



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, April 8th, 2025
5:30 p.m.

MINUTES

ATTENDANCE – Present unless otherwise noted.

Siobhan Hathhorn, Chair
Jennifer McKee, Vice Chair
Linda Cleatus, Trustee
Jennifer Walsh, Trustee
Kay Satre, Trustee
Rachel Robison, Trustee
Janet Armstrong, Trustee
Charlie Snellman, Capital High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees
Rex Wertz, Superintendent
Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent
Janelle Mickelson, Business Director
Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff
Todd Verrill, Facilities Director
Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director
Gary Myers, Director of Educational Technology
Kaitlyn Hess, Data & Federal Programs Director
Justine Alberts, Curriculum Director
Jane Shawn, HEA President
Karen Ogden, Communications Officer
Lisa Cordingley, HEF Executive Director
Brian Kessler, Helena High School Principal
Brett Zanto, Capital High School Principal
Kathleen Prody, C.R. Anderson Middle School Principal
Rob Brewer, Facilities Manager
Many guests of the public as well as Helena School District Staff and Students

I. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn called the meeting to order at 5:35 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 listed below.

Harrison Writing Awards

The Board of Trustees is proud to recognize the exceptional talent of the 2025 recipients of the Harrison Writing Awards. The Harrison Writing Awards include up to four \$350 awards given annually in the categories of either expository or creative writing to HPS high school students by the Helena Education Foundation. Dr. Lee Harrison endowed these awards in memory of her mother Ethel Harrison.

Professional writers in the community review submissions and select the winning pieces. The prose and poetry of Harrison award winners are featured in the annual Pen & Ink magazine. The Foundation organizes a community launch party for the magazine at which students have the opportunity to share their works.

The 2025 recipients of the Harrison Writing Award are:

- Zaraj Carrucini (CHS) for "Library Guardian" and "Tiger in a Birch Tree Forest"
- Fiona Kuntz (CHS) for "Ms. Shallot" and "The Woods"
- Dane Moser (HHS) for "A Winter's Thought"

Going to the Sun Awards

The Board of Trustees is proud to recognize the first-ever recipients of the Going to the Sun Award, a prestigious new initiative by the Helena Education Foundation. The Helena Education Foundation is thrilled to announce the inaugural year of the Going to the Sun Award, providing up to four \$350 awards to be given annually to HPS high school student visual artists by the Helena Education Foundation beginning in 2025. The Going to the Sun Award was established by a local family of longtime advocates/supporters of Helena Public Schools and the Helena Education Foundation. Professional artists in the community reviewed submissions and selected the winning pieces. The artwork of the Going to the Sun Award recipients will be featured in the annual Pen & Ink magazine, as well as at the community launch party for the magazine, hosted by HEF to honor the student editors, writers, and artists.

The first ever recipients of the Going to the Sun Award are:

- Faith Howard (HHS) for a series of pen and ink drawings
- Lauren Bechdol (CHS) "Portrait"
- Meika Arensmeyer (CHS) for "The View in a Box"
- Mason Karlin (HHS) for "Through the Looking Glass"

Science Olympiad Winners-Capital High School

The Board of Trustees is proud to recognize the outstanding achievements of Capital High School students who recently earned 1st place finishes at the State Science Olympiad competition.

Codebusters: Rowan Humbert, Sydney Harman, and Fiona Kuntz

Optics: Isaac Urban and Kate Drynan

Their dedication, hard work, and teamwork were instrumental in securing these impressive results. Please join us in congratulating these exceptional students for their remarkable accomplishments in the Science Olympiad competition. We would also like to extend a special thanks to their teacher advisors, Ms. Humbert and Ms. Urban for their unwavering support and guidance, which helped these students excel in the competition.

Science Olympiad Winners-C.R. Anderson Middle School

The Board of Trustees is proud to recognize the outstanding achievements of C.R. Anderson Middle School students who recently earned 1st place finishes at the State Science Olympiad competition.

Meteorology (Gold) – Eileen McLane & Ellery Hughey

Their dedication, hard work, and teamwork were instrumental in securing these impressive results. Please join us in congratulating these exceptional students for their remarkable accomplishments in the Science Olympiad competition. We would also like to extend a special thanks to their teacher advisors, Ms. Lane and Ms. Hagengruber for their unwavering support and guidance, which helped these students excel in the competition.

