



**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, February 11th, 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  
Tim McMahon, Activities Director  
Jane Shawn, HEA President  
Lona Carter, Student Health Services & Special Education Director  
Karen Ogden, Communications Officer  
Lisa Cordingley, HEF Executive Director  
Brian Kessler, Helena High Principal  
Brett Zanto, Capital High School  
Many guests of the public as well as Helena School District Staff

## **I. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m. and the Board participated in 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.

### **2025 Montana Thespian Festival Recognition-Capital High School**

The Board of Trustees would like to extend its sincere congratulations to the following Capital High School students for their exceptional accomplishments at the 2025 Montana Thespian Festival: Lexi Flath – Recognized with the Outstanding Debut Performance Award and Raine Lafond – Honored as a State Thespian Officer & Festival Liaison. These students have shown extraordinary skill, passion, and dedication to their craft, and their accomplishments reflect the high standard of excellence at Capital High School. Special thanks to educator Laura Brayko for her unwavering support and dedication, which have been instrumental in the success of these students and the theater program.

### **2025 Montana Thespian Festival Recognition-Helena High School**

The Board of Trustees would like to extend its sincere congratulations to the following Helena High School students for their exceptional accomplishments at the 2025 Montana Thespian Festival: Karl Zimmerman - Outstanding Costumes Award, and Nadja Bolotsky and Luke Wilkins - Outstanding Performers. Additionally, the Board is pleased to recognize the entire Helena High School Theater Troupe for receiving the Outstanding Troupe Award and Outstanding Comedy Award. These students have shown extraordinary skills, passion, and dedication to their craft, and their accomplishments reflect the high standard of excellence at Helena High School. Special thanks to Roger Scruggs and Madelyn Sechrist for their unwavering support and dedication, which have been instrumental in the success of these students and the theater program.

### **United States Presidential Scholars Program-Capital High School**

Congratulations to the following Capital High School students who have been selected as candidates for the prestigious United States Presidential Scholars Program: Meika Arensmeyer, Kathleen Cook, Adeline Walters, and Mason Whitney. This honor recognizes these students as some of the nation's most distinguished students, celebrated for their academic excellence, leadership, and commitment to their education. This remarkable achievement is a testament to their hard work and the dedication of the educators who have supported them along the way. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all who have contributed to their success.

### **United States Presidential Scholars Program-Helena High School**

Congratulations to Helena High School student, Evelyn Callery, who has been selected as a candidate for the prestigious United States Presidential Scholars Program. This honor recognizes Evelyn as one of the nation's most distinguished students, celebrated for her academic excellence, leadership, and commitment to her education. This remarkable achievement is a testament to Evelyn's hard work and the dedication of the educators who have supported her along the way. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all who have contributed to her success.

### **Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST)**

It is with great pride and admiration that we extend our sincere congratulations to Capital High School educators Sarah Urban and Jake Warner, who have been selected to receive the prestigious Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST). This esteemed honor, administered by the National Science Foundation (NSF) on behalf of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, celebrates exemplary educators for their exceptional contributions to the teaching and learning of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). As recipients of this award, Sarah and Jake will each receive a certificate signed by the President and a monetary award from the NSF. Additionally, they will be invited to Washington, D.C., for an awards ceremony in recognition of their outstanding achievements. We commend Sarah and Jake for their dedication, passion, and remarkable impact on the lives of their students, and we are proud to see their efforts celebrated on a national level. Congratulations once again to these exceptional educators!

### **Montana DECA Advisor of the Year**

It is with great pride and admiration that we extend our sincere congratulations to Kacey Askin, an exceptional educator at Helena High School, for being named the Montana DECA Advisor of the Year at the State DECA Conference. This prestigious recognition is a testament to Kacey's dedication, leadership, and unwavering commitment to his students. His tireless efforts have made a lasting impact on the DECA program, and this award reflects the remarkable contributions he has made to the educational community. We applaud Kacey for his outstanding achievements and are honored to celebrate this well-deserved recognition.

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

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

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

### **Recognition**

- I want to extend our district's deepest thanks to all who donated to Helena Public Schools through the Montana Innovative Educational Tax Credit Program. Thank you for investing in our students' futures.

