



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, May 13th, 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
Jeff Hindoien, 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
Kaitlyn Hess, Data & Federal Programs Director
Justine Alberts, Curriculum Director
Jane Shawn, HEA President
Lona Carter, Student Health Services & Special Education Director
Lisa Cordingley, HEF Executive Director
Brian Kessler, Helena High School Principal
Nick Radley, Central Elementary School Principal
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 5:30 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 staff and students listed below.

A. 2025 Montana School Counselor of the Year

Congratulations to Krystal Ferguson, who has been selected as the 2025 Montana School Counselor of the Year! This prestigious award recognizes Krystal's outstanding dedication, leadership, and unwavering commitment to supporting the academic, social, and emotional growth of her students. We are incredibly proud to celebrate this well-deserved honor with her.

B. National Council of Excellence Award-Helena High School

Congratulations to the Helena High School Student Council for receiving the National Council of Excellence Award!! This award recognizes their outstanding leadership, service, and commitment to creating a positive impact within the school community. A special thank you to their advisor, Samantha Humphrey, for her dedicated guidance and support in helping the Student Council achieve this remarkable honor. We are incredibly proud of their achievement!

C. Recognition of Achievement: Seal of Biliteracy Recipients

Congratulations to the outstanding students from Capital High and Helena High who have earned the Seal of Biliteracy, an honor recognized at both the state and national levels, awarded to students who demonstrate proficiency in two or more languages. This achievement reflects the hard work of both English Learners and World Language students who have met rigorous standards through formal testing. Their success highlights the importance of multilingualism and cultural understanding in our schools and community. We commend these students for their dedication and academic excellence.

Congratulations to the following Capital High students: Zaraj Carrucini-Cintron, Evan Colberg, Lyric Lanes, Adeline Walters, Hollis Elliot, Liliana Hanson, Sophie Shanight, and Perla Carrucini.

Congratulations to the following Helena High students: Eva Skibicki, Evelyn Callery, Olivia Cook, Abigale Arnold-Jacques, Gillian Bovingdon, Sofia Cetraro, Madison Demmons, Luke Ruch, Tea Woodland, Ricky Robbins, Dakota Harmon, Anna Sanchez, and Adrienne Taylor.

The Board of Trustees moved on to hear the Superintendent's Report presented by Superintendent Weltz.

IV. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

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

- Recognition
 - HPS Administration and Counseling Staff
 - EHHS Support
 - May 6th Election Day
 - Recognition of Karen Ogden, Communications Specialist
 - Recognition of Trustee Jeff Hindoién
 - Recognition of Charlie Snellman, Capital High Student Board Representative
 - Recognition of Adella Harris, Helena High Student Board Representative
 - Helena Education Foundation-Celebration of Excellence
 - Board of Trustees Work Session at Kessler Elementary School-Thank You, Principal Thatcher, Staff, & Students
 - Congratulations to the following 105.3 KMTX Teacher of the Month Recipients:
 - March-Mrs. Miranda Parisi, Central Elementary School
 - April-Mrs. Dilone' Mouledous, Kessler Elementary School
 - May 1 National School Principal's Day
 - May 2 School Lunch Hero Day
 - May 5-9 National Teacher Appreciation Week
 - May 6 National Teacher Appreciation Day
 - May 7 National School Nurse Day
 - May 9 School Communicators Day
 - May 18 National Speech Pathologist Day
 - Other
- New Business
 - Activities Director Interviews
 - HEA/HPS Consensus Bargaining
 - Graduation Planning
 - Master Facilities Planning
 - Pre Bond Work - SMA
 - Helena High School
 - Capital High School
 - Kessler Elementary
 - Activity Facilities Pre-Planning
 - 2025 Legislative Session-Complete
 - Continuing Work with CMS To Develop a Compensation Manual and Classification Tool – HR

- HPS Self-Funded Health Care RFP
 - May 27th Update
 - AA Decennial Study Strategic Planning
 - 2025-26 SY Budget
 - Staffing & Operations
 - Other
- Outreach/Meetings
 - League of Women Voters Presentation
 - Helena Chamber Board of Directors Meeting
 - HEA/HPS Consensus Bargaining
 - Board of Health Meeting
 - Board of Health Finance Committee
 - CHS Community Meeting
 - Kessler Community Meeting
 - AA Superintendents
 - Parent Advisory Committee
 - Teacher Advisory Committee
 - Board Leadership
 - HSD/HEA Meeting
 - HEF
 - HEF Executive Committee
 - Cabinet & Leadership
 - TV, Print, Radio, Media
 - CMS Meetings
 - SAM 2025 Legislative Advocacy Meetings
 - Bond Committee Meeting – Working Team
 - Mr. Keith Meyer Retirement Celebration
 - Other
- 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.

V. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Wilbur Rehmann gave general public comment. Mr. Rehmann stated he is a resident of Helena, a professional musician, and substitute taught for Helena Public Schools. Mr. Rehmann’s general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to his background as a long-time Helena resident and professional musician, with experience as a substitute music teacher. He expressed concern

about the potential elimination of the elementary music program, highlighting the importance of early music education in students' development. Mr. Rehmann urged the Board to find ways to fund and sustain music programs within the district's budget, stressing the need to maintain these programs at both the elementary and high school levels. He concluded by emphasizing that continuing to lose levies was not a viable solution and encouraged the Board to prioritize music education.

Ms. Beagan Volz gave general public comment. Ms. Volz's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to concerns about the Helena School District's efforts to close Hawthorne School. She raised questions about the accuracy of the data used to justify the closure, particularly regarding bus costs and deferred maintenance, and pointed out the lack of transparency with the district's budget. Additionally, she emphasized that Hawthorne serves a diverse student body, with a significant portion eligible for free or reduced lunch, and urged the Board to reconsider the closure, suggesting the school should remain open for at least another year to allow students time to adjust.

Ms. Sarah Perry gave general public comment. Ms. Perry's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to concerns about the proposed boundary changes, which she acknowledged are necessary but urged be approached thoughtfully to avoid unintended consequences. She highlighted potential demographic and socioeconomic imbalances, drawing on her background as a biostatistician and public health educator. Ms. Perry also raised issues related to sustainability and student safety, particularly the reassignment of students from walkable neighborhoods near C.R. Anderson Middle School to more distant schools requiring unsafe pedestrian routes. She encouraged the Board to consider more balanced and creative solutions.

Ms. Liz Grant gave general public comment. Ms. Grant stated she is a graduate of Helena Public Schools, a parent of two children at Hawthorne Elementary, and a family doctor in the community. Ms. Grant's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to the timing and impact of the proposed closure of Hawthorne Elementary. As a parent, physician, and Helena Public Schools graduate, she shared the emotional toll the uncertainty has had on families and expressed concern over the lack of communication and clear answers from the district. She questioned why the process does not follow the precedent of previous closures, which allowed families a year to transition and included support such as school visits and welcome committees. Ms. Grant also raised concerns about student safety related to crossing busy intersections, the mental health impact on students—particularly those already affected by past disruptions like COVID—and requested clarification on the financial data used to justify the closure, noting previous inaccuracies.

Ms. Eleanor Blitzer gave general public comment. Ms. Blitzer stated she is the parent of two students at Hawthorne Elementary. Ms. Blitzer's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to concerns over the rushed transition plan for the proposed closure of Hawthorne Elementary. As a parent of two students, she expressed disappointment in the lack of meaningful communication, pointing out that the only transition support offered was a brief mention of barbecues and field days, which she found insufficient. She emphasized the challenges for special needs students and urged the Board to extend Hawthorne's operation for one more year to allow for a better transition. Additionally, Ms. Blitzer criticized the lack of community engagement, citing the absence of listening sessions, surveys, or Q&A opportunities.

Ms. Lisa Richidt gave general public comment. Ms. Richidt stated she is the parent of three students at Hawthorne Elementary. Ms. Richidt's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to the stress caused by the proposed Hawthorne closure, emphasizing the rushed timeline that leaves families and staff in uncertainty. As a parent of three children at the school, she expressed concern

over the lack of preparation time for students, particularly special education children who require a longer transition. She criticized the absence of clear answers regarding school assignments and sibling placements. Ms. Richidt urged the board to delay the closure by one year to allow for a more thoughtful, inclusive transition and to avoid long-term damage to the community's trust in the school district.

Ms. Kristie Klein gave general public comment. Ms. Klein is a Hawthorne parent and employee at Hawthorne. Ms. Klein's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to her frustration with the lack of transparency around the proposed Hawthorne closure, expressing anger at the district's failure to provide clear evidence that closing the school is the best solution for addressing the budget shortfall. She emphasized the emotional toll the uncertainty is having on staff, students, and families, and criticized the lack of foresight in the decision, particularly the potential for overcrowding at Westside schools. Ms. Klein also pointed out the contradiction of closing a school only to potentially ask taxpayers to fund the building of another. She urged the board to consider all options before making a decision and warned that the closure would be a lasting and detrimental legacy.

Ms. Hanna Warhank gave general public comment. Ms. Warhank stated she is the parent of a Hawthorne student. Ms. Warhank's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to questioning the closure of Hawthorne due to the district's financial situation. She pointed out that after attending a Budget Committee meeting, it seemed the financial deficit was less severe than previously stated. She highlighted that there were surplus funds, including the potential to pay back the borrowed money from the Interlocal fund, and additional funding for charter schools. Ms. Warhank asked if this new financial outlook meant the school closure could be reconsidered or if there were other reasons behind the decision unrelated to the budget.

