



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, August 12th, 2025
5:30 p.m.

MINUTES

ATTENDANCE – Present unless otherwise noted.

Jennifer McKee, Chair
Jennifer Walsh, Vice Chair
Kay Satre, Trustee
Siobhan Hathhorn, Trustee
Jenny Murnane Butcher,
Trustee
Janet Armstrong, Trustee
Brock Gardipee, 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, Assistant Superintendent
PreK-5
Lona Carter, Student Health Services & Special Education Director
Eric Peterson, Activities Director
Taylor Lassiter, Communications Specialist
Many guests of the public as well as Helena School District Staff

I. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Board Chair Jennifer McKee 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 hear the Superintendent's Report presented by Superintendent Wertz.

III. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

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

- Recognitions
 - Facilities and Maintenance-Summer Work
 - Janelle Mickelson & Business Office-Close-Out 2024-25/Start Up 2025-26 Budgets
 - Successful Summer Services for Students
 - Our 9-week Summer SACC program provided a myriad of activities for 181 students. Each week focused on a different theme ranging from "Geology, Ecology and the Great Outdoors" to "It's Music, Art and Theatre" week.
 - Our Quest Summer School's 5-week program provided academic support for 105 students entering Kindergarten through third grade. The program also incorporated a full program of reading support with the READ dogs and their volunteer owners.
 - Thank you, Helena Education Foundation and HEA for sponsoring the upcoming 2025 New Educator Orientation.
 - Chamber of Commerce – Callie Aschim
 - Welcome To Taylor Lassiter-Communications Specialist
 - Other
- New Business
 - Administrative Changes 2025-2026
 - Justine Alberts-Assistant Superintendent PreK-5
 - Eric Peterson-Activities Director
 - Ryan Swenson-HHS Assistant Principal
 - Master Facilities Planning
 - Pre Bond Work – Informational Series
 - Helena High School, Capital High School, Kessler Elementary
 - Brown Bags and Bonds

- Brews and Bonds
 - 2025-26 SY Staffing & Operations
 - Beginning of the Year Activities
 - Compensation Philosophy Study with CMS
 - Draft 2025/2026 District Priorities
 - Other
- Outreach/Meetings
 - Board of Health Meeting
 - Chamber Meetings
 - Bond Information Meetings for Community Groups
 - CHS/HHS/Kessler School Tours
 - Board Leadership
 - HEF
 - HEF Executive Committee
 - Cabinet & Leadership
 - TV, Print, Radio, Media
 - CMS Meetings
 - 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.

IV. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Rachael Howard gave general public comment. Ms. Howard’s general public comment addressed several key topics, including but not limited to: appreciation for the Board and administration’s work on the 2025–2026 budgets, the restoration of elementary P.E. and music programs, increased staffing at the middle school level, and salary increases for district employees. She emphasized the value of competitive compensation and encouraged community members to attend board meetings and stay informed about public education.

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

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Consent Action Items

1. Personnel Actions
2. Warrants
3. Approval of FY 2025-26 Out-Of-District Attendance Agreements (Non-Resident Students Attending HPS)
4. Acknowledge FY 2025-26 Out-Of-District Attendance Agreements (Helena Resident Students Attending Other School Districts)
5. Approval of 5.27.25 Board of Trustees Work Session Meeting Minutes
6. Approval of 7.17.25 Board of Trustees Summer Retreat Meeting Minutes

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

Motion: Trustee Kay Satre moved to approve the *Consent Action Items* as presented. Trustee Siobhan Hathhorn seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 6-0 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. Approval and Ratification of the HPS-Custodians and Centralized Maintenance Collective Bargaining Agreement for 2025-2027

Ms. Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director, presented the action item, *Approval and Ratification of the HPS-Custodians and Centralized Maintenance Collective Bargaining Agreement for 2025-2027*, to the Board of Trustees.

Background:

Pursuant to MCA 39-31-306, an agreement reached by the public employer and the exclusive representative must be reduced to writing and must be executed by both parties.

The Helena School District and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Montana Council #9 Local #2774, reached a tentative agreement on July 10, 2025. The members ratified the tentative agreement to the contract and notified us on August 5, 2025. The District negotiation team recommends ratification.

The two (2) year agreement was open for language and wages for July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2027. A summary of the conditions of the contract are noted below. Upon the Board’s approval, a final copy will be made available electronically.