- Board of Trustees Work Session At Four Georgians Elementary School- January 28th, Thank You Principal Carrie Shinkle & Four Georgians Staff
- Congratulations to the following 105.3 KMTX Teacher of the Month Recipient for January:
  - Mrs. Wilma Tabaracci- Warren Elementary School
- February 3-7 National School Counseling Appreciation Week
- February 15 National School Resource Officer Appreciation Day
- Thank you to the Board of Public Education for touring our Helena Charter Schools. Special thanks to Assistant Superintendent Josh McKay and Chief of Staff Barb Ridgway for organizing these visits and Sodexo for generously donating lunch.
- Thank you to Lisa Cordingley and the Helena Education Foundation for hosting a Trustee Appreciation Lunch. We deeply appreciate their recognition of our Board of Trustees and their ongoing support of our schools and community.
- LC Recognition  
 Superintendent Weltz acknowledged Ms. Lisa Cordingley, Executive Director of the Helena Education Foundation, who will be retiring at the end of this year after over 16 years of dedicated service. Under Lisa's leadership, the Foundation awarded over a million dollars in grants, engaged thousands of community members through programs like Great Conversations, Carnival Classic, and Fabulous Firsts, and celebrated nearly 150 outstanding educators. She also facilitated student programs such as Pen and Ink and the Harrison Writing Awards and secured significant grants for various initiatives. Lisa's remarkable contributions have left a lasting impact on Helena's educational community.

### New Business

- USI Data Dive  
 Mr. Scott Haas from USI Insurance Services provided an overview of their consulting services for Helena Public Schools regarding health insurance. USI, a national healthcare consulting firm, specializes in data analysis and healthcare risk management. Their team has been hired to help the district make informed decisions related to health plan structure and funding. USI will conduct a detailed analysis of the district's healthcare data, including contributions and plan designs, and compare these with other districts such as Missoula and Kalispell. The goal is to provide Helena Public Schools with an actuarial value and competitiveness profile of their current health plans, helping the district make well-informed business decisions about their healthcare options.
- Technology 2025 Levy  
 Mr. Gary Myers, Director of Educational Technology, presented information about the Helena Schools tech levy. The district is facing an urgent need for technology funding, totaling \$4 million, to adequately support the integration and maintenance of technology across our schools. This funding is essential for providing devices for teachers, students, and classrooms, ensuring reliable network services, covering necessary software licensing, and supplying the ongoing support required to prepare students for college and future careers. In response, the district is proposing a \$3 million increase to the existing technology levy.

It is important to note that our current technology levy has remained unchanged since 2004. Over the past two decades, the role of technology in both education and the workplace has grown exponentially, becoming a fundamental tool that is now ubiquitous in nearly every aspect of life. Presently, the district allocates approximately \$2 million annually toward technology, with an additional \$1 million or more drawn each year from our interlocal fund. However, these funds are one-time dollars, which cannot be replenished once spent. The existing levy, currently set at \$1 million, merely "keeps the lights on" by supporting essential functions. Unfortunately, it falls short in allowing for the replacement of outdated devices for both students and teachers or for updating critical network infrastructure. As it stands, if a device or system fails, we lack the resources to address the issue.

The proposed levy increase is specifically earmarked for essential technology funding and is designed to cover the next 10 years, ensuring the district can meet current and future technology demands. This levy will not be perpetual, providing a targeted and time-limited solution to the district's technology funding needs.

- Master Facilities Planning
  - Pre Bond-Work – SMA
    - Helena High School
    - Capital High School
    - Kessler Elementary
      - Activity Facilities Pre-Planning

- County Elections Office Meeting – Timing
- 2025 Legislative Session – Busy
- Winter Conditions Across the District

Chief of Staff Barb Ridgway provided an update on the district's procedures for managing winter weather conditions. The district's Transportation Manager Drew VanFossen monitors road conditions starting at 3:30 a.m. to determine if bus routes can safely operate. If necessary, routes may be canceled or altered based on weather conditions, with families being notified through an automated system. The district follows a contract stipulating that buses do not operate when temperatures reach –30 degrees Fahrenheit, or when wind chill reaches –40 degrees Fahrenheit or lower (as reported at the Helena Regional Airport) for safety reasons.

- Central Elementary/SMA Klint Fisher Memorial Project
- Helena High School, Capital High School, and Kessler Elementary School Site Visit by the Facilities and Technology Committee

Facilities Director Todd Verrill provided an update on ongoing electrical issues at Capital High School. The main breaker, installed a few years ago, has been repeatedly tripping, and despite efforts from the district's long-time electrical contractor the exact cause remains unclear. The team is exploring solutions, starting with the replacement of some breakers in the building. The electrical system at Capital High has undergone several upgrades over the years, including a new transformer and power supply for the CTE building. While the power supply to the CTE building is stable, the issue seems to be internal to the main building. Some of the switch gear, which is original to the building, is beyond its useful life and may be contributing to the problem. As the team continues to diagnose the issue, there is concern that any investments in repairs could ultimately be wasted if the equipment needs to be replaced during a future remodel. However, efforts are being made to avoid unnecessary costs and ensure that any reusable equipment is preserved. In the meantime, an electrician is on-call to quickly restore power when needed. Further recommendations will be provided once a solution is determined.