Mr. Ed Beall gave general public comment. Mr. Beall stated he is a parent, grandparent, business owner, community member, and voter. Mr. Beall's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to the importance of boards recognizing when a decision may not be in the best interest of the community and taking the time to reconsider. He expressed concerns about potential instability and division on the west side of Helena and urged the board to carefully consider the long-term effects of their actions. Mr. Beall also emphasized the need for clear, deliberate communication, especially regarding the upcoming levies, and encouraged the board to listen to and address community concerns. He concluded by acknowledging the board's efforts and urging continued thoughtful decision-making.

Ms. Erin Sullivan gave general public comment. Ms. Sullivan's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to concerns about the inaccurate and inadequate information being provided regarding the potential school closure. She expressed frustration with the lack of communication and transparency, stating that the community has more questions than answers and that they feel unsupported. Ms. Sullivan urged the board to require more from the Superintendent and district in the final days leading up to the decision, emphasizing that this is about the well-being of children, who have been largely overlooked in the discussions. She concluded by calling on the Board to do better and to seek out more information to ensure that decisions are made responsibly.

Ms. Moffie Funk gave general public comment. Ms. Funk stated that she is the parent of two Helena High School graduates and the grandparent of a kindergartner in the Helena School District. Ms. Funk's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to her gratitude for those who ran for trustee positions and her appreciation for the community's effort in supporting the passing of a levy despite the financial challenges faced by many. Ms. Funk also emphasized the need for continued advocacy for

public schools, particularly during the legislative interim, and called for a redirection of funding priorities. She encouraged the community to show up and advocate for appropriate funding, as the current system has not been working for years.

Ms. Traci Swingley gave general public comment. Ms. Swingley stated that she is a Hawthorne alumna, Hawthorne grandparent, and a community member. Ms. Swingley's general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to advocating for keeping Hawthorne Elementary open or delaying its closure by a year. She raised concerns about district boundaries, student safety, and walkability, and questioned the viability of offering Kessler as an option given uncertainty around bond and levy funding. Ms. Swingley acknowledged the Board's efforts, called for improved communication, and urged the community to move forward together with unity and collaboration.

Ms. Sarah Dramstad emailed the Board of Trustees general public comment for tonight's meeting. Ms. Dramstad is a music educator in the district and has a daughter at Four Georgians Elementary. Ms. Dramstad's general public comment addressed several key topics, including but not limited to concerns about proposed cuts to music and physical education, emphasizing that reducing these programs to accreditation minimums would effectively eliminate them and require a shorter school day to maintain teacher prep time. She advocated for alternative, non-student-facing budget reductions, specifically suggesting the consolidation of elementary librarian positions and principalships where current staffing exceeds accreditation standards. She noted workload inequities among librarians at different schools and urged the board to consider equity and efficiency in all staffing decisions. Ms. Dramstad expressed concern about selectively applying accreditation standards and encouraged the board to pursue more balanced, equitable approaches to budget planning.

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

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Consent Action Items

1. Personnel Actions
2. Warrants
3. Approval of FY 2024-25 Out-Of-District Attendance Agreements (Nonresident Students Attending Helena School District)
4. 4.8.25 Board of Trustees Full Board Meeting Minutes
5. 4.9.25 Board of Trustees Special Board Meeting Minutes-Public Hearing on Potential Closure of Hawthorne Elementary School

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

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

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

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

B. Items For Action

1. Approval of Energy Performance Contracting Board Resolution

Mr. Todd Verrill, Facilities Director for Helena Public Schools, presented the action item, *Approval of Energy Performance Contracting Board Resolution*, to the Board of Trustees. Mr. Verrill explained that the resolution affirms the district's intent to follow Montana Code Annotated Titles 20, Chapter 9 (education) and Title 90, Chapter 4 (energy performance contracting). If approved, the district will issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to three DEQ-approved energy service providers to conduct an investment-grade energy audit of all district facilities. The audit will assess the financial viability of entering into a future energy performance contract, with a focus on potential cost savings through improvements in HVAC, lighting, windows, insulation, and other energy-efficiency measures. Mr. Verrill addressed all questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the action item.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, "At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item *Approval of Energy Performance Contracting Board Resolution*."