- The District shall increase the contribution to the employee cafeteria plan by \$37.50 per month (a total contribution of \$1,069.40 per month/\$12,832.80 per year) for the 2025-2027 benefit years.
- An increase of \$0.50 to each cell in the salary matrix for 2025-2026 and an increase of \$0.50 to each cell in the salary matrix for 2026-2027 fiscal years.
- An increase in the clothing allowance from \$300 to \$450 per year to be paid in July.
- An increase in the retirement benefit from \$200 to \$300 for each year of service for any retiring custodian or centralized maintenance employee with twenty (20) years of custodial service with HPS.
- A retention bonus to be paid in July each year based on year(s) of employment with HPS (must work a full year as of July to be eligible to receive):
 - 1-10 year(s): \$300
 - 11-19 years: \$350
 - 20-25 years: \$400
 - 26+ years: \$500

The estimated cost of this settlement is \$138,264 for the 2025-2027 fiscal years.

Considerations:

- HPS and the Custodians and Centralized Maintenance have a collaborative relationship and productive negotiations history.
- This agreement continues to bring parity to the bargaining units within HSD that work together on maintenance and grounds projects.
- This agreement supports the directive of the Board to support our staff members and address issues relative to the district budget.

Superintendent recommendation:

Approve and ratify the collective bargaining agreement as agreed upon between HPS and the Custodians and Centralized Maintenance.

Ms. Mizell addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the action item *Approval and Ratification of the HPS-Custodians and Centralized Maintenance Collective Bargaining Agreement for 2025-2027*.

Board Chair Jennifer McKee commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item *Approval and Ratification of the HPS-Custodians and Centralized Maintenance Collective Bargaining Agreement for 2025-2027*.”

Motion: Trustee Janet Armstrong moved to approve the action item *Approval and Ratification of the HPS-Custodians and Centralized Maintenance Collective Bargaining Agreement for 2025-2027* as presented. Trustee Jennifer Walsh seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 6-0 motion carries unanimously.

The Board of Trustees proceeded to review action items two through five. Ms. Janelle Mickelson presented these items, which included: *Certify the Trustees' Financial Summary-Elementary Fiscal Year 2024-25*, *Certify the Trustees' Financial Summary-High School Fiscal Year 2024-25*, *Final Budget Adoption-Elementary Fiscal Year 2025-26*, and *Final Budget Adoption-High School Fiscal Year 2025-26*.

Background:

School districts account for the receipt and disbursement of all money belonging to the district in accordance with the methods prescribed by the Office of Public Instruction (OPI). The Trustees' Financial Summary (TFS) is the annual financial report prescribed by the OPI.

Considerations:

- Pursuant 20-9-213(6), MCA, the board of trustees transmit the TFS to the county superintendent of schools no later than August 15th and to the OPI no later than September 15th.
- Trustees are responsible for ensuring the accuracy and prompt submission of the TFS.
- Subsequent amendments to the TFS made by the clerk of the district are considered officially made on behalf of the trustees.
- The deadline for amendments is December 10th.

Highlights:

- Local property tax revenue decreased by 4.43% district wide.
- Salaries and benefits accounted for 90.50% of elementary general fund expenditures and 87.20% of high school general fund expenditures.
- Out-of-district tuition laws changed with the passage HB 203 in the 2023 legislative session. Districts can no longer charge parents for students whose residence is in another district but attend Helena Public Schools. Taxpayers in the resident district are now responsible for paying tuition. However, tuition payments are paid in arrears, so tuition revenue will not be realized until fiscal year 2025-26. The result was an 81% decline in tuition revenues in the high school general fund.
- The elementary district sent the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) \$6,600 for education savings accounts for two students.
- The following costs, originally charged to the interlocal fund, were moved back to the general fund:
 - Approximately \$342,000 in technology costs – moved to the elementary general fund.
 - Approximately \$344,000 of curriculum costs – moved to the elementary general fund.
 - CSCT match (\$289,265) – moved to the elementary general fund.
 - Approximately \$435,000 in technology salaries – moved to the high school general fund.
 - A portion of the property & liability insurance - \$325,000 moved to the elementary general fund and \$307,000 moved to the high school general fund.