- Summer Jumpstart Program

- Continuing Work with CMS To Develop Compensation Manual and Classification Tool
- 2nd Enrollment Count – Completed
- Food Service RFP
- Copier RFP
- Accreditation Process
- Work Compensation RFP
- Other

### Outreach/Meetings

- Public Education Day of Advocacy
- Coalition of Advocates
- MFPE Day Of Advocacy Feb 17<sup>th</sup>
- Lewis & Clark County Elections Meeting
- AA Superintendent’s Meeting with Susie Hedalen-Superintendent of Public Instruction
- AA Superintendents/Counsel Winter Summit
- Parent Advisory Committee
- Teacher Advisory Committee – Rescheduled
  - Elementary Parent Teacher Conferences
- SAM
- AA Superintendents
- Board Leadership
- Hometown Helena
- HSD/HEA Meeting
- HEF
- HEF-Executive Committee
- Cabinet & Leadership
- TV, Print, Radio Media
- Shodair Children’s Hospital – Funding Meeting
- Other

### Other

- February 17th, President’s 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

There was no 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. Acknowledge FY 2024-25 Out-Of-District Attendance Agreements (Helena Resident Students Attending Other School Districts)
5. 1.14.25 Board of Trustees Full Board Meeting Minutes
6. Approval of Sabbaticals for 2025-2026 School Year

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 Jennifer Walsh 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. **a. Call for Annual Election- Elementary Trustee Resolution Calling for the Annual Regular Election**

Ms. Janelle Mickelson, Business Director for Helena Public Schools, introduced the action item *Call for Annual Election- Elementary Trustee Resolution Calling for the Annual Regular Election* to the Board of Trustees.

Background:

The annual regular school election is held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in May, which is May 6th this year. Pursuant to 20-20-201, MCA, trustees must call for the election by resolution no later than 70 days before election day. Helena Public Schools entered into an

agreement with the Lewis and Clark County Elections Office to conduct school elections for the district. The annual regular school election will be by mail ballot. The drop off location for ballots is at the Lewis and Clark County Elections Office located in the City-County Building. Voters will elect three trustees who reside within the elementary district boundaries to serve a three-year term. General fund mill levy approval for both the elementary and high school is also being requested at this time.

The District will also be requesting an increase in the technology mill levy for both the elementary and the high school districts for the purpose of purchasing, renting, repairing and maintaining technological equipment, including computers and computer network access, cloud computing services for technology infrastructure, platforms, software, network, storage, security, data, database, test environment curriculum, or desktop virtualization purposes, including any subscription or any license-based or pay-per-use service that is accessed over the internet or other remote network to meet the district's information technology and other needs, and the associated technical training for school district personnel. If approved, the increased levies will be for a term of 10 years and will take effect July 1, 2025, and expire June 30, 2035. If it is later determined that any portion of the election is not required, that portion will be cancelled.

Considerations:

- Neither the ability to run a general fund mill levy nor the amount of the levy will be known until after the spring enrollment count is finalized and the issuance of preliminary budget data sheets. However, due to the statutory requirement to call for the election no later than 70 days before the election, the recommendation is to include the general fund mill levy request in the resolution. If the Board later determines that the mill levy cannot be requested or is not desired, that portion of the election can be cancelled.
- The exact dollar amount of the technology fund levies has yet to be decided and therefore, the estimated tax impact cannot be calculated at this time.
- If the number of candidates filing a nomination petition or filing a declaration of intent to be a write-in candidate is equal to or less than the number of open trustee positions, the trustee election can be cancelled, and trustees may be seated by acclamation.
- The county elections office has requested that the exact language, including amounts, for any and all levies be transmitted to their office by March 28th so they may begin to prepare the ballot layout in the week leading up to the April 4th ballot certification deadline. Any portion of the election may still be cancelled up until the April 4th deadline.
- The cost of running an election can range (depending on the number of ballots and number of voters) is approximately \$60,000-\$87,500.

Superintendent recommendation:

Approve the resolution calling for the annual regular election.

Ms. Mickelson addressed all questions proposed by the trustees regarding the action item *Call for Annual Election- Elementary Trustee Resolution Calling for the Annual Regular Election*.



Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item, *Call for Annual Election- Elementary Trustee Resolution Calling for the Annual Regular Election* as presented.”

**Motion:** Trustee Jeff Hindoien moved to approve the resolution calling for the annual regular school election for the Helena Elementary School District No. 1. Trustee Kay Satre seconded the motion.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Vote:** 7-0 motion carries unanimously. *(Please note that Trustee Jennifer Walsh did not vote as she is a trustee strictly for the high school district and this action item is for the elementary district).*

#### **b. Call for Annual Election- High School Trustee Resolution Calling for the Annual Regular Election**

Ms. Janelle Mickelson, Business Director for Helena Public Schools, introduced the action item *Call for Annual Election- High School Trustee Resolution Calling for the Annual Regular Election* to the Board of Trustees.

