



Board of Trustees Work Session

Tuesday, February 25th, 2025

3:30 p.m. Tour of Bryant Elementary School followed by
Business & TEAMS Portion of the Meeting at 4:00 p.m.

MINUTES

ATTENDEES

<i>Trustees</i>	<i>Others</i>
Jennifer McKee, Vice Chair	Rex Weltz, Superintendent
Jeff Hindoien, Trustee	Janelle Mickelson, Business Manager
Linda Cleatus, Trustee	Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent
Rachel Robison, Trustee	Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director
Kay Satre, Trustee	Candice Delvaux, Executive Assistant
Janet Armstrong, Trustee	Gary Myers, Director of Educational Technology
Jennifer Walsh, Trustee	Justine Alberts, Curriculum Director
	Lisa Cordingley, HEF Executive Director
	Lona Carter, Student Health Services & Special Education Director
	Kaitlyn Hess, Assessment & Federal Programs Director
	Tia Wilkins, Bryant Elementary School Principal
	Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff
	Todd Verill, Facilities Director
	Jane Shawn, HEA President
	Karen Ogden, Communications Officer
	Jesika Fisher, Hawthorne Elementary Principal
	Jeffrey Gruizenga, Con'eer Engineering, Inc.
	Brian Kessler, Helena High School Principal
	Several Bryant Elementary School Staff Members
	Several Guests of the Public

I. CALL TO ORDER/ PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Board Vice Chair Jennifer McKee called the meeting to order at 4:04 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. REVIEW OF AGENDA

Board Vice Chair Jennifer McKee reviewed the agenda with the Board of Trustees and there were no suggested changes.

The Board of Trustees moved on to General Public Comment.

III. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Aaron Pratt gave general public comment. Mr. Pratt attended Helena Public Schools and is the parent of a Hawthorne Elementary School student. Mr. Pratt's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to his support for public education, his concerns about the potential closure of Hawthorne Elementary School, and the impact of Hawthorne Elementary.

Ms. Kathryn Dunkelberger gave general public comment. Ms. Dunkelberger is the secretary at Hawthorne Elementary and the parent of children in the district. Ms. Dunkelberger's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to her support for public education, and concerns about the potential closure of Hawthorne Elementary School.

Ms. Carrie Jones gave general public comment. Ms. Jones's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to her opposition to the closure of Hawthorne Elementary School, her critique of the district's past budget strategy, and concerns about legislative support and budget cuts.

Ms. Kristie Klein gave general public comment. Ms. Klein is an employee at Hawthorne Elementary School and has a child that attends the school. Ms. Klein's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to her personal experience with Hawthorne Elementary School, the Montessori Pre-K program at the school, the excellence and inclusivity at Hawthorne, the community connection at Hawthorne, and encouraged the board members to visit the school.

Ms. Hanna Warhank gave general public comment. Ms. Warhank is a parent of a child that attends Hawthorne Elementary School. Ms. Warhank's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to her opposition to the closure of Hawthorne Elementary School, the community impact of Hawthorne Elementary, the quality of education at Hawthorne Elementary, the accessibility and convenience for families of Hawthorne Elementary, the importance of the emotional and social well-being of the

children at Hawthorne, economic considerations, future growth and long-term planning, and the staff and their dedication at Hawthorne Elementary School.

Ms. Erin Gallagher gave general public comment. Ms. Gallagher is the parent of children that attend Hawthorne Elementary School. Ms. Gallagher's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to the importance of a supportive and positive environment for families which she said her family found at Hawthorne, the personal connection between students and teachers at Hawthorne, the small school advantage of Hawthorne, her opposition to the closure of Hawthorne Elementary School, and the long term value of keeping Hawthorne Elementary School open.

Ms. Katie Kelley gave general public comment. Ms. Kelley is the parent of children that attend Hawthorne Elementary School. Ms. Kelley's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to her opposition to the closure of Hawthorne Elementary School, her support for neighborhood schools, the importance of community connection through neighborhood schools like Hawthorne Elementary School, the dedication of the staff at Hawthorne, and the impact of school closures on the community and other schools.

Ms. Devon Malizia gave general public comment. Ms. Malizia is the parent of children that attend Hawthorne Elementary School. Ms. Malizia's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to her opposition to the closure of Hawthorne Elementary School, her support for Hawthorne Elementary School staff, the resiliency of Hawthorne staff and students, the need for stability at Hawthorne Elementary School, economic concerns if Hawthorne was closed, and the emotional and community impact of closing the school.

Mr. Kris Goss gave general public comment. Mr. Goss's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to opposition to permanent decisions for temporary issues, radical transparency in decision making, public participation and rights, trustee authority and responsibility surrounding school closures, and urged the board to have a commitment to transparency in upcoming hearings.

