her update.

5. **Policy Committee Report**

Trustee Jennifer Walsh gave the Policy Committee Report. The Policy Committee spent significant time discussing records management, particularly evaluating the appropriate length of time for retaining records. After thorough discussion, the committee settled on a reasonable number, ensuring that all members were comfortable with the decision. Additionally, the committee reviewed the district's non-discrimination policies, focusing on ensuring that all relevant inclusionary terms were included. It was agreed to align the district's policies with federal definitions, such as Title IX, to ensure comprehensive coverage of non-discrimination, including gender identity. The committee also discussed the implementation of facility and therapy dogs within the district. Trustee Walsh shared that these certified therapy dogs have been helping students and supporting staff, which has been a positive development. Another topic of discussion was the Voluntary Employee Benefit Association (VEBA). The committee decided to revisit the issue, as there was insufficient information to make a final decision. The committee will await further details to make a well-informed decision at the next meeting. 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. Trustee Satre provided an update on the Teaching and Learning Committee's meeting held on January 8th. Assistant Superintendent Josh McKay gave a comprehensive report on the OPI accreditation process, detailing how the district's elementary and high schools are meeting the required standards. The accreditation report, due to OPI at the end of February, serves as a reflection of last year's efforts and a preview of the work to be done in the current year. The district and all individual schools received the highest level of accreditation, "regular accreditation," which signifies outstanding performance. The report covers various areas, including strategic action plans, teacher load and class size, Indian Education For All, staff licensure, professional development, and the graduate profile. Mr. McKay also highlighted the graduate profile, which outlines the skills, attributes, and educational outcomes expected for all students. The

committee discussed ways to engage stakeholders and gather input on the graduate profile to better communicate the district's values and goals. Additionally, the committee reviewed a grant application to extend an advanced opportunity grant to cover middle school costs, which would help offset expenses related to materials and curriculum for Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs. 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. Trustee Satre provided an update on the Health Benefits Committee's recent meetings, which took place on December 18th and January 17th. The committee's focus has been on the Request for Proposal (RFP) for the district's health insurance plan. The RFP was sent out recently, after a slight delay, and a letter of instruction was approved in the committee's latest meeting. The committee also discussed the timeline for submissions and the process for reviewing the proposals. The district's attorney joined the meeting to explain the scoring criteria for bids and to share survey tools that could help gauge member needs and preferences for coverage options. The committee emphasized the importance of working with the pharmacy benefit manager to explore options, such as a 340B option with Pure View or St. Peter's Health, which was previously unavailable through the current provider. The RFP process will involve a review of bids on January 30th, with several additional dates scheduled in February for further deliberation. Finalist interviews are planned for March, with the goal of making a recommendation to the full board in April, although the timeline may be adjusted if necessary. Additionally, the committee discussed the unbundling of bids for medical, vision, dental, and prescription benefits to secure the best possible deals. They aim to continue providing strong benefits while minimizing costs.

In response to concerns about the health plan's performance, Trustee Satre shared insights from Mr. Rich Franco, Human Resources Benefits Manager, who noted that while the plan's performance had been strong in previous years, rising premium costs and the impact of a small number of high-cost members have posed challenges. However, the plan remains stable with unreserves of approximately \$2.4 million, which is a significant improvement from the previous year. The committee is focused on improving the plan by seeking lower costs, more flexibility, and better member communication about benefits. They are also exploring the possibility of introducing high-deductible health plans with health savings accounts to offer additional options to members.

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

8. **Wellness Committee Report**

There was no Wellness Committee Report this evening.

9. **Montana School Boards Association Report**

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn gave the Montana School Boards Association (MTSBA) Report. Chair Hathhorn provided an update on the recent two-day MTSBA meeting, where key topics included budget discussions, strategic planning, and legislative priorities. One major

focus was the legislative platform aimed at recouping the inflation lost in recent years. However, it was noted that a decennial study is required before significant legislative changes can be made, and legislators are currently prioritizing gathering that data before proceeding with major reforms. The general mood among MTSBA members is optimistic, with increased energy around legislative efforts, particularly as new funding opportunities are being discussed. There is strong bipartisan support for educational issues, with both Democratic and Republican leaders working together on key initiatives. A significant portion of the meeting was dedicated to reviewing various proposed bills, including educational legislation. Chair Hathhorn emphasized the importance of monitoring these bills, especially the 283 educational bills currently under consideration, noting that many are likely to be dismissed or not heard. Chair Hathhorn also highlighted two education bills—one focused on inflation adjustments and the other proposing a stipend for board certification. Additionally, the meeting discussed changes to adult education levies and potential alterations to operational levy rules, which could have significant implications for districts that rely on these funds. The communication and advocacy efforts of various MTSBA members have been strong, with ongoing coordination between key stakeholders to ensure that education remains a priority in the legislative session.

Chair Hathhorn addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding her report.

10. **Parent Council Visit Reports**

There were no Parent Council Visit reports this evening.

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

VII. UPCOMING MEETINGS

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

- Tuesday, January 28th, Board of Trustees Work Session, Four Georgians Elementary, 3:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, February 4th, Policy Committee Meeting, 12:00 p.m., Lincoln Center
- Wednesday, February 5th, Teaching and Learning Committee Meeting, 12:00 p.m., Lincoln Center
- Monday, February 10th, Facilities & Technology Committee Meeting, 12:00 p.m., Lincoln Center
- Tuesday, February 11th, Budget & Finance Committee Meeting, 12:00 p.m., Lincoln Center
- Tuesday, February 11th, Full Board Meeting, 5:30 p.m., Lincoln Center
- Tuesday, February 25th, Board of Trustees Work Session, Bryant Elementary, 3:30 p.m.

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

VIII. BOARD COMMENTS

Assistant Superintendent Josh McKay informed the Board of Trustees that an invitation will be extended for their attendance at the Board of Public Education's visit to our charter schools on January 24th. This visit is part of the ongoing charter school review process, during which members of the Board of Public Education will engage with staff and observe classroom environments.

There were no further board comments.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn adjourned the meeting at 9:37 p.m.

Candice Delvaux, Recording Secretary

Date