



**Superintendent**

Rex Wertz  
324-2001

**Business Director**

Sam Holman  
324-2040

## Board of Trustees Meeting

Lincoln Center  
1325 Poplar St., Helena, MT 59601  
And on TEAMS

**Tuesday, January 13, 2026**  
5:30 p.m.

### MINUTES

**ATTENDANCE – Present unless otherwise noted.**

Jennifer McKee, Chair  
Jennifer Walsh, Vice Chair  
Siobhan Hathhorn, Trustee  
Linda Cleatus, Trustee  
Janet Armstrong, Trustee  
Keith Meyer, Trustee  
Kay Satre, Trustee  
Jenny Murnane Butcher,  
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  
Sam Holman, Business Director  
Todd Verrill, Facilities Director  
Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director  
Gary Myers, Director of Educational  
Technology  
Justine Alberts, Assistant Superintendent  
Lona Carter, Student Health Services and Special Education Director  
Taylor Lassiter, Communications Specialist  
Jane Shawn, HEA President  
Tim Meldrum, SMA Architecture & Design  
Several Representatives from Slate & RTA Architecture  
Several Representatives from Mosaic Architecture and Cushing Terrell  
Jim Kerins, CMS  
Many guests of the public as well as Helena School District staff

## **I. CALL TO ORDER / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Board Vice Chair Jennifer Walsh 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 proposed changes.

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:

**Support** – Project for Alternative Learning – Family – Friends

### **Recognitions**

- I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to all our staff and students for their incredible efforts in supporting our community and students this holiday season. Through food drives, toy collections, fundraisers, and various service projects, their generosity has made a meaningful impact on those in need. We are truly grateful for their dedication to making this time of year brighter for others. In addition to helping families in need, these annual projects allow our students to experience the joy of giving and to plant the seeds of community spirit.
- Winter Music Programs Appreciation
- January-School Board Recognition Month
- January-Law Enforcement Appreciation Month
- Thank you to Callie Aschim & the Chamber of Commerce for hosting Community Outreach: Brews & Blueprints. The next event will be February 25 at 5:30 p.m. at Brothers Tapworks
- Valley of Gold Speech & Debate Tournament Coaches and Volunteer Judges
- Congratulations to our newly certified National Board Teachers
- Facilities Team Commended for Districtwide Wind Storm Cleanup
- Other

### **New Business**

- Montana's Innovative Educational Program (IEP) Tax Credit
  - Forms due by January 20
- Kindergarten registration for Fall 2026 opened January 7
- Mount Ascension Charter School Preliminary Registration form closes January 21
- Facilities Bond Projects –
  - Bond Update
  - HHS/PAL Precedent Tour - Spokane, Washington - December
  - KESS Precedent Tour - Spokane, Washington - January
  - Bond/Construction/Facility Meetings
    - Owner's Rep
  - HHS Project

- CHS Project
- KESS Project
- GCCM RFQ/RFP Schedule
  - Dick Anderson Construction selected as GCCM for HHS
  - CHS Recommendation and Board Approval
- “Grow Our Own” Initiative Update
  - Para-to-Teacher
  - Teacher (Staff) to Leadership
- CMS Ongoing Work –
  - Compensation Philosophy
  - Pay Plan Rules
  - Independent and Administrative Salary Matrix
  - Activity/Athletic Coaching Compensation Market Analysis
- District Academic Focus Work – 2026-2027
  - Academic Performance Indicators and Targets
  - Data Dashboard
  - Behaviors and Academic Growth
- Bridged Health Alliance – Ongoing Discussions
- Early Retirement Teacher and Administrator Incentive Initiative Update
- Cell Phone Ongoing Discussion and Planning
- Copy/Print Center Equipment Lease Contracts and Efficiency Upgrades
- National Conference on Education – Nashville
  - Assistant Superintendents & Superintendent
  - February 12-14
- Early Discussions – Facilities – RFP with Front Street Learning Center Post-PAL Relocation
- Transportation Facility Planning – New District Facility
  - Within City Limits
  - Route Mileage Decrease
- Hawthorne Elementary & MBC RFP Updates
- Dr. Plucker Gifted & Talented Program Review
- Ameresco Energy Audits Across the District (Elementary)
  - Energy Savings
  - Researching Facility Upgrades
- Preplanning and Strategic Monitoring of Washington, D.C. as January 30 Draws Near – Possible Disruption with Another Shutdown
- No School January 19 & 26
- Other