Background:

The annual regular school election is held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in May, which is May 6th this year. Pursuant to 20-20-201, MCA, trustees must call for the election by resolution no later than 70 days before election day. Helena Public Schools entered into an agreement with the Lewis and Clark County Elections Office to conduct school elections for the district. The annual regular school election will be by mail ballot. The drop off location for ballots is at the Lewis and Clark County Elections Office located in the City-County Building. Voters will elect three trustees who reside within the elementary district boundaries to serve a three-year term. General fund mill levy approval for both the elementary and high school is also being requested at this time.

The District will also be requesting an increase in the technology mill levy for both the elementary and the high school districts for the purpose of purchasing, renting, repairing and maintaining technological equipment, including computers and computer network access, cloud computing services for technology infrastructure, platforms, software, network, storage, security, data, database, test environment curriculum, or desktop virtualization purposes, including any subscription or any license-based or pay-per-use service that is accessed over the internet or other remote network to meet the district’s information technology and other needs, and the associated technical training for school district personnel. If approved, the increased levies will be for a term of 10 years and will take effect July 1, 2025, and expire June 30, 2035.

If it is later determined that any portion of the election is not required, that portion will be cancelled.

Considerations:

- Neither the ability to run a general fund mill levy nor the amount of the levy will be known until after the spring enrollment count is finalized and the issuance of preliminary budget data sheets. However, due to the statutory requirement to call for the election no later than 70 days before the election, the recommendation is to include the general fund mill levy request in the resolution. If the Board later determines that the mill levy cannot be requested or is not desired, that portion of the election can be cancelled.
- The exact dollar amount of the technology fund levies has yet to be decided and therefore, the estimated tax impact cannot be calculated at this time.
- If the number of candidates filing a nomination petition or filing a declaration of intent to be a write-in candidate is equal to or less than the number of open trustee positions, the trustee election can be cancelled, and trustees may be seated by acclamation.
- The county elections office has requested that the exact language, including amounts, for any and all levies be transmitted to their office by March 28th so they may begin to prepare the ballot layout in the week leading up to the April 4th ballot certification deadline. Any portion of the election may still be cancelled up until the April 4th deadline.
- The cost of running an election can range (depending on the number of ballots and number of voters) is approximately \$60,000-\$87,500.

Superintendent recommendation:

Approve the resolution calling for the annual regular election.

Ms. Mickelson addressed all questions proposed by the trustees regarding the action item *Call for Annual Election- High School Trustee Resolution Calling for the Annual Regular Election*.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item, *Call for Annual Election- High School Trustee Resolution Calling for the Annual Regular Election* as presented.”

**Motion:** Trustee Jeff Hindoien moved to approve the resolution calling for the annual regular school election for the Helena High School District No. 1. Trustee Janet Armstrong seconded the motion.

**Public Comment:** None.

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

## 2. Capital High School Auditorium Stage Lighting Upgrade Project

Mr. Todd Verrill, Facilities Director for Helena Public Schools, presented the action item *Capital High School Auditorium Stage Lighting Upgrade Project* to the Board of Trustees. Mr. Verrill is respectfully requesting the Board of Trustees award the Capital High School Auditorium Stage Lighting Upgrade Project to Eagle Electric, Inc. The facilities office received bids from four contractors, and Eagle Electric, Inc. submitted the lowest proposal at \$141,100.00.

During the bid opening they did notice a variation in Eagle Electric's submission. They did not properly acknowledge an addendum to the original plan as specified in the project manual (i.e. "acknowledged addenda shall be attached to the bid form"). Eagle Electric did not follow these instructions but instead acknowledged on a sticker affixed to the mailing envelope. In consultation with our legal counsel, we determined this was a minor variation to the instructions and should not disqualify Eagle Electric's bid. By accepting this bid the district may face a protest from one of the other contractors; however, our legal counsel believes the decision is defensible because we have the right to waive informalities according to state administrative rules governing procurement of public contracts. Mr. Verrill recommends the board accept the low bid and award the contract to Eagle Electric, Inc.

Mr. Verrill addressed all questions proposed by the trustees regarding the action item *Capital High School Auditorium Stage Lighting Upgrade Project*.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, "At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item, *Capital High School Auditorium Stage Lighting Upgrade Project* as presented."

**Motion:** Trustee Linda Cleatus moved to waive the irregularity to the addendum of the Eagle Electric bid and approve that award. Trustee Kay Satre seconded the motion.