Motion: Trustee Jennifer Walsh moved to approve the action item *Approval of Energy Performance Contracting Board Resolution* as presented. Trustee Linda Cleatus seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

2. Approval of HMS Exterior Painting Bid

Mr. Todd Verrill presented the action item, *Approval of HMS Exterior Painting Bid*, to the Board of Trustees. Mr. Verrill is respectfully requesting the Board of Trustees award the Helena Middle School Exterior Restoration project to Witham Companies, LLC (Witham). Work for this project includes:

- Patch and repair damaged wall surfaces
- Prepare existing wall surfaces and apply new paint
- Paint metal railings and exterior doors
- Replace two small roofs
- Repair and/or replace concrete foundation, stairs, and curbs

The facilities office received two sealed bids and conducted a public opening on 9 May 2025. Witham submitted the lowest bid with a proposal of \$348,207.00. This proposal is well within the architect's opinion of probable cost for the project. Witham is a small company out of Townsend,

and Mr. Verrill is confident they will complete the project in a timely and professional manner.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item *Approval of HMS Exterior Painting Bid.*”

Motion: Trustee Jeff Hindoien moved to award the contract for the Helena Middle School Exterior Restoration project to Witham Companies, LLC in the amount of \$348,207. Trustee Jennifer McKee seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously.

3. Approval of Resolution Requesting County to Conduct 2026 Elections

Ms. Janelle Mickelson, Business Director for Helena Public Schools, presented the action item, *Approval of Resolution Requesting County to Conduct 2026 Election*, to the Board of Trustees.

Background:

Pursuant to 20-20-417, MCA, the trustees of a district may request the county election administrator to conduct certain school elections during the ensuing school fiscal year. The request must be made by a resolution of the board of trustees. Whenever the county election administrator agrees to conduct a school election, the administrator shall perform the duties imposed on the trustees and the clerk of the district for school elections and deliver to the trustees, for the purpose of canvassing the vote, the certified tally sheets and other election items needed for canvassing the vote.

Considerations:

The county election administrator has agreed to run elections scheduled for the regular election day, May 5, 2026. If a special election is requested, the county election administrator would want to find an agreeable date for the election and may refuse to run elections on a date that does not work for election office. The District must provide copies of all candidate filing forms and any ballot issue language by the candidate filing deadline. The county election office will run the election by district, not by precinct. Requests to run the election by precinct will not be accommodated.

Superintendent recommendation:

Approve the attached resolution requesting the county to conduct 2026 elections for Helena School District No. 1.

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item *Approval of Resolution Requesting County to Conduct 2026 Election.*”

Motion: Trustee Kay Satre moved to approve the action item *Approval of Resolution Requesting County to Conduct 2026 Election* as presented. Trustee Jennifer Walsh seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 8-0 motion carries unanimously

C. Items For Information

1. Policy 5055: Leaves of Absence

Ms. Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff for Helena Public Schools, presented for information *Policy 5055: Leaves of Absence* to the Board of Trustees. The policy was revised to clarify language related to sick leave and bereavement leaves that aren't covered by a collective bargaining agreement. Also, noted was a change from nonrefundable sick leave donations to refundable sick leave donations for any unused donation. Ms. Ridgway noted on line 26 it should state *refundable sick leave fund*. Ms. Ridgway addressed all questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the policy.

2. Policy 5085: Substitutes and Student Teachers/Interns

Ms. Ridgway presented for information *Policy 5085: Substitutes and Student Teachers/Interns* to the Board of Trustees. This policy has been revised to clarify how classified staff will be compensated when called upon to substitute for a teacher. Ms. Ridgway noted that the language in lines 16 through 19 was previously presented as a single paragraph and has now been separated into two sentences for improved clarity. Ms. Ridgway addressed all questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the policy.

3. Policy 5051: Insurance Benefits for Employees

Ms. Ridgway presented for information *Policy 5051: Insurance Benefits for Employees* to the Board of Trustees. Changes to the policy include the requirement that employees may only obtain insurance coverage outside the enrollment period due to a qualifying event, and that medical examinations are no longer permitted for enrollment. Ms. Ridgway addressed all questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the policy.

4. Boundary Recommendations Update

Mr. Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent for Helena Public Schools, presented for information a *Boundary Recommendations Update* to the Board of Trustees. The Assistant Superintendent provided an informational presentation to the Board of Trustees regarding proposed East/West boundary adjustments within the Helena Public Schools. The purpose of the adjustment is to more equitably balance enrollment between the district's middle and high schools, ensuring consistent educational opportunities for students across both sides of the district.

The presentation addressed four key areas: the Why, How, What, and When of the proposed changes. The Assistant Superintendent emphasized that without adjustments to the boundary line, students in certain areas would have access to more diverse course offerings than others. Additionally, staffing inefficiencies arise when specialized program staff are required to travel between sites, reducing instructional time with students. Budget constraints and limited human resources necessitate a more efficient and equitable allocation of district resources.

The proposed shift would adjust the East/West boundary line westward to better balance enrollment at both the middle and high school levels. This transition would be implemented gradually, beginning in the 2026–2027 school year.

Key transition provisions include:

Student Choice: Current students may remain in their existing schools, though transportation routes will be adjusted beginning in 2026–2027.