### **Outreach/Meetings**

- AA Superintendents Weekly Meeting
- CHS GCCM RFP/RFQ Submission Review and Interviews
- Bond/Construction/Facility Meetings
  - Owner’s Rep
  - Bond
  - Bond Finance
  - HHS Project - Architect Team & Construction Team

- CHS Project - Architect Team
- KESS Project - Architect Team
- New Kessler School Community Engagement Meeting
- Rotary Club Presentation
- Chamber of Commerce
- Community Outreach – Brews & Blueprints
- Board Leadership
- Legal Counsel
- DA Davidson Discussions
- HEA
- HEF
- HEF Executive Committee
- Parent Advisory Committee
- Teacher Advisory Committee
- Health Benefits Committee
- Helena Food Share
- Cabinet & Leadership
- TV, Print, Radio, and Media
- Meeting with Architectural Firm – Interview Debrief
- 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 the following: her support for a clear and comprehensive cell phone ban in schools that requires physical separation from personal devices; her encouragement for the Board to focus discussion on implementation strategies rather than debating whether cell phones should be allowed; and her belief, based on research and examples from other states and districts, that smartphones negatively impact the learning environment. She emphasized the importance of providing focused instructional time, particularly for at-risk students, and cited reported improvements in school climate and student engagement following the implementation of cell phone restrictions elsewhere.

The Board of Trustees proceeded to hear the Facilities Bond Projects Updates.

## V. NEW BUSINESS

### A. Items for Information - Facilities Bond Projects Updates

1. **Helena High Campus Update**
  - a. **Helena High School**
  - b. **Project for Alternative Learning (PAL)**
  - c. **District Kitchen**
  - d. **Competition Stadium**

Mr. Tim Meldrum of SMA provided an update on the Helena High School campus project, highlighting progress on the draft site master plan, schematic design, and space-blocking studies. He explained how key program areas—including CTE spaces, performing arts facilities, gyms, academic classrooms, and specialized PAL spaces—are being thoughtfully arranged to support both functionality and a positive learning environment, while maximizing natural light, circulation, and maintainability. Feedback from educators informed the selection of a centralized commons space, ensuring usability and collaboration. Mr. Meldrum also noted plans for a districtwide digital dashboard to provide ongoing, transparent updates on design and construction progress.

Mr. Meldrum addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

2. **Capital High School Update**

Representatives from Slate and RTA Architecture provided an update on the Capital High School design process. They discussed progress in analyzing the existing building, including departmental layouts, classroom utilization, and shop equipment needs, to inform programming and ensure equitable learning environments. The architects also reviewed the Design Advisory Group (DAG) process, noting robust participation from community members, parents, teachers, and students, including “day in the life” exercises to identify operational pinch points and opportunities. Preliminary site concepts and massing studies were presented to the DAG, with feedback guiding the selection and refinement of a preferred design. The team emphasized that upcoming schematic design work will incorporate DAG input alongside continued collaboration with district staff to finalize a functional, efficient, and flexible campus design.

Representatives from Slate and RTA Architecture addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

3. **Kessler Elementary School Update**

Representatives from Mosaic Architecture and Cushing Terrell provided an update on the Kessler Elementary School design process. They reviewed the district’s established guiding principles—including designing for the whole child, integrating technology, creating adaptable and breakout learning spaces, promoting community use, and fostering healthy, sustainable environments—and discussed how these are being applied specifically to Kessler. The team highlighted extensive qualitative and quantitative engagement with teachers, staff, students, and the community, including classroom programming meetings, site assessments, and discussions to understand the school’s culture, educational goals, and functional needs. Input from these sessions emphasized the

importance of inclusivity, student belonging, and a family-oriented school culture, which will inform both educational programming and the building’s design. The team also addressed site considerations, including topography, stormwater management, and modular placement, and noted that programming work will continue with a February deliverable. They concluded by sharing insights from student engagement activities, which reinforced the value of personal expression, performance, and opportunities for students to contribute to the school community.