That concluded general public comment, and the Board of Trustees moved on to view a presentation given by Principal Tia Wilkins, Principal of Bryant Elementary School.

IV. PRESENTATION

Principal Tia Wilkins, with the assistance of several staff members at Bryant Elementary, provided a comprehensive overview of the school and reviewed the pamphlet included in the agenda. The pamphlet begins by outlining the mission of Bryant Elementary which states. *"At Bryant Elementary, we are a dedicated and resilient team committed to fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment where every individual can thrive. We advocate for our students with care and compassion, creating a nurturing space that*

empowers growth and transformation. Guided by grace and intentionality, we embrace each moment as an opportunity to learn, grow, and inspire—both personally and professionally. Together, we strive to build a community rooted in flexibility, resilience, and a shared commitment to excellence.”

Some of the engagement activities at Bryant Elementary include Monthly PAW winners, monthly family engagement opportunities and/or events, trimester assemblies, weekly communication, weekly therapy dog visits, community volunteers, Coffee with the Principal, Bryant Alliance, ELA and Writing SLT Team, Math and Science SLT Team, Family and Student Engagement SLT team, and the MTSS-Team.

Next, the pamphlet outlines school demographics at Bryant Elementary:

- Free and Reduced Lunch/69%
- Kid Packs/217
- Students with IEP's/51
- Students Receiving Speech/59
- Students on 504 Plans/7
- Indian Education Tutoring/48
- McKinney Vento/35
- CSCT Services/22
- KinderSprouts (1)/18
- Kindergarten (2)/40
- First (2)/33
- Second (2)/36
- Third (2)/47
- Fourth (2)/40
- Fifth (2)/42
- TLC (2)/13
- PBS (1)/6
- Total Enrollment/277

Lastly, the pamphlet outlined action plans goals for Bryant Elementary:

Math Goal: By May 2025, we will decrease our Tier 3 students from 47% to 17%.

ELA Goal: By May 2025, we will decrease our Tier 3 students by 10% (from 31% to 21%).

Family & Student Engagement Goal: School-wide focus on varied family and student engagement through communication (in-person and virtual) and diverse school events. Maintain 90% or higher participation in parent teacher conferences.

Principal Wilkins concluded her presentation by addressing questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

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

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Consent Action Items

1. Personnel Actions
2. 1.28.25 Board Work Session Meeting Minutes
3. Approval of FY 2024-25 Out-Of-District Attendance Agreements (Non-Resident Students Attending HPS)
4. Acknowledge FY 2024-25 Out-Of-District Attendance Agreements (Helena Resident Students Attending Other School Districts)

Trustee Jennifer McKee, Board Vice Chair, commented. "I would entertain a motion for the Consent Action Items as presented."

Motion: Trustee Jeff Hindoen moved to approve the Consent Action Items as presented. Trustee Kay Satre seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 7-0 motion carries unanimously.

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

B. Item For Information

1. Helena High School HVAC System Review

Mr. Todd Verrill, Facilities Director for Helena Public Schools, presented the *Helena High School HVAC System Review* for informational purposes. Mr. Verrill explained that he had invited Mr. Jeffrey Gruizenga, PE, from Con'eer Engineering, Inc. to assess the mechanical systems at Helena High School. Today, Mr. Gruizenga shared his findings with the Board of Trustees, and the information was included in the agenda as a memo provided by Mr. Gruizenga. The memo stated, "Thank you for the opportunity to assist you in the review of the Helena High School mechanical systems. The original building was opened in 1955. The heating system is a low-pressure steam system and beginning to show its age. Per our conversation I understand that the District is starting to plan for the next chapter for Helena High. In the next 18 months the District's intent is to approach the taxpayers for a bond to either remodel Helena High or replace it. However, if the voters approve funding in the fall of 2025, it would be the 2028/2029 school year before either option could be completed. Your intent,

based on recent events, is to review the system to determine how to extend the existing services to achieve this timeline.

Current Issues:

1. The boilers in the building are original to the building. While maintenance has been continuing over the years the units are now 70 years old. The standard service life for this style of equipment is 50-years max.
2. Condensate Return Pumps: To move condensate (steam water) back to the boiler room due to the building size, in the tunnel areas of the building are located seven condensate pumps. These units were installed when the building was constructed. All units show indications of multiple motor changes, steam leaks, wiring repairs, etc.
3. Condensate Return Main: This piping returns the water from the condensed steam back to the boiler for reuse. Most of this piping is original to the building. The piping has a service life of 50-60 years depending on the chemical treatment of the steam heating system. Presently the steam heating system requires a continuous stream of make-up water whenever the heating system is operational. This continual stream of make-up water introduces additional corrosion, metal eating oxygen and waste energy.
4. The building ventilation equipment is original per the section of the building upon which it is installed. This equipment has a service life of less than 40 years. Unfortunately, most of the equipment is older than 60 years old. Several of the units in the gymnasium are worn out and just turned off. Unfortunately, the Auditorium is only served by a single unit. The rear fan blower mount of this unit has fallen off. The unit is not operational without major rework. Without this unit there is NO air ventilation being introduced to the auditorium.

