



**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, November 11th, 2025**

5:30 p.m.

### MINUTES

**ATTENDANCE – Present unless otherwise noted.**

Jennifer McKee, Chair  
Jennifer Walsh, Vice Chair  
Siobhan Hathhorn, Trustee  
Jenny Murnane Butcher,  
Trustee  
Linda Cleatus, Trustee  
Janet Armstrong, Trustee  
Keith Meyer, Trustee  
Brock Gardipee, Helena High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees  
Delaney Lynch, Capital High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees  
Rex Wertz, Superintendent  
Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent  
Janelle Mickelson, Business Director  
Todd Verrill, Facilities Director  
Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director  
Gary Myers, Director of Educational  
Technology  
Justine Alberts, Assistant Superintendent  
PreK-5  
Kaitlyn Hess, Data & Federal Programs  
Director  
Lona Carter, Student Health Services & Special Education Director  
Taylor Lassiter, Communications Specialist  
Jane Shawn, HEA President  
Becca Leaphart, HEF Executive Director  
Bridget Ekstrom, Managing Director, Public Finance Banker, D.A. Davidson & Co.  
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 recognitions.

## **III. RECOGNITIONS**

The Board of Trustees recognized the following individuals:

### **A. MPTF and NEA Awards for Teaching Excellence**

Congratulations to Jefferson Elementary Educator Mr. Kellen Alger who is the recipient of the Montana Professional Teaching Foundation (MPTF) Award for Teaching Excellence and has been nominated to the NEA Foundation for the Awards for Teaching Excellence. This prestigious recognition honors outstanding educators who exemplify commitment to student success, professional growth, and community engagement.

### **B. Claes Nobel Educator of Distinction Award**

Congratulations to Helena High School Educator Ms. Erin Cleveland who is the recipient of the Claes Nobel Educator of Distinction Award granted by The National Society of High School Scholars. This prestigious award recognizes educators who have demonstrated outstanding commitment to excellence in education, inspired academic achievement, and made a lasting impact on the lives of their students.

### **C. G.R.I.T. Award**

Congratulations to Ms. Lona Carter, Student Health Services & Special Education Director for Helena Public Schools, for receiving the G.R.I.T. Award from the Montana Health Care Foundation for her work in supporting school-based health. The G.R.I.T. Award celebrates the Resilient, Innovative, Tenacious, and Genuine individuals making a difference in school-based health care in Montana. Ms. Carter's outstanding leadership, compassion, and tireless dedication to supporting student well-being embody the very essence of this recognition.

### **D. Administrator of the Year Award**

Congratulations to Mr. Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent 6-12, for Helena Public Schools for receiving the Administrator of the Year Award at the MTACTION Fall Institute. This award recognizes administrative CTE professionals at the school, district, county, state or federal level who have demonstrated leadership in ensuring teacher and student success and have made significant contributions toward innovative, unique and effective career and technical education programs. Assistant Superintendent McKay's leadership and dedication to expanding meaningful CTE opportunities exemplify excellence in educational leadership and continue to make a lasting

impact across our district and state.

E. **G.V. Erickson Award**

Congratulations to Superintendent Rex Weltz, recipient of the prestigious G.V. Erickson Award, presented by the School Administrators of Montana (SAM). This distinguished honor represents the highest recognition for a Montana school administrator and celebrates those who have made outstanding contributions to the advancement of public education in our state. Superintendent Weltz's visionary leadership, unwavering dedication, and commitment to excellence continue to strengthen Helena Public Schools, support students and staff, and inspire the broader Montana education community.