Representatives from Mosaic Architecture and Cushing Terrell addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

#### 4. **GCCM RFQ/RFP Timeline**

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

Superintendent Wertz provided an update on the GCCM RFQ/RFP process. Dick Anderson Construction was approved as the GCCM for Helena High School, and a kickoff meeting was held with SMA, Facilities, Sodexo, and the Owner’s Representative to establish expectations and alignment. A representative from Dick Anderson Construction, Bob Heberly, was present and provided a brief introduction and overview of the company’s current support role with the design teams. A recommendation for the Capital High School GCCM will be presented at a Special Board Meeting, followed by a kickoff meeting with Slate Architecture. Advertisements for the Kessler Elementary GCCM have been released, with screenings and interviews underway and selection anticipated by February 6.

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

#### **B. 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. 12.9.25 Board of Trustees Full Board Meeting Minutes

Board Vice Chair Jennifer Walsh commented, “At this point, I would entertain a motion to approve the *Consent Action Items* as presented.”

**Motion:** Trustee Siobhan Hathhorn moved to approve the *Consent Action Items* as presented. Trustee Kay Satre seconded the motion.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Vote:** 8-0; 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 the Approval of Pay Plan Rules**

Ms. Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director, and Jim Kerins with CMS presented action item 1, *Consideration of the Approval of Pay Plan Rules* to the Board of Trustees.

##### **Background:**

Pay Plan Rules establish a structured framework to ensure consistency, transparency, and fiscal responsibility in compensation practices. These rules support the uniform administration of employee compensation for employees not covered by a collective bargaining agreement (independent employees) across the District, while aligning pay practices with available funding and the District's strategic workforce goals. The Pay Plan Rules are intended to provide clear guidance for compensation decisions, promote equitable treatment of employees, and support responsible financial planning. The District engaged Communication Management Services (CMS), LLC, to support the development of formal Pay Plan Rules. A Steering Committee met on November 17, 2025, and December 18, 2025, to review the benefits of formalized pay plan rules, solicit feedback, and finalize the proposed Pay Plan Rules for District consideration.

##### **Superintendent recommendation:**

Approve the adoption of the Pay Plan Rules.

Mr. Kerins addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

Board Vice Chair Jennifer Walsh commented, "At this point, I would entertain a motion to approve action item 1, *Consideration of the Approval of Pay Plan Rules*."

**Motion:** Trustee Linda Cleatus moved to approve the action item, *Consideration of the Approval of Pay Plan Rules*. Trustee Siobhan Hathhorn seconded the motion.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Vote:** 8-0; motion carries unanimously.

#### **2. Consideration of the Approval of the Transition to a New Salary Matrix for Independents**

Ms. Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director, and Mr. Jim Kerins with CMS, presented action item 2, *Consideration of the Approval of the Transition to a New Salary Matrix for Independents*, to the Board of Trustees.

Background:

The current salary matrix for independent (non-represented) employees contains inconsistencies in the percentage increases between steps and grades. Over time, these inconsistencies have created challenges related to logical salary progression and long-term budget forecasting. The proposed salary matrix developed by Communication and Management Services (CMS), LLC, aligns with the District's compensation philosophy, specifically the principles of equity and transparency, budgetary discipline, and consistency in employment actions. Placement of independent employees on the new salary matrix will be based on their current pay. Employees' salaries will generally increase as part of the transition, with expanded earning potential under the new structure. The anticipated fiscal note is \$35,000 for implementation for the 25-26 fiscal year.

Superintendent recommendation:

Approve the transition to a new salary matrix for independent employees effective July 1, 2025.

Mr. Kerins addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

Board Vice Chair Jennifer Walsh commented, "At this point, I would entertain a motion to approve action item 2, *Consideration of the Approval of the Transition to a New Salary Matrix for Independents.*"

**Motion:** Trustee Kay Satre moved to approve action item 2, *Consideration of the Approval of the Transition to a New Salary Matrix for Independents.* Trustee Janet Armstrong seconded the motion.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Vote:** 8-0; motion carries unanimously.

### 3. Consideration of the Approval of Districtwide Boundary Adjustments

Assistant Superintendent Josh McKay presented the action item 3, *Consideration of the Approval of Districtwide Boundary Adjustments* to the Board of Trustees.

