



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, December 9th, 2025

5:30 p.m.

MINUTES

ATTENDANCE – Present unless otherwise noted.

Jennifer McKee, Chair
Siobhan Hathorn, Trustee
Linda Cleatus, Trustee
Janet Armstrong, Trustee
Keith Meyer, Trustee
Kay Satre, 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
Sam Holman, Business Director
Lona Carter, Student Health Services & Special Education Director
Taylor Lassiter, Communications Specialist
Becca Leaphart, HEF Executive Director
Bridget Ekstrom, Managing Director, Public Finance Banker, D.A. Davidson & Co.
Dan Semmens, Partner, Dorsey & Whitney LLP
Tim Meldrum, SMA Architecture & Design
Jacob Augenstein, Slate Architecture
Gretchen Krumm, Mosaic Architecture
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 proposed the following changes: *Items for Information – Facilities Bond Projects Updates (Items D.1 through D.5)* will be moved to follow the *General Public Comment* section. Additionally, the *Item for Information – HSD Pay Plan Recommendation (Item 9)* will be moved earlier in the agenda, depending on the arrival time of Mr. Jim Kerins, who will be presenting that information.

The Board of Trustees then moved on to hear the Superintendent’s Report from Superintendent Weltz.

III. SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT

Superintendent Weltz presented his Superintendent’s Report to the Board of Trustees and discussed topics including, but not limited to:

Recognitions

- Congratulations to Business Director Janelle Mickelson on her retirement
- Welcome to new Business Director Sam Holman
- National Special Education Day - December 2, 2025
- Special thanks to our Parent-Teacher Organization volunteers who provided dinner for our educators during Parent-Teacher Conferences over the past couple of weeks
- Thank you to Principal Jill Nyman, and the staff and students at Jim Darcy for hosting the Veterans Day Celebration
- Thank you to Principal Matt Carey, and the staff and students at PAL for hosting a Thanksgiving Celebration
- Thank you to Becca Leaphart and the Helena Education Foundation for hosting a wonderful evening at the Great Conversations event
- Thank you to Jordan Evertz, Executive Director of Helena Food Share, for hosting the Kid Pack build with the Governor and other community members
- Thank you to Callie Aschim and the Chamber of Commerce for hosting Brews & Blueprints on December 17 at 5:30 p.m. at Brothers Tapworks with more events to come
- Winter programs and our music and classroom teachers
- Other

New Business

- Montana’s Innovative Educational Program (IEP) Tax Credit
- RFP for Website Redesign and Data Transfer Project
- Bridge Health Ongoing Work
- K Sprout Enrollment Update

- Data Dashboard Update
- Facilities Bond Projects –
 - Bond Update
 - HHS/PAL Precedent Tour-Spokane, Washington
 - Bond/Construction/Facilities Meetings
 - Owner’s Representative
 - HHS Project
 - CHS Project
 - KESS Project
 - GCCM RFQ/RFP Schedule
- “Grow Our Own” Initiative
 - Para to Teacher
 - Teacher to Administration
- Superintendent Recommendations – Spring 2025
 - Review
 - To-Do
- Other

Outreach/Meetings

- AA Superintendents Weekly Meeting
- Bond/Construction/Facilities Meetings
- Owner’s Representative
- Bond
- Bond Finance
- HHS Project - Architect Team
- CHS Project - Architect Team
- KESS Project - Architect Team
- Chamber of Commerce
- Board Leadership
- HEA
- HEF
- HEF Executive Committee
- Parent Advisory Committee
- Helena Food Share
- Cabinet & Leadership
- TV, Print, Radio, Media
- City of Helena
- 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. Amanda Osborne provided general public comment. Ms. Osborne is a parent of students in the district. Ms. Osborne’s general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to urging the adoption of a districtwide, bell-to-bell student cell phone ban; citing research on the negative effects of smartphone use on student learning, attention, and mental health; noting disproportionate impacts on vulnerable and lower-performing students; referencing other states and Montana school districts that have implemented similar policies with positive outcomes; and requesting that the Board place consideration of a cell phone ban on an upcoming meeting agenda.

Ms. Carrie Owen and Ms. Emily Petrik provided general public comment together. They are both teachers in the district. Ms. Owen and Ms. Petrick’s general public comment addressed several key topics including but not limited to expressing appreciation for the Board’s support of world language programs; highlighting student success in Spanish, including high pass rates on AP exams and attainment of the Seal of Biliteracy; emphasizing the positive impact of offering Spanish at the middle school level; noting similar successes at both Helena High School and Capital High School; proposing the addition of French I as a middle school elective to expand student choice and strengthen pathways to advanced language study; and discussing the academic and financial benefits to students who earn qualifying AP exam scores.