The Board of Trustees moved on to hear the Superintendent Report from 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:

- Recognitions
  - Native American Heritage Month
  - Veterans Day-November 11
  - National School Psychology Week-November 3-7
  - National Substitute Educators Day-November 21
  - Thank you to Becca Leaphart, and the Helena Education Foundation, for awarding Spark Grants and Great Idea Grants across the district, and surprising teachers who were selected for Let's Talk About Great Teachers' recognition!
  - Thank you to Callie Aschim & the Chamber of Commerce for hosting our first Brews & Blueprints-More Events to Come!
  - Welcome Trustee Keith Meyer and a special thank you to the individuals that applied and interviewed for the vacant seat.
  - Ms. Lona Carter - G.R.I.T Award
  - Mr. Josh McKay - CTE State Award
  - Ms. Erin Cleveland - Helena High School
  - Mr. Kellen Alger - Jefferson Elementary
  
- New Business
  - Director of Finance Interviews
  - Bridge Alliance Update
  - Data Dashboard
  - HPS & Community Connections Support During Government Shutdown
  - Facilities Bond Projects Updates –
    - Bond/Construction/Facility Meetings

- Owner’s Rep
  - HHS Project – Architect Team In Motion
  - CHS Project – Architect Team Start Up
  - Teacher Early Retirement Incentive Update
  - Exploring Educational (Teaching) Pathway – “Grow Our Own” Program
    - Para to Teacher
    - Teacher to Administration
  - Kinder Sprouts Update
  - GT Program Review Update
  - Other
- Outreach/Meetings
    - MCEL Conference
    - Helena Community Breakfast Sponsored By Carroll College
    - AA Superintendents Weekly Meeting
    - Bond/Construction/Facility Meetings
      - Owner’s Rep
      - HHS Project – Architect Team
      - CHS Project – Architect Team
    - Board of Health Meeting
    - Chamber of Commerce
    - Board Leadership
    - HEA
    - HEF
    - HEF Executive Committee
    - Parent Advisory Committee
    - Teacher Advisory Committee
    - Cabinet & Leadership
    - TV, Print, Radio, Media
    - City of Helena
    - Other
  - Other

That concluded the Superintendent’s Report portion of the agenda. Superintendent Wertz responded to questions from the Board of Trustees, after which the trustees proceeded to hear general public comment.

## V. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no general public comment and the Board of Trustees proceeded to review the Consent Action Items.

## VI. 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. 9.23.25 Board of Trustees Work Session Meeting Minutes
6. 9.24.25 Board of Trustees Special Board 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 Linda Cleatus moved to approve the *Consent Action Items* as presented. Trustee Siobhan Hathhorn seconded the motion.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Vote:** 7-0 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

Superintendent Wertz provided an update on the RFPs for the Hawthorne Elementary and May Butler Center properties. He noted increased community interest regarding the future use of both sites following recent decisions affecting the facilities. The Superintendent explained that issuing RFPs will allow the District to gather formal proposals from the public for potential long-term lease or sale options, consistent with responsible stewardship of district properties. Superintendent Wertz reviewed the planned timeline for advertising, proposal review, and potential Board action, noted that the process has been vetted by legal counsel, and responded to questions from the Board of Trustees.

#### 1. Hawthorne Elementary-Request for Proposal (RFP)

Board Chair Jennifer McKee commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item *Hawthorne Elementary-Request for Proposal (RFP)*.”

**Motion:** Trustee Siobhan Hathhorn moved to approve the *Hawthorne Elementary-Request for Proposal (RFP)*. Trustee Janet Armstrong seconded the motion.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Vote:** 6-0; motion carries. *(Please note that Trustee Jennifer Walsh abstained from voting as she is a Trustee strictly for the high school district, and this action item pertains to the elementary district.)*

2. **May Butler Center Property-Request for Proposal (RFP)**

Board Chair Jennifer McKee commented, “At this point I would entertain a motion to approve the action item *May Butler Center-Request for Proposal (RFP)*.”

**Motion:** Trustee Keith Meyer moved to approve the *May Butler Center-Request for Proposal (RFP)*. Trustee Jennifer Walsh seconded the motion.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Vote:** 7-0 motion carries unanimously.

The Board of Trustees moved on to hear the Items For Information.