**Public Comment:** None.

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

## 3. Calendar Committee Proposal for the 2025-2026 School Calendar

Mr. Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent for Helena Public Schools, presented the action item *Calendar Committee Proposal for the 2025-2026 School Calendar* to the Board of Trustees. Mr. McKay's memorandum stated, "Members of the committee this year were: Thomas Baty, Jane Shawn, Gary Myers, Jonna Schwartz, Shannon Callahan, Leighann Wilson, Kathleen Prody, Chelsea Kingston, Justine Alberts, Brian Kessler, and Josh McKay. This proposed calendar begins with students attending a 3-day first week, then a 4-day week (Labor Day), and then a 5-day week. Along with this startup routine, they included a weeklong spring break and a two weeklong winter break. The winter break is 2 weeks long, due to the location of January 1. Returning for a 2-day school week is not a preferred practice for learning. Other aspects of the calendar are like past calendars. The committee has recommended maintaining a very similar calendar to the 2024-2025 calendar. The Calendar Committee is an enjoyable group of thoughtful participants. Together, we have rich discussions about our own ideas and the ideas shared with us from our partners throughout

the district. We are continuing the committee work through the spring as we discuss ways to improve learner outcomes in combination with serving our community and continuing with our positive work atmosphere.” Mr. McKay addressed all questions proposed by the trustees regarding the action item *Calendar Committee Proposal for the 2025-2026 School Calendar*.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item, *Calendar Committee Proposal for the 2025-2026 School Calendar* as presented.”

**Motion:** Trustee Kay Satre moved to approve the action item, *Calendar Committee Proposal for the 2025-2026 School Calendar*. Trustee Jennifer McKee seconded the motion.

**Public Comment:** None.

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

#### 4. **Policy 1075: Records Management and Access to Public Records**

Ms. Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff for Helena Public Schools, presented the action item *Policy 1075: Records Management and Access to Public Records* to the Board of Trustees. The only change that has been made to this policy is extending the general length of time allowed to respond to a public records request from 10 business days to 20 business days. Ms. Ridgway addressed all questions proposed by the trustees regarding the action item *Policy 1075: Records Management and Access to Public Records*.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve *Policy 1075: Records Management and Access to Public Records*.”

**Motion:** Trustee Jennifer McKee moved to approve *Policy 1075: Records Management and Access to Public Records* as presented. Trustee Linda Cleatus seconded the motion.

**Public Comment:** None.

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

#### 5. **Policy 2000: Student Instructional Goals**

Ms. Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff for Helena Public Schools, presented the action item *Policy 2000: Student Instructional Goals* to the Board of Trustees. The only change to this policy was adding the category of gender identity, as required under Title IX on line 12. Ms. Ridgway addressed all questions proposed by the trustees regarding the action item *Policy 2000: Student Instructional Goals*.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve *Policy 2000: Student Instructional Goals*.”

**Motion:** Trustee Jeff Hindoien moved to approve *Policy 2000: Student Instructional Goals*. 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 5000: Equal Employment Opportunity and Non-Discrimination**

Ms. Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff, presented for information to the Board of Trustees *Policy 5000: Equal Employment Opportunity and Non-Discrimination*. The Policy Committee recommended the removal of the phrase “and will not discriminate in its educational programs or activities, including in the area of employment” on lines 9 and 10. Additionally, the committee proposed adding the phrase “genetic information” after “gender identity” on line 12. This revision is being made to comply with Title IX requirements. Ms. Ridgway addressed questions the Board of Trustees had regarding *Policy 5000: Equal Employment Opportunity and Non-Discrimination*.

#### **2. Policy 5050: State of Montana VEBA Health Benefit Plan**

Ms. Ridgway presented for information to the Board of Trustees *Policy 5050: State of Montana VEBA Health Benefit Plan*. The Policy Committee recommended repealing the policy due to changes in program requirements and believes there is no longer a need for it. The committee determined that if a future request to participate in VEBA arises, an updated policy will be presented to the Board for approval. Ms. Ridgway addressed questions the Board of Trustees had regarding *Policy 5050: State of Montana VEBA Health Benefit Plan*.

The Board of Trustees moved on to hear reports.

### **D. REPORTS**

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

Ms. Adella Harris, Helena High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees, gave her Student Representative Report. Ms. Harris commented, “As Helena High moves into the

second half of the school year, as always, our students and staff are immersed in academics, athletics, music, and art; fulfilling and pursuing passions in every corner.

Registration for the 2025-2026 school year will be underway shortly. Our annual 8th grade visit and tour will be taking place on Wednesday, February 26. The 8th grade information night for parents will be held on March 3 in the HHS gym. All other grades will register throughout the month of March.

Currently, HHS is conducting our spring round of mental health screening. We appreciate the opportunity to be able to provide this screener to all students at our school. This screening helps break down the barriers and stigmas associated with mental health and is helping us save lives.