- Copier lease costs - \$25,378 moved to the elementary general fund and \$13,623 moved to the high school general fund.
- Approximately \$2,195,719 of one-on-one Special Education Paraprofessional salaries were spent out of the elementary tuition fund and approximately \$338,428 was spent out of the high school tuition fund.
- In fiscal year 2024-25, with the exception of paraeducators, all employee groups received a 1.5% increase in salaries. Paraeducators receive an increase of \$0.30 per hour.
- Health benefits increased by approximately \$39.50 per month.
- Federal program revenue in the miscellaneous program fund was down approximately \$274,000, primarily due to the expiration of the Montana Comprehensive Literacy State Development Program (MTCLSDP).
- Fifty individuals donated to the Innovative Educational Tax Credit Program. The elementary received \$167,250 and the high school received \$137,850 for a total of \$305,100.
- Driver's education expenditures outpaced revenues and approximately \$48,770 of expenditures were transferred to the high school general fund.
- The technology department operated with a bare bones budget. The interlocal fund did not supplement the technology and general fund to the extent anticipated (only \$73,146). However, device failure is inevitable and there is concern that there will not be sufficient funds in the future to replace devices when they fail.
- The District received \$210,795.53 in Advanced Opportunity Aid. The grant money is accounted for in the flexibility fund and is used to reduce student and family out-of-pocket costs for AP exams, dual credit classes and other course fees and for the enhancement of career and technical education programs.
- All bond projects are complete. At year-end the remaining balance of \$16,000.52 in the elementary building fund was transferred to the debt service fund, pursuant to MCA, 20-9-508.
- Major projects funded by the building reserve fund included: Smith Elementary HVAC system, Helena Middle School exterior building improvements, lunch tables at Smith Elementary and Rossiter Elementary, Capital High School auditorium lighting and various repair & maintenance projects at all schools (carpet & tile replacement, fire escape repairs and sprinkler repairs). In addition, counselor salaries totaling \$613,155 in the elementary and \$295,390 in the high school were also funded by the building reserve fund. The cost for School Resource Officers (\$169,438) was also paid for out of the building reserve fund.
- At year-end, after all cash transfers, the interlocal fund had an ending fund balance of \$8,260,006 of which \$1,525,818 is earmarked for school building budgets (\$410,897) and for the special education department, activities and professional growth (\$1,114,921).

Superintendent recommendation:

Certify the Trustees' Financial Summary and direct the clerk of the district to submit the report to the county superintendent of schools and to the Office of Public Instruction.

Ms. Mickelson also provided a comprehensive budget analysis for Fiscal Year 2025–26, which included, but was not limited to, an overview of the Helena Public Schools budget, along with key highlights from the Salaries and Health Benefits Fund, General Fund, Transportation Fund, Tuition Fund, Retirement Fund, Adult Education Fund, Technology Fund, Flexibility Budget, Debt

Service Payments, and Building Reserve.

Ms. Mickelson addressed all questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

2. **Certify the Trustees' Financial Summary-Elementary Fiscal Year 2024-25**

Board Chair Jennifer McKee commented, "At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item *Certify the Trustees' Financial Summary-Elementary Fiscal Year 2024-25*."

Motion: Trustee Siobhan Hatthorn moved to approve the action item *Certify the Trustees' Financial Summary-Elementary Fiscal Year 2024-25* as presented. Trustee Jenny Murnane Butcher seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 5-0 motion carries unanimously. *(Please note that Board Vice Chair Jennifer Walsh abstained from voting as she is a trustee strictly for the high school district, and this action item only pertains to the elementary district.)*

3. **Certify the Trustees' Financial Summary-High School Fiscal Year 2024-25**

Board Chair Jennifer McKee commented, "At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item *Certify the Trustees' Financial Summary-High School Fiscal Year 2024-25*."

Motion: Trustee Kay Satre moved to approve the action item *Certify the Trustees' Financial Summary-High School Fiscal Year 2024-25* as presented. Trustee Siobhan Hathhorn seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 6-0 motion carries unanimously.

4. **Final Budget Adoption-Elementary Fiscal Year 2025-26**

Board Chair Jennifer McKee commented, "At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item *Final Budget Adoption-Elementary Fiscal Year 2025-26*."

Motion: Trustee Siobhan Hathhorn moved to approve the action item *Final Budget Adoption-Elementary Fiscal Year 2025-26* as presented. Trustee Kay Satre seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 5-0 motion carries unanimously. *(Please note that Board Vice Chair Jennifer Walsh abstained from voting as she is a trustee strictly for the high school district, and this action item only pertains to the elementary district.)*

5. **Final Budget Adoption-High School Fiscal Year 2025-26**

Board Chair Jennifer McKee commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item *Final Budget Adoption-High School Fiscal Year 2025-26*. ”

Motion: Trustee Jennifer Walsh moved to approve the action item *Final Budget Adoption-High School Fiscal Year 2025-26* as presented. Trustee Jenny Murnane Butcher seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 6-0 motion carries unanimously.