Business Professionals of America (BPA) National Qualifiers-Capital High School

The Board of Trustees is proud to recognize the students listed below, who competed at the Montana State Business Professionals of America Conference and earned the honor of advancing to the national competition. We extend a special thank you to Ms. Toivonen for her unwavering support and guidance, which played a crucial role in helping these students excel in the competition.

- Kathleen Cook – 1st Advanced Interview Skills, 4th Java Programming
- Kayle Andriolo – 1st Computer Programming Concepts, 1st Digital Marketing Concepts, 1st Financial Math and Analysis, 1st Information Technology Concepts, 1st Java Programming, 2nd Python Programming
- Ryan Fuller – 2nd Server Administration Using Microsoft, 5th Device Configuration & Troubleshooting
- Sam Flynn – 2nd Java Programming, 3rd Python Programming, 4th IT Concepts
- Emiley Ereth – 1st Economic Research Project
- McKenzy Heppner – 1st Health Research Presentation
- Nolan Holzer – 5th Python Programming
- Brooklynn Haab, Joey Casey, Kathleen Cook, McKenzy Heppner – 1st Presentation Team
- Brooklynn Haab, Emiley Ereth, Hollis Elliott – 3rd Visual Design Team

Business Professionals of America (BPA) National Qualifier-Helena High School

The Board of Trustees is proud to recognize Lorenzo Phoenix, who competed at the Montana State Business Professionals of America Conference and earned the honor of advancing to the national competition. We also extend a special thank you to Mrs. Humphrey for her unwavering support and guidance, which were instrumental in helping Lorenzo and other students excel in the competition.

- Lorenzo Phoenix-3rd Java Programming

Mock Trial State Champions-Helena High School

The Board of Trustees would like to congratulate the Helena High School Copper Team for winning the Mock Trial State Championship! A special congratulations to team members Mia Taylor, Kenzie Criswell, Addie Murray, Maverick Franklin, Gabbi LaVoie, Grey Gildroy, and Layla Riggs (Courtroom Artist). The Board would also like to extend special thanks to advisor Mr. Askin, and Attorney Coaches Morrison, Dal Nogare, and Zupanic for their unwavering support and guidance, which played a pivotal role in the team's success.

The Board of Trustees moved on to review the presentation portion of the agenda.

IV. PRESENTATION

The Board of Trustees viewed the 2024 District Audit presentation presented by Mr. Anthony Gerharz, Senior Audit Manager, Wipfli LLP. Mr. Gerharz thanked Mrs. Mickelson and her team for their support, as their cooperation is crucial for the audit process. He explained that the audit includes a federal single audit to ensure compliance with federal spending when over \$750,000 is used. The audit process involves assessing risks and transactions to determine whether the financial statements are materially accurate and reliable.

Mr. Gerharz was pleased to announce that the district received an unmodified audit opinion, meaning the financial statements are materially correct and can be relied upon. There were no findings of material weaknesses or significant deficiencies related to internal controls. Additionally, there were no issues with federal awards, and the special education cluster was thoroughly reviewed, with everything found to be in order. Mr. Gerharz addressed questions from the board before the meeting transitioned to the review of the Superintendent's Report.

V. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Superintendent Wertz presented his Superintendent Report to the Board of Trustees and discussed topics including but not limited to:

Recognition

- Board of Trustees Work Session At Helena High School- March 25th, Thank You Principal Brian Kessler & HHS Staff
- April 2 National Paraprofessional Appreciation Day
- April 4 National School Librarian Appreciation Day
- April 7-11 National Assistant Principal Week
- April 21-25 Public School Volunteer Week / National Volunteer Recognition Week
- April 22 School Bus Driver Appreciation Day
- April 23 Administrative Professionals Day
- Other

New Business

- Board of Trustees Special Board Meeting-Public Hearing on Potential Closure of Hawthorne Elementary School-Wednesday April 9th, 2025, 5:30 p.m. PD Center 1325 Poplar Street Helena, MT
- Boundary Recommendation – Ongoing work and communications
- HEA & HPS Consensus Bargaining - Week of April 7th
- Pre-Bond Planning Key Stakeholders Meeting At HHS-SMA
- CHS Community Meeting-SMA
- Master Facilities Planning
 - Pre Bond Work – SMA
 - Helena High School
 - Capital High School
 - Kessler Elementary
 - Activity Facilities Pre-Planning
- 2025 Legislative Session
- Continuing Work with CMS To Develop a Compensation Manual and Classification Tool – HR
- 2025 – 2026 Projected Budgets for High School and Elementary
 - Financial Outlooks