Aware of the importance of mental health, The University of Montana has put together a travelling event to help bring awareness. We are excited to host this event at HHS on March 3. Early in the afternoon, the university will host a listening and learning session with our students centered around mental health in our community and how to support those around us. The information and insights gained from the session will then be shared with teachers and community members. An interactive play will be presented at the Holter Museum that night, with a final community stakeholder action meeting the next day at the Myrna Loy. This will be an incredible opportunity for our school and community to continue to build on the conversation around mental health and how we support our students through difficult situations.

Helena High has had an amazing opportunity to work closely with our individual departments, providing opportunities for departments to come together and plan for literacy and engagement strategies in the classroom. Rich and insightful discussions have been taking place around the skills students need to be successful and how to implement those in the classroom.

Thank you to the foresight of engineers at Morrison-Maierle and connections built by Mr. Jonathan Driggers, our Technical Math and Physics students will be competing in a bridge building competition at the end of this month. Students will be working through the math and physics associated with load weights and structures. They will then put their designs to the test with a bridge destroying event in the HHS gym! The students whose bridges are able to withstand the greatest amount of pressure will win prizes!

As part of our family engagement goals this year, we are working to find ways to build the connection between students' home and school by inviting parents into our building. During finals week, we held our first "Breakfast with Bengals," which we have now dubbed – Start Your Day the Bengal Way! We were fortunate to have parents and teachers help students start their day off the right, or "Bengal" way, with a doughnut. We will be doing this on the fourth Thursday of each month for the remainder of the school year. We will mix up which breakfast items we provide and will continue to encourage parents and community members to help start our students' days off on the right foot. Board members are more than welcome to join us in the fun!!

With the wintery weather that arrived last week, our orchestra students unfortunately were not able to make it down to the AA Orchestra Festival. This did not stop Mr. Cleary, though, from still creating an amazing event for our students. We appreciate his tenacity to find guest conductors and put together an opportunity for our students to still show off their talents and

grow as musicians despite the hand they were dealt.

Congratulations again to Mr. Askin for his recognition as the State DECA Advisor of the Year. Mr. Askin works hard to provide opportunities for our students to develop their skills and be prepared for the next chapter of their lives.

We have been very fortunate to have Mrs. Erin Cleveland join our staff this year. While she mainly oversees our transitions classroom, she has a deep desire to provide stability and opportunity for students who may not always have that in their lives. Thanks to her go-getter attitude and the connections she has built over the years, she is successfully implementing a mentor program at our school this semester. The time she is putting into this opportunity to connect students with the community and help them find their sense of belonging is greatly appreciated.

Congratulations again to our Thespian Troupe – as was highlighted earlier tonight, our Thespians had a spectacular showing at the Thespian Festival a few weeks ago. These students work incredibly hard to perfect their craft and were rewarded for their commitment. There is still one play left for the school year – *Legally Blonde, Junior*. We encourage you to come and see it!

Congratulations to all our student athletes who have signed so far this year to further their academic and athletic careers at the collegiate level. So far this year, there are 15 members from the class of 2025 that will be competing next year across the board from track and field, cross country, soccer, basketball, dance, and football. This is a testament to the time and effort these individuals put in each day to be better at the sport, while working hard in the classroom to be eligible for the next level.

Congratulations to our Welding students for their sweep of the podium in their competition against EHHS a few weeks ago. The annual weld-off put on by the HHS AWS club is a great opportunity to build community connections and show off the job-ready skills our students are learning in our CTE courses. The theme this year was Native American heritage, and all groups did an amazing job of paying homage to Native American culture with their sculptures. Thank you to Mrs. Galbavy for all of her work on this and to the businesses and judges who gave their time to help make the event special.

Congratulations to our DECA students who did great at the state competition, a few of whom qualified for the national competition. Special congratulations to Mackenzie Groom for her selection as a State DECA Officer. It has been many years since we have had a student earn this honor at HHS!

Congratulations to our Speech and Debate students on a great season. Congratulations to Ethan Taylor on his 3rd place finish in Impromptu speaking and 7th place finish in Original Oratory. Shout out to Layla Riggs for her 6th place finish in Legislative Debate. Good luck to all our HHS Speech and Debaters as they compete in the National Qualifiers this weekend!

Congratulations to Evelyn Callery on her nomination as a Presidential Scholar.

COMING UP.....

The annual Night to Shine talent show will take place on February 18. Tickets are still available – come out and see the amazing talent of our Helena students.

Good luck this week to our wrestling and swimming teams as they compete at their respective state tournaments! Wrestling will be at the All-Class event in Billings, while swimming will be up in Great Falls for their meet.

Good luck to our Speech and Debaters as they compete to qualify for a spot in the National Speech and Debate competition in Whitefish this weekend.

Lastly, our basketball teams are having strong seasons so far and are making their way down the home stretch. We are hopeful for strong post-season representation from our teams!

Our Bengal team remains involved, full of spirit, and hopeful for the exciting new month to come.”