C. **Item For Information**

1. **Enrollment Update**

Assistant Superintendent Josh McKay presented an update on enrollment to the Board of Trustees. Overall, elementary enrollment reflects slight declines primarily due to smaller kindergarten cohorts and natural grade-to-grade transitions, while middle and high school numbers remain stable. The addition of pre-K programs (Kinder Sprouts) has helped offset some of the elementary decline. Enrollment shifts are attributed to normal student flow, not large population losses, and reflect trends seen statewide. Assistant Superintendent McKay addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

D. **Items For Information-Facilities Bond Projects Updates**

1. **Moody’s Bond Rating Update**

Ms. Bridget Ekstrom, Managing Director, Public Finance Banker, D.A. Davidson & Co, presented a Moody’s Bond Rating Update to the Board of Trustees. She reported that the Elementary and High School Districts received A1 credit ratings, one of the highest ratings held by Montana school districts, reflecting strong financial management and solid fund balance and cash ratios. She noted that Helena Public Schools ranks among the strongest districts in the state. Ms. Ekstrom reviewed the Bond financing timeline and confirmed that Elementary and High School Districts’ Bonds will go on sale next Thursday, with the majority expected to be sold by midday. She explained the types of investors who typically purchase municipal bonds and noted strong anticipated market interest due to the size of the Districts’ Bond issuances and current favorable market conditions. She also highlighted that interest rates have recently declined, improving the District’s outlook and potentially reducing costs for taxpayers and overall interest expenses. Ms. Ekstrom addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

2. **Helena High Campus Update**

- a. Helena High School
- b. Project For Alternative Learning (PAL)
- c. District Kitchen
- d. Competition Stadium

Superintendent Wertz provided an update on the Helena High campus redevelopment. SMA + A&E Architects have been contracted to lead design work for the new high school, Alternative Learning/PAL space, district kitchen, and competition stadium. Design teams have begun extensive planning, including multiple staff meetings and upcoming site visits to other schools. Construction of the new high school is scheduled first, with students moving in fall 2028, followed by demolition of the existing building and construction of the new stadium. Architects are coordinating phased logistics to ensure alignment across all projects. Superintendent Wertz addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the Helena High Campus Update.

3. **Capital High School Architect Selection and Planning Update**

Superintendent Wertz reported that the Board approved Slate Architects, a local firm partnered with RTA from Colorado, to lead the design work for Capital High School. Slate was introduced in person to Capital High School staff, and multiple design options will be developed, incorporating input from staff and students. Superintendent Wertz addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the Capital High School Architect Selection and Planning Update.

4. **Kessler Elementary School-Architect RFQ Timeline**

Superintendent Wertz reported that the RFQ for Kessler Elementary received six submissions. A seven-member review team, including district administrators and the building principal, evaluated the submissions and selected a short list of three firms. These firms have been notified and will be interviewed next Tuesday, with a recommendation for Board approval expected the following Friday. Superintendent Wertz addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the Kessler Elementary School-Architect RFQ Timeline.

5. **GCCM RFQ/RFP Timeline**

- a. Helena High School
- b. Capital High School
- c. Kessler Elementary School

Superintendent Wertz reported that the process for selecting the General Contractor/Construction Manager (GCCM) for the three construction projects is underway. The district has prepared a detailed timeline outlining committee members, notice dates, submission deadlines, screening, interviews, and anticipated Board approval. Multiple board meetings are scheduled over the coming months to accommodate the GCCM process. Superintendent Wertz addressed questions from the

## E. REPORTS

### 1. Student Representatives Report

Ms. Delaney Lynch, Capital High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees, presented her Student Representative Report. Ms. Lynch commented, “ Good evening, Trustees, as we dive into the second quarter, lots of exciting things are happening at Capital High.

#### Rock Your Mocs Week:

This week is Rock Your Mocs Week at Capital High. There is designated dress up days for each day next week to celebrate tribal diversity.

#### CHS Drama Department:

The CHS drama department has been working hard on their show “The Mouse that Roared”. There are shows this week on November 13-15. The curtain is at 6:00 and the doors open at 5:30. Tickets can be purchased both at the door and online.