- Federal Funding Uncertainties
- HB 15 – 3% Inflationary Increase
- Impacts of Technology Levies
- 3 Year Budget Reduction Efforts Overview
- Deficits for 2025-26 SY – Projected
 - Elementary
 - High School
- Other

Outreach/Meetings

- AA Superintendents
- Parent Advisory Committee
- Teacher Advisory Committee
- Board Leadership
- HSD/HEA Meeting
- HEF
- HEF Executive Committee
- HEF – Interviews for new Executive Director
- Hawthorne Community Meeting
- Coffee With The Principal
- Principal Thatcher-Kessler
- Cabinet & Leadership
- TV, Print, Radio Media
- CMS Meetings
- SAM 2025 Legislative Advocacy Meetings
- Bond Committee Meeting – Working Team
- Kiwanis Presentation
- Business Partner Meetings
- Pre-Bond Planning Key Stakeholders Meeting At HHS

Other

That concluded the Superintendent’s Report portion of the agenda. Superintendent Weltz responded to questions from the Board of Trustees, after which the trustees proceeded to hear general public comment.

VI. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Doug Dellwo gave general public comment. Mr. Dellwo stated that he is a former teacher in Helena and a resident of the community. Mr. Dellwo’s general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to concerns about communication between the district and the community. He emphasized the need to make the funding decrease more relatable by explaining how it directly impacts students, urging that parents and the community need to understand the consequences of such cuts. He also discussed the importance of engaging the community in advocacy, recommending that citizens regularly communicate with legislators in a non-combative way to support educational bills and ensure the

district's needs are met. Mr. Dellwo concluded by stressing that this grassroots involvement could make a significant difference.

Ms. Lisa Richidt gave general public comment. Ms. Richidt is a parent of three children in the school district. Ms. Richidt's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to the importance of clear communication about the consequences of levies, particularly regarding the closure of neighborhood schools. She emphasized that clearer information would likely lead to higher voter turnout. Ms. Richidt also expressed concerns about the proposed boundary changes, specifically the shift of the east-west line along Grant Street, which she felt was illogical given that students could walk to the nearby middle school but would instead be assigned to a school across town. She urged the board to reconsider the boundary lines with a focus on walkability for middle school students.

Ms. Peggy Hollow-Phelps gave general public comment. Ms. Hollow-Phelps' general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to concerns about recent reductions in early childhood education programs, such as the closure of the Ray Bjork Learning Center. She expressed opposition to the closure of neighborhood schools, highlighting Helena's unique culture and suggesting a mix of walkable neighborhood schools with larger community schools. Ms. Hollow-Phelps also questioned the financial logic of maintaining the Front Street Learning Center while considering the closure of an elementary school, proposing that the community focus on building a new high school and updating Capital High School instead of closing existing schools.

Ms. Hanna Warhank gave general public comment. Ms. Warhank is a parent in the district and a taxpayer. Ms. Warhank's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to concerns about the increasing negativity between the trustees and parents online. She emphasized that parents are advocates for their children, not the enemy, and expressed frustration over the unfair message being spread that cuts to programs like music and P.E. were due to Hawthorne. Ms. Warhank reminded the trustees that parents want to be involved and support public education.

Ms. Kathryn Dunkelberger gave general public comment. Ms. Dunkelberger is a community member, a parent of students in the district, and an employee in the district. Ms. Dunkelberger's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to concerns about school closures and boundary changes. She emphasized the negative impact these decisions would have on vulnerable students, particularly those who have experienced setbacks due to the pandemic. Ms. Dunkelberger highlighted the importance of the relationships students have built with peers and staff, urging the board to recognize the life-changing consequences of disrupting these connections. She called for decisions that support students' long-term success rather than setbacks.