Assistant Superintendent Josh McKay presented the rationale and timeline for the proposed districtwide boundary adjustments, noting the changes are driven by enrollment imbalances between the east and west sides of town, facility planning tied to construction projects, and the goal of providing more equitable educational opportunities and staffing across schools. He reviewed the district's extensive communication efforts dating back to November 2022, including board presentations, community forums, newsletters, and an online question-and-answer platform. Mr. McKay emphasized that boundary changes must align with construction planning and cannot occur in isolation. He clarified that current students may remain in their schools, outlined transfer options, and addressed common community questions regarding boundary lines and transportation. Feedback received to date has been limited and largely positive. He concluded by presenting the recommendation for approval of the proposed boundary adjustments.

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

Board Vice Chair Jennifer Walsh commented, “At this point, I would entertain a motion to approve action item 3, *Consideration of the Approval of Districtwide Boundary Adjustments.*”

**Motion:** Trustee Siobhan Hathhorn moved to approve action item 3, *Consideration of the Approval of Districtwide Boundary Adjustments.* Trustee Keith Meyer seconded the motion.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Vote:** 7-0; motion carries unanimously. (*Chair Jennifer McKee was not in attendance for the vote.*)

The Board of Trustees moved on to hear the Reports.

## D. 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 wrap up second quarter, lots of exciting things are happening at Capital High.

Holiday Assembly:

The annual Holiday Assembly was held on the last day of school for 2025. Students and staff were treated to musical performances by the jazz band as well as modern band acts. Also, finalists from the Capital High Has Talent competition performed, and votes were collected for the top act. A great way to go into the holiday break!

Poetry Out Loud Finals were held last Thursday night:

First: Addison Lassu

Second: Elizabeth Marron

Third: William Shropshire

Alternate: Araya Harrison

Thank you to Laura Brayko for creating this opportunity for students.

Night to Shine- mark your calendars, from Jessica Freeman:

Night to Shine auditions are in full swing. We are going to have an amazing show this year, full

of great talent, including several students from here at CHS!

Registration for the upcoming 2026-2027 school year- starts in early February:

Week of February 9 - current 11th graders (course requests entered 2/13)

Week of February 16 - current 10th graders (course requests entered 2/20)

Week of February 23 - current 9th graders (course requests entered 2/27)

Week of March 16 - current 8th graders

Tuesday, March 17th: 8th graders tour CHS/receive registration information

Wednesday, March 18th: 8th Grade Parent Night @ CHS - TBD

Friday, March 20th: Counselors collect registration materials

Bond building updates:

This week, Tuesday (same night as the board meeting) is the CHS Design Advisory Group Meeting #3 with Slate/RTA Architects. The CHS DAG group is a collection of 9th/10th grade students, staff, and parents.

On Wednesday of this week, there will be a monthly staff meeting with Slate/RTA Architects at lunchtime in the auditorium. Our architects host a staff meeting once a month, on the second Wednesday of the month, at lunchtime.

SLT:

The CHS SLT (school leadership team) is meeting our literacy consultant, Liz Tuss, tomorrow afternoon. The goal of this meeting is to mesh MAP growth data, instructional round data, and details/areas of focus shared by the Cognia External Accreditation Team.

Speaking of Cognia Accreditation, we found out just before the holiday break that Capital High is once again a Cognia-accredited school. The review team identified one area of noteworthy achievement as well as recommendations for three areas of focus.

Valley of Gold Speech and Debate Tournament:

Speech events were held at CHS this past Friday and Saturday. Thank you to all of you that volunteered to be a judge!

It has been a great end to 2nd quarter here at CHS and we are excited to continue this throughout the 2025-2026 school year. Go Bru!"