Sibling Rule: Families may choose to have younger siblings follow older siblings to the same school; however, families must provide transportation or use designated courtesy routes.

Transportation: In-district courtesy routes will be available to students remaining at their current school. These regional-style stops will allow resident students to access existing routes.

Boundary Exceptions: The district's long-standing in-district boundary exception process will remain in place.

Additionally, demographic projections from the Montana Department of Commerce indicate that the school-age population in Lewis and Clark County is expected to remain stable over the next 20 years. Given this, the district recommends conducting regular boundary reviews every 7 to 10 years, or more frequently as needed. Assistant Superintendent McKay addressed all questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the *Boundary Recommendations Update*.

D. 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, “Good evening, Trustees, With the blooming of lilacs and the final days of the school year in sight, May at Capital High has been a whirlwind of celebrations, milestones, and academic rigor. Springtime has brought us our annual pep assembly, the Vigilante Parade, prom, AP testing, sports, and plenty of senior excitement as we count down the days to graduation.

On Friday, May 9th, CHS held its 2025 Prom with the theme “Starry, Starry Night” at the Helena Civic Center—and what a night it was. Nearly 500 students attended, dressed to the nines and dancing well into the evening. It was a joyful and celebratory night for our upperclassmen.

The Pen & Ink Party was hosted the evening before, on Thursday, May 8th, honoring the publication of Helena’s beloved student writing and art journal. A huge thank you to Kim Cook and Kevin Ward, our faculty sponsors, and to the Helena Education Foundation for continuing to support this student-led tradition. Editors Delaney Lynch and Trevin Kockler, along with their outstanding selection committee, curated a beautiful edition filled with student voices and creativity.

Capital students also represented Montana at the Business Professionals of America (BPA) National Leadership Conference last week in Orlando, Florida. We’re proud to share that

Brooklynn Haab placed third in the nation in her competitive event, called Virtual Interview and Digital Portfolio Design! Several others placed top 10 in the nation, including: Mckenzy Heppner, Sam Flynn, Ryan Fuller, Kayle Andriolo. Congratulations to all our top 10 finalists, participants in the state, regional, and national levels of BPA, and our star advisor Ms. Toivonen, on these outstanding achievements.

Our Spring Drama Production, Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, wrapped up its run after six evening performances and two Saturday matinees. This classic play challenged both cast and audience with its timely themes and emotional depth, and our drama department once again delivered an incredible theatrical experience.

May also marks the dreaded AP Exam Season, and our testing center has been buzzing. A massive thank you to our counseling staff—especially Bethany Lindner—for coordinating the administration of a record of 670+ AP exams this spring. For context, Capital administered just 170 exams twelve years ago. This growth speaks volumes about the academic ambition and preparation of our students and staff at CHS.

On May 2, The Vigilante Parade brought music, school spirit, and tradition to downtown Helena. With over 60 CHS floats registered, student participation was at an all-time high. This year, CHS also implemented a new "barrier check" staff assignment along the walking mall portion of the route to help monitor crowd safety and emergency access. These improvements were well received by both school leaders and city officials.

CHS Track & Field athletes competed in a fun and positively competitive Crosstown Meet on May 8th, with strong performances across the board. We are excited to cheer on several Bruins heading to Divisionals in Butte on May 16–17, and those who qualify for State Track in Kalispell from May 22–24.

On Wednesday, May 21st, CHS will welcome a powerful presentation from Supaman, a Native American hip-hop artist and motivational speaker. Thanks to a grant through the Lewis and Clark County Health Department, Supaman will visit several schools in our district to deliver a message of hope, resilience, and cultural pride.

Finally, in the spirit of gratitude, CHS Student Council treated our teachers and staff to a delicious Teacher Appreciation Luncheon last week, catered by Panda Express. Special thanks to Kathy Kidder, who also secured Broadwater Hot Springs passes as prize giveaways for our staff. Speaking of gratitude, I would also like to echo CHS students' broad appreciation for HEF and specifically, Lisa Cordingley, the woman behind it all. Her leadership and commitment to public education is incredibly inspiring to me. Though I only had the pleasure of getting to know Lisa personally this year, as I reflect on my twelve years in Helena Public Schools, I could point to something that positively impacted my education for every single year of the twelve. Her programs, institutes, and events from Fabulous Firsts to the Celebration of Excellence last night are a testament to her absolute conviction to uphold the most beautiful aspect of our society: education.

Anyway, as we head into our final weeks, the excitement is palpable. Between final projects, award ceremonies, senior skip days, and of course—graduation coming soon!—there's a lot to celebrate as we close the curtain on another exceptional year at Capital High."