That concluded general public comment, and the Board of Trustees moved on to review the Consent Action Items.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Consent Action Items

1. Personnel Actions
2. Warrants
3. Approval of FY 2024-25 Out-Of-District Attendance Agreements (Nonresident Students Attending

Helena School District)

4. 3.11.25 Board of Trustees Full Board Meeting Minutes
5. 3.12.25 Board of Trustees Special Board Meeting Open Session Meeting Minutes
6. 3.12.25 Board of Trustees Special Board Meeting Closed Session Meeting Minutes
7. 3.18.25 Pre-Bond Planning Key Stakeholders Meeting Minutes
8. 3.19.25 Board of Trustees Special Board Meeting Open Session Meeting Minutes
9. 3.19.25 Board of Trustees Special Board Meeting Closed Session Meeting Minutes

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the Consent Action Items as presented.”

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

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 7-0 motion carries unanimously.

That concluded the approval of the Consent Action Items. The Board of Trustees moved on to hear reports.

B. REPORTS

1. Student Representatives Report

Mr. Charlie Snellman, Capital High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees, presented his Student Representative Report. Mr. Snellman commented, “With spring in full swing, students and staff at Capital High are getting adjusted to the rhythm of fourth quarter. Between testing, scheduling, and an array of academic and extracurricular activities, there’s no shortage of excitement in the building.

Earlier today, CHS hosted ACT and pre-ACT testing for all juniors and sophomores. Thanks to the coordination and support of our staff, the day ran smoothly, and students were given the best environment to showcase their academic prowess.

The week before spring break, CHS celebrated Choose to Include Week—a campaign through Special Olympics as part of our designation as a Unified Champion School. Our unified classes and Special Olympics Club put on spirit days and inclusive lunchtime activities to highlight the power of belonging, acceptance, and inclusive language for students of all abilities.

Also that week, CHS Career Counselor Aspen Herndon organized a Medical Career Night, giving students and families the opportunity to hear from professionals across a wide range of medical careers. There were even virtual simulation activities for attendees to try out! In that same vein, the Helena Health Science Advisory Board hosted another fusion event, called

Neuro-Fusion, with several awesome guest speakers, pizza, and activities like designing and creating a safe helmet (for an egg), drawing up a “thinking cap,” and several myth-busting trivia games.

The Helena Health Science Advisory Board (HHSAB), in partnership with Confluence Public Health Alliance, is hosting another event, called Super Fusion on Public Health this Wednesday, April 9th, from 6:00–7:30 PM. The event will feature incredible speakers, breakout sessions led by public health professionals, and refreshments. It’s free and open to the public, and we’re excited to see continued interest in health science opportunities across the Helena community. It is important that we continue to provide opportunities and give students adequate exposure to careers that might pique their interest—in the medical career and beyond. Whether it comes in the form of a class, a CTE pathway, extracurricular organization, or any combination thereof, it is our duty to provide the best we have to our students.

Looking ahead, CHS will host a Community Bond Presentation and Tour on Wednesday, April 23rd at 6:00 PM. The event will provide information about potential facility improvements at CHS and offer guided tours for community members to see current conditions firsthand.

Meanwhile, the scheduling process for 2025–2026 is underway. Course request data was distributed to department coordinators before spring break, and our counseling team has finished student registration. We’ve officially entered the master scheduling phase! Good luck to Mr. Zanto and his team...

And, of course, Vigilante Day Parade registration is open from April 10th to April 17th! Students can register in the library foyer or through their class Teams pages.

Capital High continues to thrive this spring. Whether it’s statewide testing, inclusive programming, career exploration, or future-focused events, Bruins are leaning into every opportunity with pride and purpose.”

Ms. Adella Harris, Helena High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees, was not in attendance this evening, so there was no report.

2. **Helena Education Association Report**

Ms. Jane Shawn, HEA President, presented the Helena Education Report. Ms. Shawn provided an update on the upcoming annual MFPE conference, which will include a rally at the Capitol on Friday, lunch with legislators, a celebration dinner, and business meetings on Saturday, such as electing officers and passing the budget. She mentioned that 17 delegates would be attending from HEA. Ms. Shawn also gave an update on the ongoing bargaining process, noting that it has been intense but productive. She expressed satisfaction with the progress made since the previous year and highlighted the positive working relationship with the district, particularly appreciating the collaborative and productive nature of the meetings.

3. **Facilities & Technology Committee Report**

There was no Facilities & Technology Committee Report this evening, as the committee will not meet until next week.