After walking through the facility with your staff those are the immediate needs. There are additional needs that will need to be addressed as a portion of any building remodel but should not need to be addressed as a temporary solution.

These items include the following:

1. Gymnasium unit coils are wearing out and leaking. Due to the number of units, you should be able to limp through by using worn out units as sources of spare parts until a permanent plan can be developed.
2. Temperature Controls: The building uses obsolete pneumatic controls. For this type of system, spare parts are limited. Heating valves were found failed open or closed causing space comfort issues. This condition is very noticeable in cold weather when building windows are opened to control space temperature.

- a. The controls in the 1997 addition are Digital Controls but are obsolete. This is not an unusual issue with 20+ year old computer equipment. This is causing the system to be non-accessible by maintenance staff. This means no adjustability or control. This creates comfort issues and waste energy.
3. Classroom Ventilation Units: With the exception of the 1998 building addition, all classrooms in the building are served with Unit Ventilators. These are typically floormounted equipment but can also be ceiling mounted. They contain a fan and heating coil. In addition, they are connected to the building exterior to provide the space with ventilation air. These units typically have a service life of 30 years. Most of the units in the building are original 1955 or 1962. These units have a replacement installed cost of \$18,000 per unit.
4. Plumbing Fixtures: As a temporary solution no consideration was given to modifying the existing building plumbing system. Fixtures in the building are aging but are functional. There are reports of issues with the sewer main piping crumbling. Without removing floors and completely remodeling toilet spaces the sewer piping should be addressed on a per case basis.

The following is a breakdown of items that are recommended to be addressed immediately to keep the building operational until a long-term solution can be developed.

Boilers: The installed boilers are steam. Steam is a heating medium that is not a long-term solution for the building. If the building is remodeled or a new building is built neither will utilize steam. Therefore, any money put into the existing boiler system is sunk cost. Keeping that in mind, there are really three possible options for building a heating plant:

Option 1: Do nothing and gamble that 70-year-old equipment will hold out for the 3-5 years until a long-term solution is completed.

Option 2: Rebuild the existing boilers. Retube the existing boilers and patch the worn-out metal sections as required. Relocate the existing newer burner from the parts boiler to replace the older boiler burner.

Option 3: Remove two of three and install a new steam boiler.

Speaking with the service company that has most recently serviced the boiler equipment, Montana Boiler Service, they expressed the following concerns:

1. A complete internal inspection should be completed on the boiler.
2. Several tubes have been plugged in both operating boilers. These boilers will probably need retubing during this temporary service window.

3. In the bottom corners of the boiler front and back are access points called hand holes. These allow for mud or sludge that will settle out of the boiler water to be flushed out of the boiler. If the sludge is not removed from the boiler corrosion, diminished heat transfer and wall failure can develop. These access points in a steam boiler are typically steel plates with a gasket between the plate and the boiler wall sealing the two plates. There is evidence that the boiler walls have corroded enough that the gasket will no longer seal the opening, and a sealant has been required to prevent leaks. This is normally a stop gap means not a normal service protocol. Concern with the use of sealant is that the lower water legs of the building will need to be replaced.

Estimated Budget

Option 1: \$75,000 to \$100,000 and cross your fingers.

Option 2: \$200,000 to \$250,000 planned maintenance to stabilize the equipment in place.

Option 3: \$400,000 to \$475,000 projects which allows for a longer solution possibly up to 10 years.

Air Handling Equipment: The unit failure in the Auditorium is an issue. Without the unit no public functions should take place in the Auditorium. The room is equipped with perimeter heat so there is no fear of room freezing. The existing unit is not located in a location where a new unit can be installed. To restore space ventilation there are two options:

Option 1: Remove the unit and work with a local machine shop to reconstruct the deteriorating parts. Then reinstall the unit and hope nothing else fails. The existing fan shaft bracket issue normally requires replacement of the mounts, blower shaft, bearings, etc.

Option 2: Install a new air handling unit on the building exterior and extend ductwork to the existing duct connections.

Estimated Budget

Option 1: \$45,000 to \$60,000 and hope no additional issues arise in the unit which is 70 years old.

Option 2: \$100,000 to \$125,000 This equipment could be re-used in a long-term building solution or new building if desired.

Building Condensate System: The pumps and piping issues are really interconnected. The pumps are being damaged due to age and the failure of the building steam traps. The failed traps allow raw steam to enter the condensate

piping. This steam heats what moisture in the piping. In an operating steam system condensate is typically 5-8°F below boiling temperature. Condensate

pumps prefer to operate at less than 205°F. When the fluid temperature rises above this, pump motors and seals fail. This causes operational issues and fluid leaks. Service life on condensate pumps is 20-30 years. This equipment is 60+ years old.