The Board of Trustees proceeded to hear a Bond Finance Update provided by Ms. Bridget Ekstrom.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Items for Information-Facilities Bond Projects Updates

1. Bond Finance Update

Ms. Bridget Ekstrom, Managing Director and Public Finance Banker at D.A. Davidson & Co, presented a Bond Finance Update to the Board of Trustees. Ms. Ekstrom provided an update on the bond issuance process, noting that significant progress had been made since the last meeting through multiple Bond Finance Committee and Board meetings. She reviewed the bond issuance timeline included in the Board packet and explained that two bond resolutions—one for the elementary district and one for the high school district—would be presented for Board action. Ms. Ekstrom reported that interest rates were successfully locked on November 20 at levels more than half a percent lower than projected to voters, resulting in substantial savings. The bonds were structured in multiple series to align issuance with project expenditures, including a 20-year elementary bond and a 30-year high school bond to match the useful life of the projects and limit near-term taxpayer impact. She also highlighted the district’s Moody’s A1 credit rating, favorable insurance terms, strong market demand for the bonds, and overall positive financial outcomes. Closing is scheduled for December 18, at which time bond proceeds will be received and invested until used for projects. 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**

Mr. Meldrum of SMA + Design provided an update on the Helena High Campus design process, reporting that the education specifications (educational programming and space requirements) are nearing completion and will guide the upcoming design work. He noted that the project has entered the schematic design phase, focusing on overall building organization and site relationships. Mr. Meldrum summarized recent community engagement efforts, including a well-attended community meeting and planned outreach through presentations and “Brews and Blueprints” sessions. He also described a recent precedent site visit involving teachers and administrators to tour comparable schools, gather feedback, and inform design decisions. Additionally, he reported progress on campus master planning, including refinement of major site elements such as building placement, athletics, and support facilities, and stated that the project remains generally on schedule. Mr. Meldrum addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

3. **Capital High School Update**

Mr. Jacob Augenstein of Slate Architecture provided an update on the Capital High School design process reporting that extensive stakeholder engagement is underway, including a survey of students, parents, and staff that has received strong participation. He summarized the initial Design Advisory Group meeting, which included representation from students, parents, teachers, and administrators, and focused on identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and priorities for the project. Mr. Augenstein also described ongoing background work to digitally model the existing school building to support informed renovation decisions. He outlined upcoming engagement activities, including staff meetings, additional Design Advisory Group meetings, and potential building tours, all aimed at refining project priorities, program needs, and design direction. Mr. Augenstein addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

4. **Kessler Elementary School Update**

Ms. Gretchen Krumm of Mosaic Architecture provided an update on the Kessler Elementary School design. Ms. Krumm reported that a post-occupancy review of Bryant School was conducted to gather feedback on functionality and lessons learned. Key findings emphasized the need for flexibility in educational spaces, adequate storage, and designated workspaces for support staff. Ms. Krumm noted ongoing engagement with the Kessler Building Committee, walkthroughs of Kessler and other schools, and plans for teacher engagement sessions to gather qualitative input on building functionality and community needs. She also outlined plans to engage parents and the broader community, with sessions scheduled primarily in January to accommodate holiday events, working in coordination with CT planning staff to map out these engagement opportunities. This feedback will inform both the design of Kessler and the planning of future spaces. Ms. Krumm addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

5. **GCCM RFQ/RFP Timeline**
 - a. **Helena High School**
 - b. **Capital High School**
 - c. **Kessler Elementary School**

Superintendent Weltz 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 Weltz addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the GCCM RFQ/RFP Timeline.

The Board of Trustees moved on to review the Consent Action Items.

B. Consent Action Items

1. Personnel Actions
2. Warrants
3. Acknowledge FY 2025-26 Out-of-District Attendance Agreements (Helena Resident Students Attending Other School Districts)
4. 11.11.25 Board of Trustees Full Board Meeting Minutes
5. 11.21.25 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 Kay Satre 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.

C. Items for Action

1. **Consideration of Bond Resolutions Authorizing General Obligation School Building Bonds, Series 2025**
 - a. **Approval of Bond Resolution Authorizing \$31,500,000 Elementary School District General Obligation School Building Bonds, Series 2025 (see attached)**
 - b. **Approval of Bond Resolution Authorizing \$130,000,000 High School District General Obligation School Building Bonds, Series 2025 (see attached)**

Ms. Mickelson, outgoing Business Manager, presented action item *1. Consideration of Bond Resolutions Authorizing General Obligation School Building Bonds, Series 2025: a. Approval of Bond Resolution Authorizing \$31,500,000 Elementary School District General Obligation School Building Bonds, Series 2025.*

Background:

- On September 9, 2025, district voters approved a \$43 million elementary bond to build a new Kessler Elementary School.
- At a special board meeting held on September 24, 2025, the Board authorized the issuance of up to \$43 million of the elementary bonds.
- The District issued \$31.5 million of the authorized \$43 million on November 20, 2025.
- The remaining \$11.5 million will be issued in a later series.