Ms. Adella Harris, Helena High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees, presented her Student Representative Report. Ms. Adella Harris commented, “The atmosphere is bittersweet at Helena High. AP students finish up their final exams and teachers begin to wrap up final units. Seniors hold a buzz of nervous but excited energy as the big day approaches. All of us scrambling to plan last minute senior pranks (and have Mr. Kessler approve them) and staying on the lookout during an intense battle of non-school related senior assassin.

This past month, a follow-up meeting was held with the group of students who participated in the State of Mind event workshop on March 3. The group reviewed the Care Commitments that were created and plan to share them with staff again this school year. The group's desire is to use these commitments to build student engagement and eventually share them with the whole community as we work together on bringing further awareness to mental health support and needs for our students. The student group has many other ideas on how we approach mental health education, resources, and approaches in the district that they will continue to think through. The students hope to eventually approach district administration and the board on what next steps may look like.

One of our best traditions will continue later this month. On May 28, we will hold our annual Grad Walk, having our students walk through HMS and their respective Elementary Schools, being cheered on by students and former teachers. New this year, in collaboration with Bryant Elementary, we will walk the entire graduating class of 2025 around their campus before heading off to the other locations. This new piece of the grad walk will help Bryant’s goal of imparting the importance of graduation on their students.

We will hold our Spring Pep Assembly tomorrow, Wednesday, May 14 at 10:00 a.m. We would like to invite the Trustees to attend the assembly and help celebrate all of the amazing students at HHS! This is also the time where we transition from our outgoing student body leadership to the new. We will highlight our spring sports teams, recognize those that earned their Seal of Biliteracy, and engage in a few exciting games!

Thank you to all of our students and the support of the community to put on another successful Vigilante Parade! It was exciting to see a large contingency of Bengals taking part in the parade again this year. We want to give a special shout out to our band and all of their hard work – there were many comments on how great they sounded again this year!!

Thanks to our Green Group and local community members for coming to campus during Earth Week and taking the first stab at cleaning up overgrowth and working to make our campus a beautiful place to be. While always a work in progress, this support truly helps and shows how important our schools are for our community. We will also have students helping in a few weeks to clear out space for our new Hoop House, donated by the Helena Indian Alliance, where we will help grow native grasses and resources that can be utilized by many classes in the school.

We were honored to celebrate the academic accomplishments of the Class of 2025 Valedictorians and Salutatorians a few weeks ago. Maintaining a 4.0 GPA throughout at least 7 semesters in high school, or having just one B, may seem easy, but it takes an incredible amount

of grit and determination to reach those goals. We are honored to have such a strong group of individuals who achieved these accomplishments this year with 19 Valedictorians and 7 Salutatorians.

One of the best scholarships a student can earn when attending a school in the Montana University System is the MUS Honors and STEM Scholarships. This highly competitive scholarship helps cover tuition costs for students in the Montana University System. HHS had 8 students awarded the MUS Honors Scholarship which will give roughly \$20,000 over a 4-year time period to each student. On the STEM Scholarship side, 19 Bengals will receive \$6,000 over 4 years to help cover their collegiate needs.

Our two National Merit Finalists have been notified that they have earned the National Merit Scholarship to their respective colleges! We are incredibly proud of all the work Eva and Evelyn put in during their time at HHS and wish them luck on their next steps.

A couple of weeks ago, our graduating members of the National Honor Society received their NHS tassels and were recognized for the amazing achievements they have accomplished over the past year. With roughly 20,000 hours of community service provided by this graduating group, we can confirm that they truly gave back to the Helena community and help to make Helena a better place to be. We also want to congratulate the new inductees to our National Honor Society and wish them luck as they work to maintain the high level of expectation of giving back.

Helena High student Michael Leyva has been awarded the prestigious Horatio Alger Scholarship. This highly competitive scholarship is awarded to typically one Montana student each year. Michael's story of perseverance and dedication to fulfilling his lifelong dreams made him the perfect candidate for this award. Michael will get to travel to Washington, DC next year to accept the award and participate in the awards ceremony alongside the other top scholars from around the nation.

Congratulations to our Bengal Softball team – earning the first conference championship since 1990! This team has done incredible things, and we look forward to what comes next for them.

If you have a chance, stop by and see the amazing things happening in our shops! Whether it be our welding students creating awards, gifts, or fixing trailers for community and family members. Watching students learn how to use the new state-of-the-art alignment machine in our auto bays, to the sheds being built for community members or businesses like Food Share. The hands-on learning and job skill creation happening in these courses is truly amazing.

Ms. Koch continues to find ways to not only teach students about the joys and science behind cooking, but to make the reality of a career in this field a true possibility. Recently, Ms. Koch took her upper-level students on a tour of two colleges, introducing students to the pathways available to them. A few students mentioned that they had never considered a collegiate path before, but after seeing the two campuses (UM and Flathead Valley Community College), they now think it is a real possibility. Additionally, Ms. Koch has made tremendous connections with businesses in the community, giving our students an opportunity to learn how The Union prepares its food, what farm to table really means, and find potential career paths for many in her courses.