#### Bruin Pantry Food Drive:

The CHS Counseling Department is once again sponsoring a Bruin Pantry Food Drive for CHS families for the upcoming holiday break (as well as daily needs). For the past several years, CHS has distributed prepaid grocery-only gift cards to CHS families over long school breaks. Due to generous donations, we have been able to provide 48 Van’s gift cards to families during the 2024 Thanksgiving and Christmas breaks. This year we hope to gather donations to maintain our pantry on a daily basis and provide gift cards for the holiday. The goals for this year are as follows: provide every classroom with snacks, provide daily snacks for students in need, provide weekend packs of food for students in need, provide at least 48 groceries only gift cards.

#### Slate/RTA Architects:

Slate/RTA Architects met with Capital High Staff today during lunchtime at the CHS Auditorium. They will highlight the next steps and how staff will be able to provide input in the design.

#### State Special Olympics Basketball Tournament:

Helena recently hosted this big event; 3 on 3 basketball games were held at CHS last Friday and Saturday. CHS students often watch this event periodically throughout the day. This year, Principal Zanto received a message from one of the tournament volunteers that read “Oh my heart! Your student section at the Special Olympics game may be one of the most special things

I've seen! It's ridiculously cool! Signs. Cheers. Chants. Encouraging both teams. It's flat awesome."

#### Staff Meeting Last Week:

Last week, admin hosted a staff meeting to review the cell phone policy and to review disciplinary literacy. PLC teams are encouraged to focus on current disciplinary literacy practices occurring in their classrooms and to also focus on MAP data. Last Monday, freshman and sophomore teachers received p.d. on the various resources found in the MAP testing site.

#### Cognia External Review – Monday October 20th:

Cognia review members visited our school last month. Principal Zanto gave a principal's presentation and visitors interviewed various staff, students, and parents. Over 40 classrooms were also observed. On this day, the Montana State Cognia Accreditation Director, Daniel Sybrant, sent the following email to OPI, state leaders, and Cognia-accredited school leaders. CHS made state history as Cognia accreditation efforts are now more closely linked to OPI standards. The email reads as follows: Dear Montana Cognia State Committee Members, State Superintendent Susie Hedalen, the Montana Board of Public Education Chairman, Dr. Tim Tharp and the Montana Board of Public Education and Executive Director Flynn. History is being made today! After 30 years in the making, we have our first onsite review today with a team comprised of Montana Office of Public Instruction personnel, our lead evaluator Dr. Paige Hughes, and several other local administrators. The onsite has already started at Helena Capital High School and represents our inaugural school in this new protocol. Congratulations to Principal Zanto and Helena Superintendent Weltz for having the vision to be the first in the state to move forward with this alternative protocol. We have 7 other reviews this fall with this new protocol. I am happy to say that local administrators whether they are members or not have stepped up big time to become part of these volunteer onsite teams. Thanks, to you, the Montana State Committee, thanks to OPI and the accreditation team, thanks to the Montana Board of Public Education and our Cognia Team for making this vision possible. We are anxiously awaiting the results-positives and areas of improvements-and will be sure to share both. It has been a great start to 2nd quarter here at CHS and we are excited to continue this throughout the 2025-2026 school year. Go Bru!"

Mr. Brock Gardipee, Helena High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees, presented his Student Representative Report. Mr. Gardipee commented, "Hello everyone! I hope you all have been well since the last time we met. At Helena High School we have been incredibly busy. First off, our Bengal Buddies Program has been working to get kids excited about being a Bengal and the excitement around graduating. Some things they have done so far have been doing an egg lab, having spooky stations during Halloween with different activities, and the high school students sharing their favorite childhood stories. On November 7th, HOSA members went out to the Special Olympics dance and volunteered at certain booths. At those booths, they would share important health information with the athletes who attended. At my table I informed them on the difference between healthy drinks and non-healthy drinks This month is also Native American Heritage Month, so students were instructed to wear certain types of clothes in order to honor the history and Native tribes around us. Helena High has also been working hard to receive donations so that the people in our school have plenty to eat.

