



**Board of Trustees**  
**Teaching and Learning Committee Meeting**

Wednesday, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025

12:00pm

Lincoln Center & TEAMS

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**MINUTES**

**ATTENDANCE**

*Trustees:*    *Others:*

Kay Satre, Committee Chair	Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff
Rachel Robison, Trustee	Jane Shawn, HEA President
	Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent
	Justine Alberts, Curriculum Director
	Candice Delvaux, Board Reporter
	Kaitlyn Hess, Assessment and Federal Programs Director
	Gary Myers, Director of Educational Technology
	Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director
	Todd Verrill, Facilities Director
	Ashlie Buresh, TOSA
	Melissa Romano, TOSA
	Lauren Gustafson, Helena High Educator
	Emily Wheeler, Helena High Educator
	Meghan Schulte, Title & Instructional Specialist
	Dr. Michele Douglass, District Consultant

## **I. CALL TO ORDER/INTRODUCTIONS**

The meeting was called to order at 12:00 p.m. by Committee Chair Kay Satre.

## **II. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no general public comment.

## **III. REVIEW OF AGENDA**

No changes were requested to the agenda.

## **IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The committee reviewed and accepted the minutes from the 3.5.25 Teaching and Learning Committee Meeting.

## **V. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION/DISCUSSION**

### **A. Elementary Writing Project**

Curriculum Director Ms. Justine Alberts provided an update on the district's elementary writing project. She outlined a renewed focus on establishing a sustainable, research-based writing system that extends across all content areas, moving beyond reliance on a single curriculum.

Key points included:

Writing is essential for enhancing both writing and reading skills and supports learning in subjects such as social studies and math.

Current data indicates only about 20% of students meet grade-level writing proficiency, underscoring the need for improvement.

Teacher feedback highlighted the need for additional support in handwriting, keyboarding, explicit and vertically aligned writing instruction, and user-friendly resources.

Writing instruction is currently inconsistent, with teachers using various curricula or developing their own materials, which complicates vertical alignment.

Next steps include piloting a writing system aligned with new Montana reading and writing standards, increasing daily writing time, and creating supporting materials for teachers.

The writing task force will focus on writing in response to reading, the writing process, and vertical alignment from kindergarten through fifth grade.

A pilot program with select teachers will collect data and feedback to refine the initiative before wider implementation.

Ms. Alberts addressed questions from the Teaching and Learning Committee regarding the elementary writing project.

**B. Social Studies Curriculum Updates**

The Teaching and Learning Committee proceeded to discuss updates to the social studies curriculum. The committee reviewed progress on a comprehensive redesign of high school social studies courses, reflecting five years of collaborative work. Key courses include 9th grade World Studies, 11th grade American Studies I, and 12th grade American Studies II.

Educators in attendance at the meeting highlighted a shift from a content-heavy model to one emphasizing critical thinking, inquiry, and skill development aligned with the C3 Framework. This approach focuses on student engagement through inquiry-based learning and argumentation rather than memorization of facts.

Following a pilot year, teachers noted the curriculum's flexibility to tailor content while maintaining consistent skills across courses. They advocated for formal curriculum approval, emphasizing its alignment with state standards and its role in preparing students for college and civic life.

Ms. Alberts addressed questions from the Teaching and Learning Committee regarding updates to the social studies curriculum.

**C. High School Writing Assessment**

The Teaching and Learning Committee concluded by discussing the high school writing assessment. The committee discussed the integration of writing within the high school social studies curriculum. Educators in attendance at the meeting emphasized the goal of increasing writing across disciplines and making time for more writing instruction. Writing is a central component, particularly at the freshman level, where students develop foundational skills through assignments such as five-paragraph essays structured around compelling questions aligned with the C3 Framework. The curriculum encourages critical thinking and argument development through various writing formats, including ethnographies, journal assessments, and analysis of primary sources.

There is strong collaboration with the English department to create a shared language and expectations around writing skills, including thesis development, evidence analysis, sourcing, and citation. Writing serves as the primary mode of assessment, with no traditional multiple-choice tests given. Instead, students complete cumulative projects requiring intensive argumentative writing.

The curriculum accommodates diverse student abilities, especially in courses like American Studies, where students with varying reading and writing levels are supported through differentiated approaches. Teachers report that students generally thrive under this model, writing daily in short bursts that build toward more complex papers, which strengthens their critical thinking and communication skills.

Educators in attendance at the meeting acknowledged the significant transformation in social studies teaching, moving away from traditional lecture-based classes to more student-centered, discussion-driven learning. This evolution has increased student engagement and reflects a new, dynamic approach to social studies education.

Finally, the committee reviewed the Helena School District's writing assessment, originally developed in 2013-2014 and now being revitalized. The assessment uses ACT-style prompts to measure writing skills across grades 9 through 12, with plans to adapt senior year assessments to focus on practical writing skills such as resume and cover letter writing. The writing assessment provides a key tool to evaluate the effectiveness of writing initiatives and supports ongoing curriculum development.

Ms. Alberts and Ms. Kaitlyn Hess, Assessment and Federal Programs Director, addressed questions from the Teaching and Learning Committee regarding the high school writing assessment.

## **VI. BOARD COMMENTS**

There were no further board comments.

## **VII. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:42 p.m. by Committee Chair Kay Satre.