The Board of Trustees moved on to hear reports.

C. REPORTS

1. **Student Representatives Report**

Mr. Brock Gardipee, Helena High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees, presented his Student Representative Report. Mr. Gardipee commented, “Hi everyone! I hope you all had a great summer, because I sure did. The staff at Helena High have been prepping for the incoming students ready to start the 2025-2026 school year. We have many new faces joining us in the faculty staff and I’m excited to meet them. Teachers have been preparing their classrooms, counselors have been creating student schedules, and the custodians are making the school the best it can be. I would like to thank all the staff who have been working to make this upcoming year great! Not only have the teachers been hard at work, but the athletes have been working hard as well. Tryouts for fall sports are about to begin, and I’m excited to watch my fellow students compete and win! I’m thrilled to announce Helena High’s new initiative, where academic support will be offered to students in any period, where they can receive support one on one or in small groups. I would also like to recognize Layla Riggs for placing second at the National Speech and Debate competition, which is a huge accomplishment for any student in Montana. My last recognition is to anyone who has been involved in getting the bond for the new schools passed. They have done such a great job and Helena High has had a great presence in it. I would like to end by inviting anyone to join us at the annual booster BBQ, which will take place on August 23rd from 11-1:30, or stop by on the 27th to see students like myself welcoming the freshmen to our school. Thank you to everyone supporting our students and schools!”

Ms. Delaney Lynch, Capital High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees, was not in attendance this evening, so Mr. Gardipee delivered the report on her behalf. With summer coming to an end, both staff and students at Capital High School are looking forward to the upcoming school year. As always a new school year brings many reminders and many “To Do” lists for families and staff alike. Between August 20th and August 22nd, seniors, juniors, and freshman will all be picking up their textbooks and schedules. This includes checking out a lock, purchasing a parking pass, and making sure all classes are correct before the first day of school. For freshmen, August 27th will bring about both their textbook and class schedule pick

up day as well as Link Day. On Link Day, upper classman will lead small groups of freshmen around the school playing games and helping them acclimate to the building where they will spend the next four years. For everyone else, the first day of school commences on August 28th. As always, fall means the starting up of high school sports. Football, volleyball, golf, cross country, and soccer will all begin their regular season practices and will be preparing for upcoming games. Many students are now getting their sports physicals done and submitted in order to prepare for their respective seasons. For spectators, activity passes are being sold so students can avoid the hassle of purchasing a ticket every game. Looking forward to September, picture day will be held at CHS on September 3rd. On that same note students will be purchasing and making contributions to the yearbook for the remainder of the year. Though summer felt like it went by in a flash, the starting of the school year is anxiously awaited. With many students admittedly finishing up their summer projects in these last few weeks, we are ready for a great year both academic and activity wise. Go Bru!

2. **Helena Education Association Report**
There was no Helena Education Association Report this evening.
3. **Facilities & Technology Committee Report**
There was no Facilities & Technology Committee Report this evening.
4. **Budget and Finance Committee Report**
There was no Budget and Finance Committee Report this evening.
5. **Teaching & Learning Committee Report**
There was no Teaching & Learning Committee Report this evening.
6. **Policy Committee Report**
There was no Policy Committee Report this evening.
7. **Health Benefits Committee Report**
There was no Health Benefits Committee Report this evening.
8. **Wellness Committee Report**
There was no Wellness Committee Report this evening.
9. **Montana School Boards Association Report**
There was no Montana School Boards Association Report this evening.

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.

VI. UPCOMING MEETINGS

Board Chair Jennifer McKee reviewed upcoming meetings with the Board of Trustees.

- Tuesday, September 9th, Board of Trustees Full Board Meeting, Board of Trustees Conference Room at the Lincoln Center, 5:30 p.m.
- Committee Meetings-To Be Determined

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

VII. BOARD/SUPERINTENDENT COMMENTS

There were no further board or superintendent comments.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Board Chair Jennifer McKee adjourned the meeting at 7:32 p.m.

Candice Delvaux, Recording Secretary

Date