

A Citizen's Guide to the Helena School District 2025-2026 Budget



Our
Helena
Public
Schools

Dear Helena Community,

We have developed this booklet as an explanation of the Helena Public Schools finances.

This guide provides information on Helena School District budget revenues. Funds come to our School District from local, state, and federal sources as well as grants and awards. All funding sources must be used for specific purposes. The Board of Trustees adopts the final annual District budget each year at their regular August Board Meeting.



Our budget is focused on our mission to challenge and empower each student to maximize individual potential and become a competent, productive, responsible, caring citizen. To accomplish this mission, we are committed to working together to continuously improve our District.

Fulfilling our mission would not be possible without the partnership of our parents, our community, and the teamwork of our staff. We celebrate the successes of our students which are a source of pride to our community.

We believe that fiscal transparency is essential to establishing trust in our community especially as we begin considering significant reductions that will need to take place. A “Budget Consensus Recommendation” committee comprised of community members, HPS staff members, trustees, and parents has been meeting since last Spring. This committee will bring budget recommendations forward for consideration this winter.

We hope that you find this booklet explaining our District finances helpful. You can find information regarding the 2025-2026 elementary and high school budgets <https://helenaschools.org/departments/business-finance/>

If you have questions, please contact me at rweltz@helenaschools.org.

Sincerely,

Rex Weltz
Superintendent

Budget Basics

This guide focuses on the General Fund Budget for the 2025-2026 school year. The General Fund Budget covers the cost of educating almost 8000 students while providing a safe, comfortable, and engaging learning environment.

In addition to the General Fund Budget there are several other budgeted funds that are designated for specific purposes. Additional information regarding these funds and how they can be used are provided on pages 6-7.

The Helena School District is comprised of two districts; the Elementary K-8 District which includes the following school sites:

Broadwater School	Four Georgians School
Central School	Jefferson School
Jim Darcy School	Kessler School
Smith School	Rossiter School
Bryant School	Warren School
Montessori Public Charter School	Mount Ascension Public Charter School
C. R. Anderson Middle School	Helena Middle School

The High School (9-12) District includes the following school sites:

Capital High School	Helena High School
Project for Alternative Learning (PAL) Public Charter School	Mount Ascension Public Charter School

The funds to operate our schools come from many sources, including bonds, federal, state, and local taxes, and grants.

Two types of funds include:

1. A **budgeted fund** means any fund for which a budget must be officially adopted by the board of trustees in order to expend money from the fund. 20-9-201(2)(a), MCA.
2. A **non-budgeted fund** is any fund for which an official budget is not required to be adopted in order to expend money deposited in the fund,

20-9-201(2)(b), MCA. Expenditures from these funds are limited to the amount of cash balance in the fund.

Budgeted funds include:

General Fund	Building Reserve Fund
Technology Fund	Transportation Fund
Tuition Fund	Retirement Fund
Adult Education Fund	Flexibility Fund
Debt Service Fund	

Non-Budgeted funding sources include:

Interlocal Fund	Schoolwide Title Funds
IDEA, Part B (Special Education)	

WHO Decides How We Spend School Funds?

The principal and staff at each school who make budget decisions at your local schools...

The Superintendent and other school district staff who develop the budget each year and present it to...

The Helena School District Board of Trustees who review and adopt the budget each year.

The Montana State Legislature and Governor who decide how much state money to spend on schools, how to allocate that money to districts and what conditions apply. Since almost half of the general fund comes from the state legislature, the legislature's role is more important than many realize.

Congress and the President decide how much federal money to spend on education, how to divide and distribute funds among states and districts.

And, of course, the most important person, YOU. As citizens we elect all public officials and vote on local levies and bonds.

HPS Budget 2025-2026

The revenues shown in the table below are the amounts the District expects to receive for the 2025-2026 school year. Most of these funds are restricted and can only be used for specific purposes as defined by state regulations.