Considerations:

- On November 4, 2025, the District received an A1 rating on the bonds from Moody's Investors Service. The District elevated its rating to an AA rating by purchasing municipal bond insurance and a public sale was conducted on November 20, 2025.
- The attached resolution finalizes the sale of the \$31.5 million bonds by fixing the form of the bond certificate, authorizing the tax levy, and making covenants with respect to execution and delivery, payments, and redemption of the bonds. Covenants agreeing to the security provisions (the accounting of the bonds), arbitrage regulations and reporting requirements are also included in the resolution.

Superintendent Recommendation:

Approve the resolution relating to \$31,500,000 elementary general obligation school building bonds, Series 2025.

Ms. Mickelson, Business Manager, presented action item *1. Consideration of Bond Resolutions Authorizing General Obligation School Building Bonds, Series 2025: b. Approval of Bond Resolution Authorizing \$130,000,000 High School District General Obligation School Building Bonds, Series 2025 (see attached).*

Background:

- On September 9, 2025, district voters approved a \$240 million high school bond levy to build a new Helena High School, make major renovations/improvements to Capital High School, relocate PAL and the District kitchen to the Helena High Campus, and construct a new instructional and playing field complex.
- At a special board meeting held on September 24, 2025, the Board authorized the issuance of up to \$130 million of the high school bonds.
- The District issued \$130 million of the authorized \$240 million on November 20, 2025.
- The remaining \$110 million will be issued in later series.

Considerations:

- On November 4, 2025, the District received an A1 rating on the bonds from Moody’s Investors Service. The District elevated its rating to an AA rating by purchasing municipal bond insurance and a public sale was conducted on November 20, 2025.
- The attached resolution finalizes the sale of the \$130 million bonds by fixing the form of the bond certificate, authorizing the tax levy, and making covenants with respect to execution and delivery, payments, and redemption of the bonds. Covenants agreeing to the security provisions (the accounting of the bonds), arbitrage regulations and reporting requirements are also included in the resolution.

Superintendent Recommendation:

Approve the resolution relating to \$130,000,000 high school general obligation school building bonds, Series 2025.

Ms. Mickelson deferred to Mr. Dan Semmens, Partner, Dorsey & Whitney LLP, for additional details and to address any questions. Mr. Semmens explained that the resolutions before the Board represent the final action required to authorize and issue the bonds, following the bond sale on November 20. He outlined that bond closing is scheduled for December 18, at which time the Districts will receive the bond proceeds. Mr. Semmens reviewed the purpose of the resolutions, noting that they establish the terms of the bonds, authorize execution and delivery, provide for tax levies and repayment, and set up required construction and debt service accounts. He also explained that the resolutions include provisions necessary to maintain the bonds’ tax-exempt status, resulting in lower borrowing costs.

Board Chair Jennifer McKee commented, “At this point, I would entertain a motion to approve action item 1. *Consideration of Bond Resolutions Authorizing General Obligation School Building Bonds, Series 2025: a. Approval of Bond Resolution Authorizing \$31,500,000 Elementary School District General Obligation School Building Bonds, Series 2025.*”

Motion: Trustee Kay Satre moved to approve the *Consideration of Bond Resolutions Authorizing General Obligation School Building Bonds, Series 2025: a. Approval of Bond Resolution Authorizing \$31,500,000 Elementary School District General Obligation School Building Bonds, Series 2025.* Trustee Janet Armstrong seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 6-0; motion carries unanimously.

Board Chair Jennifer McKee commented, “At this point, I would entertain a motion to approve action item 1. *Consideration of Bond Resolutions Authorizing General Obligation School Building Bonds, Series 2025: b. Approval of Bond Resolution Authorizing \$130,000,000 High School District General Obligation School Building Bonds, Series 2025.*”

Motion: Trustee Janet Armstrong moved to approve the *Consideration of Bond Resolutions Authorizing General Obligation School Building Bonds, Series 2025: b. Approval of Bond Resolution Authorizing \$130,000,000 High School District General Obligation School Building Bonds, Series 2025*. Trustee Keith Meyer seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 6-0; motion carries unanimously.

2. Call for Annual Election

a. Helena Elementary School District No.1-Trustee Resolution Calling for a Mail Ballot Election

b. Helena High School District No.1-Trustee Resolution Calling for a Mail Ballot Election

Ms. Sam Holman, incoming Business Manager, presented the action items, 2. *Call for Annual Election a. Helena Elementary School District No.1-Trustee Resolution Calling for a Mail Ballot Election and b. Helena High School District No.1-Trustee Resolution Calling for a Mail Ballot Election* to the Board of Trustees.