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

Mr. Charlie Snellman, Capital High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees, gave his Student Representative Report. Mr. Snellman commented, “Good evening, Trustees, As we move further into the second semester, Capital High students and staff are staying busy with academics, extracurricular activities, and career readiness opportunities. Here’s what’s been happening at CHS:

All CHS students recently completed the RBHI (Rural Behavioral Health Institute) Winter Screener during their 2nd period classes. Therapists from PureView Health Center and RBHI were present to provide immediate support for students who scored in the higher ranges of the index. This screener is an important tool that we use to gauge student mental health and it is crucial especially during winter months, when vitamin D deficiencies tend to cause higher than normal rates of seasonal depression. Freshman PE students have started the YAM (Youth Aware of Mental Health) curriculum, a mental health education program designed to build awareness and coping strategies. The first session is currently running, with a second session planned for later this spring. Last Wednesday, CHS administered the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) to all students during 3rd period. This survey, conducted by the Office of Public Instruction, was completed online with unique identification numbers to ensure anonymity.

Scholarship Night Recap: Career Counselor Aspen Herndon hosted Scholarship Night on January 28, covering essential topics such as:

- Scholarship opportunities and essay assistance
- FAFSA guidance (March 1 is the preferential deadline)
- WUE (Western Undergraduate Exchange) and GI Bill Education Benefits

In honor of CTE Education Month, CHS hosted Trades Day yesterday, providing students with hands-on experiences in various skilled trades. Thanks to the efforts of Tom Kain, Lucas



Canney, and Ted Riehl, students in Fundamental Woodworking and Design Classes rotated through interactive stations, including:

- Hanging and taping sheetrock
- Trim work
- Plumbing simulators
- Electrical wiring
- Flooring installation
- Sheet metal work
- Welding
- Cabinetmaking

#### Student Events & Activities:

The annual DECA Night to Shine talent showcase will take place on Sunday, February 18th, at 7:00 PM at the Civic Center. Tickets are now available and proceeds from the event will help support CHS & HHS DECA programs. Students have been working hard in preparation, and it promises to be a fantastic evening celebrating talent and creativity.

Rehearsals are in full swing for CHS's first-ever winter musical, *"Mean Girls"*, which will debut later this month. The cast and crew have been working tirelessly, and anticipation is building for an exciting set of performances.

CHS HOSA, in conjunction with the Helena Health Science Advisory Board and Carroll College Student Nursing Association, will host a Fusion Event on Sunday, February 25th, from 6:30-8:00 PM in O'Connell RM107 at Carroll College. This event will focus on cardiovascular health and will feature a hands-on CPR breakout session. All students, regardless of age or ability, interested in healthcare careers or general health education are encouraged to attend.

CHS basketball, wrestling, and swimming teams are in the thick of their seasons, with key competitions coming up as we approach the postseason. Our speech and debate team has also had a strong season, competing in multiple tournaments and representing CHS with excellence.

CHS National Honor Society members logged an impressive 3,085 community service hours during the first semester alone, demonstrating their commitment to leadership and service within Helena.

With 2nd semester now underway, it is time to look forward to next year. CHS teachers have been engaged in ongoing curriculum discussions, reviewing current pathways, course preferences, and scheduling logistics. These conversations will help determine staffing needs and course offerings for the upcoming school year. Student registration for the 2025-2026 school year will begin later in February, allowing students to select courses that align with their academic and career goals.

Capital High is thriving as we continue to provide students with meaningful academic experiences, career readiness opportunities, and mental health support. Thank you for your continued commitment to our students, and I look forward to sharing more updates next

month!”

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

2. **Helena Education Association Report**

There was no Helena Education Association Report this evening.

3. **Facilities & Technology Committee Report**

Trustee Jeff Hindoien gave the Facilities & Technology Committee Report. The members of the Facilities and Technology Committee, along with other attendees, boarded a bus for a guided tour of Helena High School, Capital High School, and Kessler Elementary School. The tour provided an opportunity to observe the facilities firsthand and engage in discussions regarding their current state and needed improvements. Trustee Hindoien noted at Helena High School the aging boiler room and the damage caused by failed pipes in the library. Trustee Hindoien emphasized the need for improvements, particularly at Helena High, which is in critical condition. Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn, who participated in the tour, shared her observations about Kessler Elementary, describing it as a series of interconnected buildings that, while once functional, have become inadequate. She pointed out the narrow hallways and the lack of space for group activities, noting that the building would be a really good choice for replacement. Trustee Janet Armstrong, who participated in the tour added that there are rooms in the building that are inaccessible to students with mobility issues, as well as rooms that require walking through classrooms to reach. In discussing Helena High, Trustee Armstrong highlighted significant electrical and technology issues, noting that the building lacks the capacity to install essential items such as digital clocks for safety purposes. She also mentioned ongoing challenges at Capital High, as discussed earlier in the meeting.

