



The Helena Public Schools educate, engage, and empower each student to maximize his or her individual potential with the knowledge, skills and character essential to being a responsible citizen and life-long learner.

Board of Trustees Teaching and Learning Committee Meeting

Wednesday, November 12th, 2025

12:00pm

Lincoln Center & TEAMS

MINUTES

ATTENDANCE

Trustees: *Others:*

Jenny Murnane Butcher, Trustee

Siobhan Hathorn, Trustee

Rex Weltz, Superintendent

Candice Delvaux, Executive Assistant

Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent

6-12

Justine Alberts, Assistant

Superintendent PreK-5

Kaitlyn Hess, Assessment and Federal
Programs Director

Gary Myers, Director of Educational
Technology

Lona Carter, Student Health Services
& Special Education Director

Keri Mizell, Human Resources
Director

Jane Shawn, HEA President

Taylor Lassiter, Communications
Specialist

Todd Verrill, Facilities Director

Brice Burton, Jefferson Elementary
Principal

Amanda WalkingChild, IEFA

Instructional Coach

Joe Pichardo, Indian Ed/Title VI

Academic Specialist

Terri Johnson, Indian Ed/Title VI

Academic Specialist

Jenny Wade, Indian Ed/Title VI

Academic Specialist

KC Sackman, Indian Ed/Title VI

Academic Specialist

Michele Zentz, Homeless Liaison

Therese Tucker, EL/ML Coordinator

I. CALL TO ORDER/INTRODUCTIONS

The meeting was called to order at 12:01 p.m. by Trustee Jenny Murnane Butcher.

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 10.8.25 Teaching and Learning Committee Meeting.

V. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION/DISCUSSION

A. IEFA

Staff members from the Helena School District's Indian Education for All program (IEFA) introduced themselves and described their roles within the schools. They shared a variety of initiatives and programs, including tutoring and mentoring for Native students, monthly cultural lessons for different grade levels, traditional games, storytelling units, and collaboration with community partners like Carroll College. The staff also highlighted their work with high school students through mentorship programs, family nights, field trips, and large-scale projects such as a collaborative canvas art project. They addressed questions from the Teaching and Learning Committee, emphasizing their goal of supporting students while also training and equipping teachers to incorporate Native American history, culture, and perspectives into the curriculum.

B. Homeless

Next, Ms. Michele Zentz, the district's Homeless Liaison, provided an update on her role and the work she is doing to support students experiencing housing instability. She shared current data, noting that the district is serving 363 students under the McKinney-Vento and foster care categories, including those who are doubled up, sheltered, unsheltered, or living in motels. She explained the nuances of these categories and emphasized the importance of identifying and supporting students' basic needs to help them succeed academically. Ms. Zentz described several initiatives underway, including: creating monthly infographics to share data with school staff, collaborating with principals and counselors to remove barriers to learning, and addressing individual student needs through direct support and advocacy. She also highlighted the ways the prevalence of homelessness varies by grade level, with younger students more likely to be identified due to closer relationships with teachers and less stigma around reporting housing challenges. Overall, Ms. Zentz emphasized that meeting students' basic needs is critical to their

success, and her work focuses on identifying vulnerable students, coordinating supports, and ensuring that all children in the district have equitable access to learning opportunities. Ms. Zentz addressed questions from the Teaching and Learning Committee.

C. ELL

Next, Ms. Therese Tucker, EL/ML Coordinator, provided an update on her work supporting students across the district. As the K–12 EL/ML coordinator, she works directly with students, teaches classes, and collaborates with classroom teachers to develop academic English skills. Currently, there are 79 identified ELL students in the district, representing a highly diverse population, including Spanish-speaking students from Mexico, Ecuador, Puerto Rico, Honduras, and Peru; Afghan students speaking Dari and Pashto; and smaller groups from countries including Thailand, China, Indonesia, and Jamaica. Therese highlighted the varying needs of her students, including newcomers (students in the U.S. less than 12 months), students with interrupted or limited formal education (SLIFE), and long-term English learners, some of whom take 5–7 years to fully acquire academic English proficiency. She explained how students may appear conversationally fluent but still require support to navigate the specialized language of school subjects, such as math problem-solving or academic reading and writing. Therese also collaborates with Michelle Zentz, the Homeless Liaison, to support students who are experiencing housing instability, ensuring they have access to resources such as the district’s resource closet. Her work emphasizes both individualized student support and teacher collaboration, helping staff implement strategies that allow ELL students to succeed academically while building long-term English proficiency. Ms. Tucker addressed questions from the Teaching and Learning Committee.

D. Fall Data Report-Including MAST

Due to time constraints, the Teaching and Learning Committee decided that the Fall Data Report, including MAST, will be presented and reviewed at a future meeting.

VI. BOARD/SUPERINTENDENT COMMENTS

There were no further board or superintendent comments.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:22 p.m. by Trustee Murnane Butcher.