It would be recommended to change the installed condensate units. But if we do not change the upstream steam traps changing the pump will not prevent the current service cycle. There are approximately 240 steam traps in the building. Steam traps are damaged due to age and water. When changing steam traps in an existing system it is always recommended to change all units on a single condensate loop. If all are not changed any failed units can damage any new units downstream of it.

There is approximately 5,600 linear feet of condensate piping in the building crawlspaces. There are 360 different risers from the crawlspace to heating units distributed throughout the building. There are approximately 520 steam traps in the building.

Based on the condition of the pumps trap and piping there are a couple of different scenarios available:

Option 1: Replace the condensate and a limited amount of the condensate piping. This is the minimal solution. This option deals with immediate needs only. The primary issue is existing piping insulation contains asbestos. Meaning to replace damaged piping or equipment first the asbestos needs to be removed. Asbestos removal is easier if it is done in an organized plan rather than piece meal.

Option 2: Replace the condensate pumps, heating equipment steam traps and the crawlspace horizontal condensate piping. This planned complete replacement would allow abatement to be completed wing by wing. Once a wing is completed additional maintenance should not be required for 10-15 years.

The piping failure is widespread but not significant to make the system non-operational. Even if all the horizontal piping is replaced it does not mean there will not be issues. Vertical piping risers both steam and condensate are concealed within walls throughout the building. Due to their limited access, we did not consider any effort to resolve these in a temporary solution.

Estimated Budget: Neither of these budgets include any cost to remove the insulation asbestos. That work is beyond my scope or expertise.

Estimated Budget

Option 1: \$1,300,000 to \$1,500,000 and cross your fingers remembering the piping is 70 years old. Any major piping leak could disable the heating system or create an asbestos incident.

Option 2: \$1,900,000 to \$2,125,000 This option would replace all piping over a 2–3-year process. There is insufficient time horizon between heating seasons to completely replace the piping in a single effort.

Schedules:

Boiler Work: It is possible if scheduled soon to complete most of Option 2 during Summer 2025. There are limited contractors in the state of Montana that can complete this work therefore their schedules fill up quickly and should be scheduled as soon as practical.

There is insufficient time to receive a boiler replacement therefore a new boiler install would need to wait till summer 2026 at the earliest.

Ventilation Equipment:

Option 1 Unit Repair: With the unit inoperable work could commence at any time. The primary issue is asbestos abatement. To correctly correct the issue the unit should be moved out to get to the back of the unit. It is possible to schedule abatement during spring break allowing the unit to be rebuilt this spring and summer.

Option 2 Unit Replacement: Due to equipment availability if a unit was ordered by the first of May the unit could be installed prior to next year's heating season.

Condensate Piping: Any work on the condensate piping can take place from the day the heating system is turned off for the year and 1-week prior to starting the heating system for the fall. Mid- May to Early October. Any asbestos abatement work could be completed in a 1–2-week period. Without insulation the spaces will be warmer if not re-insulated but could remain in operation. Allowing abatement to take place during school breaks due to the amount of the piping, it will take a minimum of 2-years to replace all the piping.

Conclusion: The building heating system is not healthy, and work will need to be completed to keep it operating. The piping is leaking, and it will only get worse. If major sections of the piping fail and create an asbestos clean-up issue school

function could be interrupted. The boilers are on borrowed time. The auditorium issue is an immediate need. These are the items that a basic plan review and building inspection has uncovered. As with any older facility there will always be other issues that could arise. In our discussions it was mentioned that the district has deferred maintenance funds. If a portion of the funds could be prioritized to the building for the next 2-3 years, the system could be stabilized for building operation for the next 4-8 years. I look forward to discussing these or additional options with you and your staff in the future.”

Mr. Gruizenga and Mr. Verrill addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presentation.

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

VI. BOARD COMMENTS

Superintendent Rex Weltz provided an update to the board on the progress of district priorities and decisions. At a previous Board of Trustees meeting, Trustee Hindoen had requested a collection of priorities, and the superintendent noted that this work is part of an ongoing effort. Superintendent Weltz mentioned collaborating with SMA on the Facilities Master Plan and highlighted that recommendations regarding a potential bond issue for three projects, including those related to Helena High, are still being developed. He plans to present a roadmap and recommendations for these and other district projects at next month's full board meeting, with the Board of Trustees expected to review and vote on them at a future meeting.

Trustee Janet Armstrong stated that she appreciated the discussion and hearing the different perspectives provided.

There were no further board comments.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Board Vice Chair Jennifer McKee adjourned the meeting at 5:16 p.m.

Candice Delvaux, Recording Secretary