4. **Budget and Finance Committee Report**

Trustee Janet Armstrong gave the Budget and Finance Committee Report. She discussed the necessity of cell phone stipends for certain groups, explaining that while efforts have been made to reduce these costs, the stipends remain a complicated issue due to contractual obligations. The committee also reviewed the interlocal fund which began the year with just under \$6 million but is currently down to around \$3.9 million. This fund is being used to offset the district's deficit, though it is a limited resource and cannot continue to be relied upon at this rate. The district is anticipating a potential 3% increase in state funding, though Trustee Armstrong cautioned that this will not provide additional resources due to rising costs, such as steps and lanes, contractual obligations, and increases in utilities. For example, the district faced a 17% increase in liability costs last year, and a 15% increase is projected for this year. While the increase in funding will help, it is unlikely to be enough to provide additional compensation for staff, who are deserving of more support. 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 committee reviewed several policies, with some not requiring any changes. Notably, they discussed the repeal of the VEBA policy. The committee also revisited Policy 5085, concerning substitute compensation, particularly regarding paraeducators substituting for teachers. It was clarified that paraeducators would be paid the higher of their hourly rate or the substitute rate when filling in for teachers. Lastly, the committee discussed Policy 5055, focusing on leave, with an emphasis on bereavement leave, gathering additional information for further policy updates. Trustee Walsh addressed questions the Board of Trustees had regarding her report.

6. **Teaching & Learning Committee Report**

Trustee Jennifer McKee provided a report from the Teaching and Learning Committee meeting, where the focus was on how data is utilized within schools. Bryant School was highlighted for meeting its year-long growth goals in just three months, achieved through a collaborative approach involving staff sharing their values before the school year began. This strategy helped align everyone's efforts toward common goals and contributed to the school's rapid progress. The committee also discussed the challenges faced by schools with high student turnover, such as Bryant, where 40% of students frequently come and go. This turnover creates additional complexity in tracking and supporting student progress, as students must be quickly assessed and moved up to the appropriate level, even if they only remain in the district for a short time. At HMS, similar challenges were noted. This constant turnover requires schools to adapt quickly, ensuring students are caught up on missed assignments or gaps in learning. Capital High School Principal Zanto also shared insights, particularly regarding the school's efforts to provide enrichment and intervention time. At Capital High, as with other schools, this time is essential to address academic gaps and ensure students are meeting learning goals. Principal Zanto emphasized the importance of this time for students, especially those who may struggle with assignments or need extra support. The committee acknowledged the challenges and complexities faced by these schools, with an emphasis on meeting the varied needs of students, especially in environments with high mobility and diverse learning requirements. Trustee McKee addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding her report.

7. **Health Benefits Committee Report**

Trustee Kay Satre provided a report from the Health Benefits Committee meeting, which took place on January 30. The committee focused on developing a framework for moving forward with the Request for Proposal (RFP) process. A scoring process for evaluating submissions was solidified, and the committee is planning to have finalist presentations in early April, though the exact date is still to be confirmed. Additionally, a survey will be distributed to all members to assess their preferences and understanding of the current health benefits plan. The survey aims to gather valuable feedback and help inform the decision-making process. 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 ongoing legislative efforts at the Capitol, specifically those involving the Montana School Boards Association (MTSBA). She highlighted the association's focus on several key bills. House Bill 15, which aims to address the inflationary gap, has successfully passed its second reading. Additionally, House Bill 320 has also passed its second reading. This is the tax credit bill that creates two additional tax credits for private school students and would result in incremental funding cuts to public schools. Trustees Cleatus and Trustee Satre have also been actively involved in advocating for education-related legislation. 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, February 25<sup>th</sup>, Board of Trustees Work Session, Bryant Elementary, 3:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, March 4<sup>th</sup>, Policy Committee Meeting, 12:00 p.m., Lincoln Center
- Wednesday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, Teaching and Learning Committee Meeting, 12:00 p.m., Lincoln Center
- Friday, March 7<sup>th</sup>, Budget & Finance Committee Meeting, 12:00 p.m., Lincoln Center
- Monday, March 10<sup>th</sup>, Facilities & Technology Committee Meeting, 12:00 p.m., Lincoln Center
- Tuesday, March 11<sup>th</sup>, Full Board Meeting, 5:30 p.m., Lincoln Center
- Tuesday, March 25<sup>th</sup>, Board of Trustees Work Session, Helena High School, 3:30 p.m.

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

## **VIII. BOARD COMMENTS**

There were no further board comments.

## **IX. ADJOURNMENT**

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn adjourned the meeting at 8:08 p.m.

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Candice Delvaux, Recording Secretary      Date