4. **Budget and Finance Committee Report**

There was no Budget and Finance Committee Report this evening, as the committee did not meet in April, but Trustee Janet Armstrong raised a suggestion for consideration. Trustee Armstrong proposed creating a document that outlines the adjustments and efforts made by the administration and board over the past three years. She believed this could help inform the public about the ongoing work and efforts, providing a clear overview of the progress made. She left this idea for the board's consideration.

5. **Policy Committee Report**

There was no Policy Committee Meeting Report this evening, as the committee did not meet in April.

6. **Teaching & Learning Committee Report**

There was no Teaching and Learning Committee Report this evening, as the committee did not meet in April.

7. **Health Benefits Committee Report**

Trustee Kay Satre presented the Health Benefits Committee meeting report. Trustee Satre reported that the Health Benefits Committee met on March 27th to determine finalists for the RFP process, evaluating proposals for medical, dental, and vision plans. The committee has yet to analyze proposals for the pharmacy component. The finalists will be asked to refine their proposals and present their best offers at an in-person interview on April 17th. The RFP process aims to ensure the best cost options for these services. Additionally, there have been no updates from the Montana School Insurance Alliance regarding their plans for the district, with the latest information indicating that their draft plans and costs are expected by late summer or early fall, which is a delay from the original timeline.

8. **Wellness Committee Report**

Ms. Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff, presented the Wellness Committee Report. The report highlighted several key initiatives, including the committee's recent visit to Helena Food Share, which supports students, particularly through the Kid Packs program. During the visit, the committee toured the facility and learned about its operations. Ms. Ridgway also shared that new vending machines offering healthier options, such as salads and sandwiches, were installed at Capital High School, where they have been well-received by students. She noted the impact of the federal cuts to the Local Foods for Schools program, which will affect access to fresh produce. Lastly, the committee discussed ongoing collaboration with local culinary programs to enhance student learning and engagement with food preparation.

9. **Montana School Boards Association Report**

There was no report from the Montana School Boards Association. Chair Hathhorn noted that the organization's primary focus has been on legislative matters.

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.

VIII. UPCOMING MEETINGS

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

- Wednesday, April 9th, Board of Trustees Special Board Meeting-Public Hearing on Potential Closure of Hawthorne Elementary School, 5:30 p.m., Lincoln Center
- Monday, April 14th, Facilities & Technology Committee Meeting, 12:00 p.m., Lincoln Center
- Tuesday, April 22nd, Board of Trustees Work Session, Kessler Elementary, 3:30 p.m.
- Monday, May 5th, Policy Committee Meeting, 12:00 p.m. Lincoln Center
- Wednesday, May 7th, Teaching & Learning Committee Meeting, 12:00 p.m., Lincoln Center

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

IX. BOARD COMMENTS

Trustee Jennifer Walsh thanked the community for their engagement through comments and emails, stressing the importance of being well-informed about board decisions. She highlighted the need to evaluate each financial proposal, such as levies and bonds, based on its individual merits rather than emotional factors. Trustee Walsh encouraged the public to focus on specific proposals for improvements at Helena High and Capital High and make informed decisions. She also reminded everyone that regardless of whether these proposals pass, budget decisions will still be made and will impact the district's direction. Lastly, she invited the community to attend the upcoming community meeting at Capital High to better understand the school conditions and the proposed improvements.

Board of Trustees Capital High School Student Representative Charlie Snellman shared a personal reflection on his role as a student trustee, acknowledging the challenges and rewards of his position. Although he cannot vote, he values advocating for the voices of others. He mentioned the emotional nature of last month's meeting and the challenge of not interacting directly with the

public during comment periods, though he often feels the urge to respond. Mr. Snellman emphasized the importance of truly listening, not just hearing, to the public's feedback, and balancing it with the practical considerations of the board's decisions. He concluded by encouraging everyone to focus on listening carefully and reflecting on the community's input while considering the facts and data presented.

Trustee Armstrong expressed gratitude for the wise words of the student trustees, particularly Mr. Snellman. She acknowledged the significant challenges the district is facing and reminded the public of the importance of staying involved, asking questions, and working together to address these issues. Trustee Armstrong emphasized the board's commitment to not just addressing financial difficulties, but also ensuring the district moves forward in a positive direction. She highlighted the emotional weight of the decisions the board is making and thanked the public for their engagement and support. Trustee Armstrong concluded by reaffirming the shared goal of providing the best possible education for future generations.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn adjourned the meeting at 7:26 p.m.

Candice Delvaux, Recording Secretary

Date