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

Mr. Brock Gardipee, Helena High School Student Representative for the Board of Trustees, presented his Student Representative Report. Mr. Gardipee commented, "Hey everyone, it is good to see you again! The semester is finishing up, so teachers and students are preparing for the upcoming semester tests next week. It has been a great school year so far and hopefully it will continue into the next semester, but boy do I hate finals. Something that is also coming up

is registration for the 2026-2027 school year so it will be interesting to see which classes the future of Helena High signs up for. This week, students are given the opportunity to connect with the architect team to input their voice or ask questions about the future school building which I know many will be excited about. Winter formal was this past Friday, and roughly 200 students attended. I know many people had a great time! This past weekend we also co-hosted one of the largest speech and debate tournaments with Capital. The competitions were all at Helena High and everyone did great! For Helena High's recognitions, we had 12 football players receive all conference or all state awards with many of the players receiving multiple awards. I would like to congratulate Mrs. Svingen and Mrs. Kohutek on receiving their National Board Certifications. They're both great teachers who do amazing things! I would also like to thank Mr. Cleary, Mr. Hollow and Mrs. Kohutek for the amazing holiday assembly. It was the best I had ever been to, and the students have a lot of talent. And finally thank you to our janitorial team who worked hard cleaning our schools while we were away; it looks way better than before. Coming up we are handing out doughnuts January 15, and the second round of RBHI testing comes out February 2."

Mr. Gardipee 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. Trustee Hathhorn reported that the Facilities and Technology Committee met and received an update from Ameresco regarding the district's energy savings program, which will allow projects to begin while generating long-term energy cost savings. She noted wind damage repairs estimated at \$20,000–\$25,000 are being addressed through insurance. Ongoing projects include the Smith Boiler replacement, completion of the Smith solar design in coordination with SMA, and multiple Fire Marshal re-inspections. Technology updates included completion of spring enrollment and behavior reporting counts used for state funding calculations, implementation of longer student passwords to improve cybersecurity, camera server upgrades, door fob installations, and continued planning for technology and projection systems in new buildings. 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. Highlights included a discussion of elementary and high school custodial overtime, noting that post-COVID staffing needs may have been previously underestimated. Overall, 88% of the elementary budget and 83% of the high school budget is allocated to staff, a significant improvement from earlier deficits. The Superintendent noted that early retirement plans and two-year teacher contracts are helping provide stability and accurate projections. The committee also received an update on the bond, which closed in December; funds are earning interest, and invoices from firms such as SMA are beginning to be processed. Trustee

Armstrong addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

5. **Teaching & Learning Committee Report**

Trustee Siobhan Hathhorn presented the Teaching and Learning Committee Report. Trustee Hathhorn reported on the December Teaching and Learning Committee meeting. Although three agenda items were scheduled, discussions were robust and focused on homelessness, the district's English Learner (EL) program, and Indian Education for All (IEFA). Committee members discussed the increasing numbers of students experiencing homelessness, the impact of the recent government shutdown on vulnerable families, and ongoing community support needs. The district currently has one EL teacher, who is managing multiple demands without state funding. The meeting also included introductions from IEFA educators, who highlighted their specialties and recommended greater integration of Indian Education into the curriculum across subjects, as well as a stronger focus on Native American Day next year. Trustee Hathhorn addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the information presented.

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 that the Health Benefits Committee has been evaluating whether the district should join the Bridged Health Alliance or continue managing its self-funded plan independently. The committee met with Bridged representatives and consultants Alliant and Prism to review options, risks, and potential benefits. While both paths would maintain a self-funded structure, joining Bridged would involve pooled services and a five-year commitment, with possible long-term advantages such as greater stability and access to a larger risk pool, though limited short-term savings are anticipated. Consultants cautioned that Bridged remains in development pending sufficient statewide participation, and some proposal terms are not yet finalized. The committee continues to assess these factors and plans to meet again on January 22 to vote on a recommendation to Superintendent Weltz. Superintendent Weltz and the trustees engaged in discussion regarding Bridged Health Alliance and 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 Vice Chair Jennifer Walsh reviewed upcoming committee and board meetings with the Board of Trustees and Superintendent Wertz.

**VII. BOARD/SUPERINTENDENT COMMENTS**

Superintendent Wertz expressed appreciation for the engagement of the Student Representatives, highlighting their thoughtful participation in discussions, including the recent conversation regarding insurance. Trustees shared pride in the professionalism, curiosity, and critical thinking demonstrated by the students. They also noted positive experiences visiting schools and emphasized the broader accomplishments of the district beyond facilities projects, including strong district-staff relationships and collaboration with the union.

**VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

Board Vice Chair Jennifer Walsh adjourned the meeting at 9:15 p.m.

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Candice Delvaux, Recording Secretary

Date