



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, December 10th, 2025

12:00pm

Lincoln Center & TEAMS

MINUTES

ATTENDANCE

Trustees: *Others:*

Siobhan Hathhorn, Trustee	Rex Weltz, Superintendent
Jennifer McKee, Board Chair	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
	Katie Literski, PreK-5 Student Health Services & Special Education Coordinator
	Teal Klabo, 6-12 Student Health Services & Special Education Coordinator
	Brittany Hogan, Behavior Analyst
	Molly Meyer, Behavior Interventionist
	Jessica Brunett, Behavior Analyst
	Allie McFarlane, SPED Secretary
	Monique Dvorak, SPED Secretary
	Courtney McAdams, Guest of the Public

I. CALL TO ORDER/INTRODUCTIONS

The meeting was called to order at 12:01 p.m. by Trustee Siobhan Hathhorn.

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 11.12.25 Teaching and Learning Committee Meeting.

V. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION/DISCUSSION

A. HPS Student Health Services

Ms. Lona Carter, Student Health Services & Special Education Director, introduced several members of the Student Health Services and Special Education Department and described their roles within the district. Staff shared that their work focuses on ensuring compliance with state and federal special education requirements, including IDEA, through oversight of IEP development, prior written notice, and accurate child count reporting. Coordinators support students from early childhood through postsecondary transition, with responsibilities that include early identification and evaluation of preschool-aged children, collaboration with community partners such as Family Outreach and Head Start, and ensuring smooth transitions into district services at age three. Department leadership supports staff and administrators with complex student needs, particularly in the area of behavioral support, by providing training, consultation, and direct assistance in schools. The team also oversees special education preschool programming and early intervention services to promote strong developmental foundations. At the secondary level, staff coordinate transition planning for students with disabilities, including Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) in partnership with Vocational Rehabilitation. This work connects students to career readiness activities, work-based learning opportunities, and adult services following graduation. The department is also developing programming for students ages 20–22 to support continued transition services. Administrative support within the department includes budget management, purchasing and inventory oversight, coordination of equipment and supplies, Medicaid and Pre-ETS billing, and collaboration with the Business Office to ensure fiscal accountability and efficient use of resources. Ms. Carter noted that the department functions as a collaborative team committed to continuous improvement, open communication, and problem-solving to best support students, families, and staff across the district.

Next, Ms. Carter provided a snapshot of the Student Health Services and Special Education Department, outlining current staffing levels across the district. She reported that the department includes 48 special education teachers, 104 paraeducators, and 11 motor pool staff, including occupational and physical therapists, adaptive physical education staff, and adaptive PE paraeducators. The department also employs eight school psychologists, 15 speech-language pathologists, and 11 school nurses. Ms. Carter noted that the district is currently experiencing difficulty recruiting qualified special education teachers and has two open special education general resource positions. Schools are working collaboratively to manage staffing needs for the remainder of the year, and efforts are underway to fill the positions to ensure full staffing for the next school year. She also referenced a summary of student identification categories and enrollment data included in the snapshot for committee review.

Ms. Carter reported that the department has strengthened its MTSS referral process to prioritize early interventions before pursuing special education evaluations. She explained that staff work closely with families and schools across all grade levels to review data, implement targeted supports, and determine whether special education identification is necessary. Ms. Carter also noted that the department has streamlined and clarified its procedures over the past year and, despite additional demands related to early childhood services and students aged 19–22, has effectively met these challenges.

Ms. Carter provided an overview of the Student Health Services Department, which oversees suicide risk and behavioral threat assessment processes in the district. She highlighted ongoing safety and mental health trainings, including CPI and pilot safety trainings, to support staff in managing high-needs student behaviors while maintaining safe learning environments. Ms. Carter emphasized the close alignment between special education and mental health supports, noting the goal of helping students regulate and remain in general education settings whenever possible. She outlined the district’s multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), collaboration among school psychologists, counselors, and administrators, and the use of restorative practices. Additional supports discussed included student screenings, mental health curricula, reporting tools, and partnerships with community providers. Ms. Carter also shared that the district is exploring grant opportunities to further strengthen school safety and student support services.

Ms. Carter highlighted the Helena School District’s community partners who provide mental health services in schools. She noted Shodair’s CSCT teams at multiple schools, as well as Pure View, Helena Indian Alliance, Aware, and Intermountain, all offering varying levels of support. She described bridge funding used to maintain services during funding delays and emphasized efforts to ensure students receive consistent support throughout the school year, including over summer breaks. Ms. Carter noted that these partners serve all students, not just specific populations, and stressed the district’s goal of expanding access to mental health services across all buildings.

Ms. Carter discussed department needs to better serve district students. She highlighted the need for additional BCBA and BIS staff to support students and families, noting their critical role in enabling teaching and learning. She proposed creating a social service coordinator (or social worker) position to provide case management for students not yet connected to services. She also identified a need for more interpreters for deaf, hard-of-hearing, and EL students, suggesting a “grow-your-own” interpreter pathway. Ms. Carter noted challenges in hiring highly qualified special education teachers and emphasized the importance of attracting top applicants. Finally,

she discussed the growth of the Pre-ETS program and the need for dedicated staff to manage it as it expands for students aged 19–22.

Ms. Carter addressed questions from the Teaching and Learning Committee regarding the information presented.

B. HPS Fall Data

Due to time constraints, the Teaching and Learning Committee decided that the HPS Fall Data 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 1:03 p.m. by Trustee Siobhan Hathhorn.