Background:

The annual regular school election is held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in May, which is May 5th this year. The 2025 legislature changed the deadline to call for an election from 70 days before the election day to 145 days before the election (December 11th this year). Helena Public Schools entered into an agreement with the Lewis and Clark County Elections Office to conduct school elections for the district. The annual regular school election will be by mail ballot. The drop off location for ballots is at the Lewis and Clark County Elections Office located in the City-County Building. Voters will elect two trustees who reside within the elementary district boundaries to serve a three-year term and one trustee to serve a one-year term. In addition, voters will elect one trustee who resides in the Wolf Creek Elementary District or the Trinity Elementary District for a three-year term. General fund mill levy approval for both the elementary and high school districts is also being requested at this time.

The District will also be requesting an increase in the technology mill levy for both the elementary and the high school districts for the purpose of purchasing, renting, repairing and maintaining technological equipment, including computers and computer network access, cloud computing services for technology infrastructure, platforms, software, network, storage, security, data, database, test environment curriculum, or desktop virtualization purposes, including any subscription or any license-based or pay-per-use service that is accessed over the internet or other remote network to meet the district's information technology and other needs, and the associated technical training for school district personnel. If approved, the increased levies will be for a term of 10 years and will take effect on July 1, 2026, and expire June 30, 2035.

If it is later determined that any portion of the election is not required, that portion will be cancelled.

Considerations:

- Neither the ability to run a general fund mill levy nor the amount of the levy will be known until after the spring enrollment count is finalized and the issuance of preliminary budget data sheets. However, due to the statutory requirement to call for the election no later than 145 days before the election, the recommendation is to include the general fund mill levy request in the resolution. If the Board later determines that the mill levy cannot be requested or is not desired, that portion of the election can be cancelled.
- The trustees may amend the resolution calling for the annual election at least 70 days prior to the election (February 24).
- The exact dollar amount of the technology fund levies has yet to be decided and therefore, the estimated tax impact cannot be calculated at this time.
- If the number of candidates filing a nomination petition or filing a declaration of intent to be a write-in candidate is equal to or less than the number of open trustee positions, the trustee election can be cancelled, and trustees may be seated by acclamation.
- The county elections office has requested that the exact language, including amounts, for any and all levies be transmitted to their office by March 20 so they may begin to prepare the ballot layout in the week leading up to the March 26 ballot certification deadline. Any portion of the election may still be cancelled up until the March 26th deadline.
- The cost of running an election can range (depending on the number of ballots and number of voters) is approximately \$60,000-\$87,500.

Superintendent Recommendation:

Approve the attached resolution calling for the annual regular election.

Board Chair Jennifer McKee commented, “At this point, I would entertain a motion to approve the action item 2. *Call for Annual Election a. Helena Elementary School District No.1-Trustee Resolution Calling for a Mail Ballot Election.*”

Motion: Trustee Linda Cleatus moved to approve action item 2. *Call for Annual Election a. Helena Elementary School District No.1-Trustee Resolution Calling for a Mail Ballot Election.* Trustee Kay Satre seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 6-0; motion carries unanimously.

Board Chair Jennifer McKee commented, “At this point, I would entertain a motion to approve the action item 2. *Call for Annual Election b. Helena High School District No.1-Trustee Resolution Calling for a Mail Ballot Election.*”

Motion: Trustee Kay Satre moved to approve the action item, 2. *Call for Annual Election b. Helena High School District No.1-Trustee Resolution Calling for a Mail Ballot Election.* Trustee Keith Meyer seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 6-0; motion carries unanimously.

3. **Early Retirement Incentive**
a. **Approval of Early Retirement Incentive for Teachers**

Superintendent Wertz presented the action item, *3. Early Retirement Incentive: a. Approval of Early Retirement Incentive for Teachers*, to the Board of Trustees.

Background:

There is an interest in ensuring that the discrepancy between base salary and average teacher salary is not less than 70% to continue eligibility under the Student and Teacher Advancement for Results and Success (STARS) Act under the requirements of MCA 20-9-324. Helena Education Association (HEA) Members approved negotiating a larger percentage increase for the bottom of the scale than the top of the scale of the steps and lanes salary matrix when necessary. There is interest in rewarding the loyalty of the most tenured teachers to the District and for helping defer the financial crisis we found ourselves in.

Superintendent recommendation:

Approve a voluntary early retirement incentive of \$20,000 for a maximum of twenty-five qualifying teachers for 2025-2026 and 2026-2027. The incentive will be awarded to fifteen (15) teachers retiring June 2026 and ten (10) teachers retiring June 2027 who meet the eligibility criteria.