Budgeted Funds	Elementary District	High School District
General Fund	\$ 45,216,850.98	\$ 25,171,976.94
Building Reserve	\$ 6,556,861.36	\$ 4,961,551.12
Technology Fund	\$ 712,340.15	\$ 1,408,270.50
Transportation Fund	\$ 6,495,321.46	\$ 1,527,738.61
Tuition Fund	\$ 2,310,627.79	\$ 642,775.18
Retirement Fund	\$ 6,744,825.10	\$ 3,926,816.39
Adult Education Fund	\$ 244,433.29	\$ 336,459.57
Flexibility Fund	\$ 7,274.81	\$ 426,995.35
Debt Service Fund	\$ 4,970,700.00	\$ 200,000.00
Total Budgeted Funds	\$ 73,259,234.94	\$ 38,602,583.66

Significant Non-Budgeted Funding Sources	Elementary District	High School District
Interlocal Fund	\$ 8,260,006.31	
Schoolwide Title Fund	\$ 1,682,425.02	\$ 614,697.98
IDEA, Part B (Special Education)	\$ 1,366,295.00	\$ 599,611.00
Total Significant Non-Budgeted Funds	\$ 9,993,698.33	\$ 1,203,902.66
Total of All Funds	\$ 77,515,795.72	\$ 35,447,298.72

A Brief Description of Each Fund

Budgeted

A budgeted fund means any fund for which a budget must be officially adopted by the board of trustees in order to expend money from the fund. 20-9-201(2)(a), MCA.

General Fund

This is the main operating fund that receives local and state funds to cover the cost of day-to-day activities in our schools.

Building Reserve Fund

This fund covers the cost of major and minor building projects, ongoing maintenance, and repairs.

Revenue is generated through a local levy every 10 years. The fund is also used to pay for safety and security with a permissive levy and state Major Maintenance Aid.

Technology

The Technology Fund is used for the purchase, rental, repair and maintenance of technology and computer network access.

Transportation

This fund is used to pay the costs associated with getting students to and from school. These services are contracted.

Tuition Fund

This fund is used to pay tuition costs for students attending schools, day-treatment facilities or detention centers outside their district of residence. It is also used to payfor one-on-one services for special needs students.

Retirement

This fund is used to pay the district's share of employer contributions, including Social Security and Medicare taxes, retirement contributions, and state unemployment insurance.

Adult Education

This fund provides for any area of instruction approved by the Board of Trustees, including basic and secondary general education, parent education and vocation/Technical education.

Flexibility Fund

Used to account for receipt of the state Flexibility Payment (if any – we have only received it twice in many years). It funds the Incentive for the Creation of Transformational Learning and Creation of Advanced Opportunity Aid.

Debt Service

This fund finances the payment of the principal, interest and associated fees on outstanding bonds and special improvement district (SID) assessments.

Non-Budgeted Funding Sources

A **non-budgeted fund** is any fund for which an official budget is not required to be adopted in order to expend money on deposit in the fund, 20-9-201(2)(b), MCA. Expenditures from these funds are limited to the amount of cash balance in the fund. Non-budgeted funds are addressed in more detail in the Trustees' Financial Summary which is certified by the trustees each year at the August regular Board meeting.

Interlocal

A multi-district cooperative for the purpose of purchasing K-12 curriculum resources, professional development, emergency staffing to achieve accreditation standards, and operational costs.

Schoolwide Title

Provides a comprehensive reform strategy in qualifying schools based on need determined by a federal formula.

IDEA, Part B (Special Education)

Provides financial assistance to support special education and related services to students with disabilities.

How is the General Fund spent?

Educating children is a labor-intensive process. For that reason, the largest share of any school district's budget goes to pay for employee wages and benefits. As you can see below, this holds true for the Helena School District.



Elementary District:

Salaries & Benefits – 88%

Utilities – 3%

Other Operations & Maintenance – 9%

Total = 100%

High School District:

Salaries & Benefits – 83%

Utilities – 3%

Other Operations & Maintenance – 14%

Total = 100%

Where Do All the Funds to Run Schools Come From?

Local Taxes	30%
Tuition & Fees/Contributions/Misc.	17%
County	7%
State	41%
Federal	6%



Here's how to calculate the school district's portion of your property tax bill.