Some of the things we have done are certain clubs hosting clothing/food drives. In one of our food drives there are 3 boxes with the face of our principals on each. Whoever gets the most food donations in their box must spend a certain amount of time in detention depending on how much is donated. Another project has been filling a Food Pantry where we have worked with the community to allow students to have the food, toiletries, and other necessities they need for free. Now I will move onto the recognition of the amazing members we have at Helena High. I'd like to start by congratulating the girls' soccer team who won the AA conference. I'm super excited to see how they grow as the majority of the team is made up of young members. I would also like to congratulate cross-country boys for finishing 2nd at state and cross-country girls who finished 3rd at state. Also, our girls golf did a great job at the AA divisional meet where they placed 2nd. For Veterans Day I'd like to thank Mr. Belliveau, Mr. Schulte, and Mr. Spencer for their service. They are amazing people, and we really appreciate them. Finally, for my last recognition I'd like to thank all the clubs who came out and participated in the Halloween event we put on. It was an amazing event we put on where clubs came together and decided whether they wanted to put up a booth to play games or have a table to pass out candy. It was a huge success, and we had close to 1000 people who attended. It was crazy and my table ran out of pumpkins, but it'll be good to plan for next year. Finally, I'd like to invite you all to our fall play on Thursday or Friday at 6:30 and to join us on Thursday November 20th for our next donut handout day."

2. **Helena Education Association Report**

There was no Helena Education Association Report this evening.

3. **Facilities & Technology Committee Report**

Trustee Siobhan Hathhorn presented the Facilities & Technology Committee Report. Trustee Hathhorn reported that the district's technology team, led by Gary Myers, supports a wide range of functions including network management, software support, student device enrollment, construction and AV support, and state reporting.

On facilities, recent work includes boiler repairs at Bryant and Smith Elementary, parking adjustments at C.R. Anderson, fencing upgrades at Vigilante Stadium, sidewalk repairs at HMS, sprinkler blowouts, interior painting, and snow equipment preparation. Central Elementary is addressing erosion and paving issues. Maintenance staffing is fully filled, while seven custodial positions remain vacant. Additional projects included carpet installation at HHS, support for Special Olympics events, fire marshal inspections with corrective actions, and coordination with Montana DES for seismic assessments.

4. **Budget and Finance Committee Report**

Trustee Janet Armstrong presented the Budget and Finance Committee Report. Trustee Armstrong reported that the district's budget is generally in good condition, with the high school general fund showing no concerns and only minor issues in the elementary general fund. These include higher-than-planned technical salaries due to custodial shortages and overtime, and some special education paraprofessional costs. The committee also reviewed updates on the bond program.

5. **Teaching & Learning Committee Report**

There was no Teaching and 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**

Trustee Jenny Murnane Butcher presented the Wellness Committee Report to the Board of Trustees. Trustee Murnane Butcher reported that the district is collaborating with St. Peter's Health and Helena Foodshare on a farm-to-school grant to help continue funding the Harvest of the Month program. The committee discussed expanding the program to other classrooms, including middle school and functional life skills. They also reviewed ways to support students amid increased needs and emphasized the importance of advocacy for programs like SNAP, including opportunities to engage with state officials. PTA outreach to support these initiatives was also planned, and the committee expressed appreciation for the strong community support.

9. **Montana School Boards Association Report**

There was no Montana School Boards Association Report this evening.

10. **Parent Council Visit Reports**

Trustee Janet Armstrong shared her experience at the Jim Darcy Elementary School Veteran's Day celebration noting a full veteran procession and strong community participation. The program included a flag presentation by Cub Scouts and Brownies, songs performed by older students honoring each military branch, a slideshow honoring multi-generational military families, and student-created artwork, posters, and poppies displayed throughout the gym. Trustee Armstrong described the event as heartwarming and a meaningful community gathering.

That concluded the Reports portion of the agenda. The Board of Trustees moved on to review upcoming meetings.

## **VII. UPCOMING MEETINGS**

Board Chair Jennifer McKee reviewed upcoming committee and board meetings, and the Board then moved to final comments.

## **VIII. BOARD/SUPERINTENDENT COMMENTS**

Superintendent Weltz highlighted a number of community and district events, praising the Special

Olympics basketball tournament and Jim Darcy's Veteran's Day program.

**IX. ADJOURNMENT**

Board Chair Jennifer McKee adjourned the meeting at 8:27 p.m.

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Candice Delvaux, Recording Secretary

Date