Superintendent Wertz addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

Board Chair Jennifer McKee commented, “At this point, I would entertain a motion to approve the action item *3. Early Retirement Incentive: a. Approval of Early Retirement Incentive for Teachers*.”

Motion: Trustee Keith Meyer moved to approve action item *3. Early Retirement Incentive: a. Approval of Early Retirement Incentive for Teachers*. Trustee Kay Satre seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 6-0; motion carries unanimously.

b. **Approval of Early Retirement Incentive for Administrators**

Superintendent Wertz presented the action item, *3. Early Retirement Incentive: b. Approval of Early Retirement Incentive for Administrators*, to the Board of Trustees.

Background:

As we continue to evaluate organizational needs and long-term staffing sustainability, Administrator (i.e., Principals, Assistant Principals, Assistant Superintendents, Directors) roles have been identified where there are potential retirements in the near term. A voluntary retirement incentive supports leadership succession, organizational alignment, and long-term fiscal stewardship.

Superintendent recommendation:

Approve a voluntary early retirement incentive of \$20,000 for up to two qualifying Administrators who retire June 2026.

Superintendent Wertz addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

Board Chair Jennifer McKee commented, “At this point, I would entertain a motion to approve the action item 3. *Early Retirement Incentive: b. Approval of Early Retirement Incentive for Administrators.*”

Motion: Trustee Linda Cleatus moved to approve action item 3. *Early Retirement Incentive: b. Approval of Early Retirement Incentive for Administrators.* Trustee Janet Armstrong seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 6-0; motion carries unanimously.

4. **Policy 2005: School Year, Calendar and Day**

Ms. Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director, presented action item 4. *Policy 2005: School Year, Calendar and Day* to the Board of Trustees. This policy has been updated to align with House Bill 591. The purpose is to educate students about the sacrifices made for freedom in the founding of the United States and the values on which the United States was founded. The committee also noted that, although Martin Luther King Day is no longer recognized as a federal school holiday, the district may still choose to close schools on that day, and the policy can remain unchanged. Ms. Mizell addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the policy.

Board Chair Jennifer McKee commented, “At this point, I would entertain a motion to approve action item 4. *Policy 2005: School Year, Calendar and Day.*”

Motion: Trustee Kay Satre moved to approve action item 4. *Policy 2005: School Year, Calendar and Day.* Trustee Keith Meyer seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 6-0; motion carries unanimously.

5. **Policy 2016: Human Sexuality and Identity Instruction**

Ms. Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director, presented action item 5. *Policy 2016: Human Sexuality and Identity Instruction* to the Board of Trustees. This policy has been updated to align with the revised definition of human sexuality and identity instruction as defined in House Bill 471. It further clarifies the parent or guardian’s right of consent for human sexuality instruction (opt out) and identity instruction (opt in) and the notice provisions. Ms. Mizell

addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the policy.

Board Chair Jennifer McKee commented, “At this point, I would entertain a motion to approve action item 5. *Policy 2016: Human Sexuality and Identity Instruction.*”

Motion: Trustee Janet Armstrong moved to approve action item 5. *Policy 2016: Human Sexuality and Identity Instruction.* Trustee Keith Meyer seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 6-0; motion carries unanimously.

6. **Policy 2100: Recognition of Native American Cultural Heritage**

Ms. Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director, presented action item 6. *Policy 2100: Recognition of Native American Cultural Heritage* to the Board of Trustees. The policy emphasizes that schools located in close proximity to Montana Tribes will work in consultation with Tribal partners when providing instruction and implementing educational goals that include Native American cultural heritage. Ms. Mizell addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the policy.

Board Chair Jennifer McKee commented, “At this point, I would entertain a motion to approve action item 6. *Policy 2100: Recognition of Native American Cultural Heritage.*”

Motion: Trustee Kay Satre moved to approve action item 6. *Policy 2100: Recognition of Native American Cultural Heritage.* Trustee Keith Meyer seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 6-0; motion carries unanimously.

7. **Policy 2140: Suicide Awareness and Prevention Training**

Ms. Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director, presented action item 7. *Policy 2140: Suicide Awareness and Prevention Training* to the Board of Trustees. This policy has been updated to reflect employee training timeline requirements, as well as to clarify how training may be delivered in accordance with Senate Bill 369. Ms. Mizell addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the policy.

Board Chair Jennifer McKee commented, “At this point, I would entertain a motion to approve action item 7. *Policy 2140: Suicide Awareness and Prevention Training.*”

Motion: Trustee Keith Meyer moved to approve action item 7. *Policy 2140: Suicide Awareness and Prevention Training.* Trustee Linda Cleatus seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 6-0; motion carries unanimously.