The market value of your home	Tiered residential tax rate:	268.32*	PT The School Portion of your Property Tax
		One mill is equal to one one-thousandth of a dollar. The voters in the Helena School District have passed levy amounts of 268.32 mills. Elementary Total Mills = 194.48 High School Total Mills = 73.84	
	Up to \$400,000 - .79%		
	\$400,000 to \$1.5 million - 1.10%		
	Over \$1.5 million - 2.20%		
	Other classes of property have different rates.		

*268.32 assumes homeowner resides in both the elementary and high school districts.

Assessed Value

The assessed value is a property's determined valuation to calculate the appropriate tax rates.

Appraised Value

An appraised value is assigned to a property by a professional real estate appraiser.

Are There Other Funding Sources?

YES.

School Bonds

School bonds are issued for purchasing land or buildings, making changes to existing land or buildings, obtaining a water supply, purchasing school buses, providing funds to redeem existing bonds, for the issuance of refunding bonds, financing a judgment against the district (including protested taxes), and funding a debt service reserve account for oil and natural gas revenue bonds or impact aid revenue bonds.

Helena taxpayers passed a School BOND for the elementary K-8 district in 2017 for the first time in approximately 24 years. The \$63,000,000 generated by the bond was used to build three new elementary schools (Jim Darcy, Bryant and Central). The bond revenue also funded safety and security projects in all K-8 schools and included keyless entry and alarm and speaker systems.

The last BOND for the high school district was in 1997 and was \$14,010,000. The revenue generated by this bond mainly funded a new science wing on Helena High and a science and library wing on Capital High.

If a district bond election is held by poll election at a regular school election, or a special election called by the trustees, the bond issue is subject to the following:

- a) 40% or more of the qualified electors cast a ballot in the election – the proposition must be approved by a majority of the votes cast on the issue; or
- b) More than 30%, but less than 40% of the qualified electors cast a ballot in the election – the proposition must be approved by 60% or more of the votes cast on the issue; or
- c) 30% or less of the qualified electors cast a ballot in the election – the proposition fails.

If the school district bond election is held in conjunction with an election that is conducted by mail ballot, or in conjunction with a general or primary election, the determination of the approval or rejection of the bond issue is made by a majority of the votes cast on the issue. 20- 9-428, MCA



Special Levies

Building Reserve Levy

Taxpayers approved 10-year building reserve levies in both the elementary and high school districts in May 2023, with the levies beginning in FY 2024. The elementary levy is \$3,000,000 annually and the high school levy is \$1,500,000 annually. The ballot language for the levies stated funds would be used “for the purpose of facility modifications, renovations, repair, upgrades and maintenance of safety and security, roofing, heating ventilation, air conditioning, electrical, plumbing, structural systems, grounds improvement, and maintenance of the District.”

It is important to note that the majority of all facility maintenance projects are funded by the revenue generated from these levies. Projects include but are not limited to, reroofing, boiler replacements, flooring, sidewalks, HVAC, track replacement at Vigilante Stadium and much more.

Technology Levy

Taxpayers approved perpetual levies in 2005 to support technology in both the elementary and high school districts. The annual elementary technology levy is \$520,500 and the annual high school levy is \$559,500.

The purpose of these levies is to purchase, rent, repair, and maintain technological equipment, including computers and computer network access and the associated technical training for school district personnel.

When the technology levies were passed, mobile technology was still emerging...the first iPhone was released in 2007! Now, integrated technology is not only essential for teaching and learning, but also critical for all aspects of district business and operations.

We support nearly 9,000 users with our robust network: Classrooms are outfitted with digital projectors, sound systems, and document cameras. Teachers use laptops for presenting engaging lessons, and students use Chromebooks and iPads to access all of their curricular resources. Each of these resources and devices requires an ongoing license, which allows materials to be kept up to date and accessed anytime and anywhere. The technology skills and experience students acquire in our district help them prepare to engage immediately in many career pathways or serve them well as they pursue higher education. Both of our high schools offer advanced technical classes which are supported by specialized technology.

Technology is also critical to our safety and security efforts...every door in our K-8 buildings is managed electronically, and all of these services require licenses and support as well. All users, thousands of devices, access points, servers, switches, and applications in 17 different buildings are supported by a staff of 12 dedicated technicians.

To Find Out More, Contact Us At:

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