Recognizing the need for our students to have multiple certifications or aspects to put on their resumes that will help them along the way, our World Language teachers took on the hard task of providing the testing for students to demonstrate proficiency in multiple languages. As you heard earlier tonight, this is a great task and a great honor for students to earn the Seal of Biliteracy – thank you to our World Language teachers for their work on this.

Last week was Teacher/Staff appreciation week. We are so fortunate to have an amazing staff at HHS that works hard each day, preparing kids for the future. Thank you to all of our teachers for what they do each day, providing a safe place for students to learn and grow!

Tennis will be competing in their divisional tournament Thursday and Friday this week in Bozeman. Our track teams – who both have had success throughout the year – sweeping the Crosstown meets – will compete in their Divisional meet in Butte Friday and Saturday this weekend. We already have a large number of student-athletes who have auto-qualified for the meet and look forward to seeing how our teams do at the State Meet next week in Kalispell. Softball has earned an automatic bid to the State Tournament in Great Falls next week, taking the number one seed from the west into the tournament! Go Bengals!

We look forward to celebrating the Class of 2025 on Saturday, June 7 at 11:00 a.m. as they walk the graduation stage.

As always Helena High never fails to produce not only high achieving, highly awarded students, but incredible people. Our staff works more than just to help teach a math formula or Shakespeare, but work to instill faith, belief, and confidence in their students. Congratulations to the Class of 2025, their families, and their teachers. We cannot wait to see what you all do to serve your community now and in the future. Go Bengal's!"

2. **Helena Education Association Report**

Ms. Jane Shawn, HEA President, presented the Helena Education Association Report. Ms. Shawn reported that teacher bargaining sessions were productive, with progress made on final language items and adjustments to the salary matrix to align with STARS compliance. A ratification vote by membership is scheduled for the following Thursday and Friday, with the board set to review the agreement pending approval. Nominations for Educator and Paraeducator of the Year are currently open and will close tomorrow. Award recipients will direct a \$500 donation to their school of choice. Paraeducator bargaining is also underway, with most language agreed upon and ongoing discussion around salary increases. Ms. Shawn also highlighted the recent Celebration of Excellence event, noting it was a meaningful opportunity to honor outstanding students and educators. She expressed appreciation for the event and shared that MFPE sponsored a table this year. Ms. Shawn addressed all questions from the Board of Trustees regarding her report.

3. **Facilities & Technology Committee Report**

Trustee Jeff Hindoien presented the Facilities & Technology Committee Report. Trustee Hindoien shared that a new Network Engineer will begin on June 2, filling a long-standing vacancy. The district is now addressing the need for expanded video storage capacity, as earlier

security infrastructure implemented with the safety levy is aging. Preparations are also underway for summer Chromebook maintenance, which includes software resets and organizing hardware. The district recently solicited proposals for a new copier system, with a recommendation expected at the May 22 board meeting. Additionally, a surplus technology resolution is anticipated in the fall to dispose of outdated equipment. Trustee Hindoien noted that the district will phase out support for the Google Chrome browser to streamline operations and improve cybersecurity by supporting only Brave, Edge, and Safari browsers. The IT department continues to work through challenges related to the charter schools. During the meeting Mr. Myers commented on the recent technology levy vote, acknowledging its narrow margin and emphasizing that the technology needs remain, despite the levy's failure.

On the facilities side, Trustee Hindoien highlighted ongoing projects, —specifically, the Helena Middle School exterior improvements and the resolution related to Energy Performance Contracting. Mr. Verrill praised the facilities team for their efforts during the Vigilante Parade and reported that grounds crews have started seasonal irrigation and mowing, although the department is still struggling to fill summer temporary positions. Custodial staff are preparing for extensive flooring projects district-wide. A single-day custodial training and team-building event will be held at Jefferson. However, custodial staffing has declined again with 5 current vacancies and several retirements anticipated. Finally, Trustee Hindoien mentioned that the district is participating in a geohazards and seismic safety workshop. Trustee Hindoien addressed all questions from the Board of Trustees regarding his report.

4. **Budget and Finance Committee Report**

Trustee Janet Armstrong presented the Budget and Finance Committee Report. Trustee Armstrong outlined that the district is in its third year of addressing ongoing budget deficits and has relied on interlocal funds to manage shortfalls while awaiting outcomes from the recent legislative session. Although the session provided some financial clarity, the current use of interlocal funds is unsustainable and has led to underfunding in key departments. Federal funding is expected to decline due to reduced student enrollment, and charter school funding challenges were highlighted. Additionally, rising property liability insurance costs pose a significant burden. Trustee Armstrong addressed all questions from the Board of Trustees regarding her report.