8. **Policy 4332: Display of Flags and Banners on District Property**

Ms. Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director, presented action item *Policy 4332: Display of Flags and Banners on District Property* to the Board of Trustees. This proposed policy was developed to align with House Bill 819 and addresses which flags and banners may be displayed on district or school property. Ms. Mizell clarified that the policy does not apply to personal clothing, jewelry, or accessories worn by school employees, except where uniform policies or official dress codes apply, as outlined in the district's employee handbook. One Trustee suggested that this clarification may be appropriate to include within the policy itself. The Board of Trustees agreed to table the policy and refer it back to the Policy Committee for further discussion at a future date.

Board Chair Jennifer McKee entertained a motion to table *Policy 4332, Display of Flags and Banners on District Property*, so it could be referred to the Policy Committee for further review and discussion at a future meeting.

Motion: Trustee Kay Satre moved to table *Policy 4332, Display of Flags and Banners on District Property*, so it could be referred to the Policy Committee for further review and discussion at a future meeting. Trustee Janet Armstrong seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 6-0; motion carries unanimously.

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

D. Item For Information

1. HSD Pay Plan Recommendation

Mr. Jim Kerins with CMS provided an informational update on the development of the HSD Pay Plan. He reviewed the work completed to date, including the use of the district's salary survey and board-adopted compensation philosophy as the foundation for a revised pay plan. Mr. Kerins explained that the pay plan consists of three components: a revised wage matrix, a job classification system, and pay plan rules currently under development.

He outlined the proposed transition to a new independent staff wage matrix, noting improvements over the existing matrix, including more consistent step increases, smoother progression between grades, greater predictability for budgeting, and stronger alignment with market rates. The revised matrix is designed so that employees generally reach market pay around Step 5, with opportunities for continued growth.

Mr. Kerins also discussed the classification process for placing positions into appropriate grades based on job content and market data, as well as upcoming communication efforts with staff. He emphasized that the pay plan is a continuation of work previously presented to the board and noted that the update was provided for information only. CMS anticipates bringing a formal

recommendation to the board for action at a future meeting, following further implementation and communication. Mr. Kerins addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

2. Policy 3097: Use of Video Monitoring Cameras

Ms. Mizell presented *Policy 3097: Use of Video Monitoring Cameras* to the Board of Trustees. This policy has been updated to align with parental rights under House Bill 32, allowing video monitoring during events open to the public. At the last Policy Committee meeting, clarifying language was added to specify that no staff member or volunteer may make an audio or video recording of a student without the student’s parental permission. Ms. Mizell addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

3. Policy 1020: School Board Elections

Ms. Mizell presented *Policy 1020: School Board Elections* to the Board of Trustees. This policy has been updated to reflect the changes to candidate filing deadlines and withdrawal under House Bill 406. There is also a requirement that school elections must be called at least 145 days before a regular election, but they can be amended until 70 days prior to the election. There is an allowance for a period of 70 days to call a special election. Ballot certification must occur no fewer than 40 days before the election. Ms. Mizell addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

4. Policy 2103: Religion and Religious Activities

Ms. Mizell presented *Policy 2103: Religion and Religious Activities* to the Board of Trustees. This policy has been updated to reflect changes to House Bill 343, which now requires—rather than simply permits—the district to release a student at the parent’s request (at least annually) for not less than one hour per week for formal religious instruction. The Policy Committee made an update to lines 26 and 27 to use more inclusive language. The revision clarifies that a student may read any religious material during free reading time, rather than referencing a specific religious text. Ms. Mizell addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

5. Policy 2165: Early Literacy Targeted Intervention

Ms. Mizell presented *Policy 2165: Early Literacy Targeted Intervention* to the Board of Trustees. This policy has been updated to reflect current legislation, including the removal of lines 33 through 35, clarifying the definition of scholastic literacy and incorporating math into early targeted intervention programs. Ms. Mizell addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

6. **Policy 3000: Equal Educational Opportunities**

Ms. Mizell presented *Policy 3000: Equal Educational Opportunities* to the Board of Trustees. The policy changes reflect Senate Bill 350, which permits schools districts and MHSA to prohibit participation of a home school student in extracurricular activities based upon the student either not being a US citizen or a resident of the state of Montana. Ms. Mizell addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

7. **Policy 3410: Student Health/Physical Screenings/Examinations**

Ms. Mizell presented *Policy 3410: Student Health/Physical Screenings/Examinations* to the Board of Trustees. House Bill 599 requires that a district provide parents with notice of the right to opt out of physical or mental health screenings or surveys and to be notified of the results of any such screenings. The policy has been updated to align with this requirement. Ms. Mizell addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

8. **Policy 5025: Employment and Assignment**

Ms. Mizell presented *Policy 5025: Employment and Assignment* to the Board of Trustees. Under House Bill 226, state penalties can be issued to employers for failing to comply with federal immigration laws and the bill grants Montana Department of Labor and Industry subpoena power to determine compliance. Language was added to the policy stating, “including, but not limited to, verification that the employee is authorized to work in the United States.” Ms. Mizell addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

9. **Policy 5075: Termination of Employment**

Ms. Mizell presented *Policy 5075: Termination of Employment* to the Board of Trustees. This policy has been updated with a legal reference to House Bill 602. Under House Bill 602, in the process of nonrenewal of a nontenured teacher, if the recommendation for nonrenewal is for financial reasons, this must be stated in the Board agenda posted before June 1st, which is subject to public comment. Ms. Mizell addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

E. 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, “Hello everyone, great to see you all again! To get started I would like to talk about our school-wide information. Winter concerts are being put on by our amazing music groups and led by Mr. Hollow, Mrs.

Kohoutek, and Mr. Cleary. We have some very talented students so I know they will be doing a great job. All freshmen have been going through YAM training in their P.E. classes which inform them about warning signs of a friend needing help and what to do because of it. We have partnered with MSU on this, and it is a great way for students to learn how they can help. On December 9 and 10, freshman and sophomore students will be taking MAP assessments so that teachers can view what they would score on the ACT tests and for them to know how they can improve their teaching. Our school leadership team is working hard to move forward with a school and district goal related to furthering our approaches related to disciplinary literacy and overall growth of students' thinking, writing, and preparing like a professional in all our content areas. Each PLC (department) provided our SLT with insight into what they are currently doing in their classes related to vocabulary instruction, writing approaches, and the skills needed to be a professional in their field. Our next steps with this are to analyze the information given to us, look at commonalities for our strong points and areas in need of improvement. Also, our clubs have been hard at work collecting food. Now I'll move on to my recognitions. The volleyball team had six All-Conference/All-State recognition and the boys' and girls' soccer team had nine. Milo Kauffman finished 15th place in the Regional Cross Country Competition last month. This competition had over 500 competitors from the states in the Northwest. Thank you to our World Language team for the amazing Winter Holiday Market they put on at Central School this past week. Bizz, Emily, Carrie, Leah, Susan, and Sheila do amazing work to build an understanding of other cultures and cultural traditions throughout our district and community. Strings and Desserts will be held on December 11 at lunch in the library. Our Choir is singing at lunch in the Capitol Rotunda with CHS, HMS, and CRA choirs – a very awesome event. Join us to hand out donuts on Thursday, December 18 – 8:00 a.m. at any entrance. A Holiday Assembly showcasing our music groups will take place on Friday, December 19, at 10:00 a.m.” Mr. Gardipee addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

Ms. Delaney Lynch, Capital High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees, presented her Student Representative Report. Ms. Lynch commented, “Good evening, Trustees, with the last couple of weeks of school wrapping up before the holidays, lots of things have been happening at Capital High School.

Holiday concert season:

First, orchestra students performed last Tuesday as well as this past Thursday when they performed in the Capitol Rotunda (during the day, as they can no longer perform at night).

Upcoming concerts:

Monday, December 8- CHS Band Concert, CHS Auditorium, 7:00 pm

Tuesday, December 9- CHS Choir Winter Concert, CHS Auditorium, 7:00 pm (yes, the same night as the board meeting)

NHS Food Drive:

The CHS NHS recently held a food drive. A classroom competition amongst second-period homeroom classes occurred with the winning class earning donuts.

Total items donated: 563

Winning Homeroom: Mrs. Rummel, with 202 items donated!

Toys for Tots- thank you to NHS and Chelsea Mazurek-Pierce:

National Honor Society is helping with Toys for Tots this year. The deadline is the end of this

Friday, the 12th. Please note that toys must be new and in their original packaging.

Talent Show Finalists/Shakespeare in the Schools, from Laura Brayko:

Congratulations to our talent show finalists who will perform at the Holiday Assembly on December 19!

Claudia Cook
Declan O'Leary and Thomas Byron
Daniel Dachs
Isabella Fedele

Shakespeare in the Schools:

This traveling troupe will be at CHS on Tuesday for an 80-minute performance of *Richard III* in the gymnasium starting at 8:30 a.m. on Tuesday, December 9. Interested English teachers can bring their students. Due to the choir concert that evening, the performance will be held in the CHS gym.

SLT Professional Development:

Last Monday, December 1, the CHS School Leadership Team presented strategies to all teachers during PLC time on the following items:

1. Writing does not have to be an event
2. Disciplinary Literacy
3. Engagement

Our focus this year is on the implementation of literacy strategies across all curricular areas. Next, the goal will be for each individual teacher (or specific PLC team) to share a prompt/assignment that incorporated one of the presented strategies, along with a student sample of it.