5. **Teaching & Learning Committee Report**

Trustee Kay Satre presented the Teaching and Learning Committee Report. The meeting focused on district-wide writing initiatives and updates to high school instruction. At the elementary level, a pilot program is underway to increase daily writing time, integrate writing across subjects, and build a consistent, evidence-based curriculum aligned with new Montana standards. Teachers emphasized the need for improved instruction in handwriting, keyboarding, and writing progression across grades. The task force will continue work over the summer and monitor student growth in the coming year. At the high school level, writing assessment has been revised to include interdisciplinary scoring, AI-supported efficiency, and meaningful feedback for students. The committee also reviewed a major revision of the high school social studies curriculum, which has shifted from content delivery to an inquiry-based model. Teachers reported strong student engagement and positive spillover into other subjects, with ongoing collaboration and refinement continuing into the next school year. Trustee Satre

addressed all questions from the Board of Trustees regarding her report.

6. **Policy Committee Report**

Trustee Jennifer Walsh presented the Policy Committee Report. The Policy committee has completed its review of all scheduled policies, with attention now turning to upcoming legislative policy updates. The committee reviewed several specific policies, including 5055, 5085, and 5051, with a notable discussion on Policy 5085 related to substitute compensation, which was revised to ensure equity and alignment with related roles. Policy 2165 "Early Scholastic Literacy Targeted Intervention Programs" was reviewed and discussed. A key improvement to the policy states that the Board may opt to enroll on-target students into the classroom or jumpstart targeted intervention program and may admit one on-target child for every five eligible children enrollment in the targeted intervention program. Trustee Walsh noted the committee is in a good position heading into the fall policy work. Trustee Walsh addressed all questions from the Board of Trustees regarding her report.

7. **Health Benefits Committee Report**

Trustee Kay Satre presented the Health Benefits Committee meeting report. Trustee Satre highlighted the recent RFP process and selection of new vendors. Allegiance was chosen as the medical third-party administrator for its cost effectiveness, Delta Dental for its strong in-state network, and Ameritas for vision, offering access to both EYEMED and VSP networks. The committee is also evaluating the introduction of two plan options—one similar to the current plan and another resembling a marketplace silver plan—which could save members \$70–\$90 per month. Other discussions include adopting a more modern structure by eliminating deductibles in favor of co-insurance to reduce upfront costs, although this may not be put in place this upcoming Plan Year. Preliminary premium increase projections are underway and will be finalized after results from the pharmacy benefit manager (PBM) RFP process. Express Scripts will no longer be the PBM, and finalist interviews are ongoing to select a new vendor. Final financial proposals, including premium adjustments, will be presented to the Board by the end of the month. Trustee Satre addressed all questions from the Board of Trustees regarding her report.

8. **Wellness Committee Report**

Ms. Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff, presented the Wellness Committee Report. Key initiatives include Chloe Lundquist's collaboration with Broadwater teachers to expand their school garden and Robert Worthy's efforts to supply nutritious items in vending machines at both high schools—currently very popular, particularly with parfaits. Helena's summer food program, led by Robert Worthy, aims to once again lead the state in meals served. Committee member Kim Dale from Helena Food Share is retiring and will be replaced by a new representative. Other updates included Kim Lloyd's work with the Charlie Cart to teach cooking with local ingredients, and Lisa Lee's push to address the high consumption of energy drinks among students. PAL students are growing produce for Food Share and participating in cooking classes. Future committee goals include addressing student energy drink consumption, improving C.R. Anderson's overcrowded lunch period structure, adding a student member from PAL, and conducting a student wellness survey. There's also interest in recruiting a family and consumer sciences teacher from Helena High to join the committee. Ms. Ridgway addressed all

questions from the Board of Trustees regarding her report.

9. **Montana School Boards Association Report**

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn presented the Montana School Boards Association Report. Chair Hathhorn reported that while the Montana School Boards Association has not met formally, an important convening of educational leaders is scheduled for June 3–4. The event aims to foster collaboration between public and non-public school systems. Additionally, a board training session for trustees is scheduled for June 5, and more information will be shared soon.

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.

- Thursday, May 22nd, Board of Trustees Special Board Meeting, 5:30 p.m., Lincoln Center
- Tuesday, May 27th, Board of Trustees Work Session, Broadwater Elementary, 3:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, June 10th, Board of Trustees Full Board Meeting, 5:30 p.m. Lincoln Center

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

VIII. BOARD/SUPERINTENDENT COMMENTS

There were no further board or superintendent comments.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Board Chair Siobhan Hathhorn adjourned the meeting at 10:11 p.m.

Candice Delvaux, Recording Secretary

Date