MAP Winter Assessment- starts tomorrow, December 8:

Like the fall assessment, all freshman and sophomore students will take the MAP Winter Benchmark Assessment in their math and English classes (which assesses math and language arts skills). This assessment will produce data to allow all freshman teachers to see student growth from the fall benchmark to the winter benchmark.

Building Bond Upgrade Survey:

Slate and RTA Architects are collecting student, teacher, and parent data to determine the areas in need of improvement in light of the renovation of Capital High School. We had our first DAG (Design Advisory Group) meeting with architects last Tuesday, and our team is comprised of select staff, students, and parents. This week, Slate architects will host a staff meeting on Wednesday to facilitate communication regarding building design.

We are looking forward to the holidays at CHS and are eager to start the new year! Go Bru!"

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

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. Mr. Myers provided updates on state and accreditation reporting due in February, noting challenges with system alignment and thanking staff for their work. Technology updates included student ChatGPT content filtering with broader access for teachers, improved student password security, camera server upgrades, ongoing administrative training, and technology planning input for the bond process based on prior construction experience. Facilities updates included recent plumbing repairs and staffing additions, boiler issues at Central School, routine air-handler maintenance districtwide, winterization of Vigilante Stadium, and support for the Bryant School mural installation. Ongoing projects include the Smith Elementary boiler project, completion of solar design work with bidding planned for next summer, progress on the Klint Fisher Memorial project, and continued erosion concerns at Central School. Safety and security updates included fire marshal and Montana Department of Labor inspections and coordination with the Safety Advisory Committee. Trustee Hathhorn also shared key takeaways from the recent facilities tour to Spokane, emphasizing school design as community-centered spaces, thoughtful public access layouts, and the sense of pride created by new facilities. Trustee Hathhorn addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

4. **Budget and Finance Committee Report**
Trustee Janet Armstrong presented the Budget and Finance Committee Report. The committee reviewed bond-related budget items and noted a variance in paraeducator expenses, largely due to the expansion of Kinder Sprouts classrooms and the assignment of additional special education paraeducators. Administration indicated that finance staff and the assistant superintendent are working collaboratively to establish a clearer baseline for next year. The committee also discussed the district's careful approach to preserving interlocal funds, particularly as bond proceeds become available, while remaining mindful of future bond issuances and anticipated reductions in interlocal balances. Trustee Armstrong acknowledged this meeting as Janelle Mickelson's final committee meeting, expressing appreciation for her integrity, expertise, and trusted judgment in managing complex financial and legal matters, and thanked her for her service to the district. Trustee Armstrong addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

5. **Teaching & Learning Committee Reports**
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**

Trustee Kay Satre presented the Health Benefits Committee Report to the Board of Trustees. Trustee Satre reported on the Health Benefits Committee meeting, including the annual health plan review with Allegiance for the 2024–2025 plan year. Membership declined, largely due to workforce reductions, and enrollment shifted between plan options following prior plan design changes. Medical costs increased modestly, pharmacy costs increased significantly, and overall combined costs rose. The number of catastrophic claims decreased from the prior year. Major cost drivers included mental health, neurological, musculoskeletal conditions, cancer, and gastrointestinal disorders.

Utilization trends showed increased use of urgent care and office visits, slight decreases in preventive visits for some age groups, and cancer screening rates above benchmarks. The St. Peter’s Health narrow network generated significant cost savings. Dental utilization declined, while vision utilization increased. Despite an unusually high claims month, the health plan remained financially stable with unreserved funds exceeding the prior year’s balance.

The committee also discussed updating its handbook and ongoing evaluation of the Bridged Health Alliance. A meeting with the Alliance was scheduled to review the potential benefits and risks of joining, noting that several AA districts have chosen to join contingent upon provider network and performance guarantees.

Trustee Satre addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

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 committee and board meetings, and the Board then moved to hear final comments.

VII. BOARD/SUPERINTENDENT COMMENTS

Trustee Janet Armstrong shared remarks about attending the Central School holiday market, noting the strong participation and performance of the German Club, as well as the presence of other world language programs. She also highlighted positive conversations with Helena High staff regarding Principal Kessler’s efforts to build community connections and welcome students from other schools as future Helena High students, praising this proactive approach to relationship-building and outreach. Superintendent Weltz announced that Janelle Mickelson’s retirement celebration will be held on December 18 at 5:30 p.m. at Mount Ascension.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Board Chair Jennifer McKee adjourned the meeting at 10:02 p.m.

Candice Delvaux, Recording Secretary

Date