



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 Work Session Meeting

Thursday, February 26, 2026

10:00 a.m.

Lincoln Center & Teams

MINUTES

ATTENDEES

Trustees

Linda Cleatus, Trustee
Janet Armstrong, Trustee
Kay Satre, Trustee
Jenny Murnane Butcher, Trustee
Siobhan Hathhorn, Trustee
Jennifer Walsh, Trustee

Others

Rex Weltz, Superintendent
Rob Brewer, Facilities Manager
Sam Holman, Business Director
Matt Carey, PAL Principal
Candice Delvaux, Executive Assistant
Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent 6-12
Justine Alberts, Assistant Superintendent PreK-5
Brett Zanto, Capital High School Principal
Gary Myers, Director of Educational Technology
Robert Worthy, Sodexo General Manager
Alec Pinero, Hulteng
Shane Swandal, Hulteng
Brian Kessler, Helena High School Principal
Riley Thatcher, Kessler Elementary School Principal
Several representatives from Mosaic and Golden Eagle/Swank
Several representatives from Slate, RTA, & Langlas
Several representatives from A&E & SMA, NAC, & Dick Anderson Construction
Several Guests of the Public

I. CALL TO ORDER/ PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Trustee Kay Satre called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m. and the Board participated in the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. REVIEW OF AGENDA

Trustee Kay Satre reviewed the agenda with the Board of Trustees and there were no changes.

The Board of Trustees then proceeded to hear general public comment.

III. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no general public comment.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Items for Information

1. Kessler Elementary School Architecture & Construction Update - Mosaic and Golden Eagle/Swank

The Board of Trustees received a Kessler Elementary School Architecture & Construction update from Mosaic and Golden Eagle/Swank. The design team reviewed the guiding principles that have been refined specifically for Kessler Elementary based on feedback from teachers, students, parents, and community members. Key themes emphasized in the updated principles include belonging and inclusion, hands-on and engaging learning environments, whole-child wellness, strong community partnerships, and connections to nature and real-world experiences. These priorities reflect feedback gathered through staff collaboration and community engagement activities.

An overview of the project schedule and planning process was presented. The team is currently transitioning into the schematic design phase and continuing to coordinate timelines with the Construction Manager/General Contractor (GCCM). Potential work being evaluated for the upcoming summer includes site utility work and rerouting a storm line. The team noted that current planning indicates the modular classrooms likely will not need to be relocated, which would reduce project costs. Additionally, the GCCM has proposed evaluating whether construction of the building shell could begin this summer, though feasibility is still under review.

The team described several student and staff engagement efforts, including classroom activities, feedback boards, and a collaborative mural project completed with a local artist in partnership with the Holter Museum. Student feedback highlighted a strong love of reading and library spaces, appreciation for school events that build community, and interest in inclusive, accessible learning environments.

Teacher engagement sessions focused on programming needs, collaboration, and maintaining the strong culture among staff while transitioning to a larger facility.

Staff also emphasized the importance of utilizing the unique site for outdoor and nature-based learning opportunities.

Finally, the team discussed building size and budget considerations. The current concept is approximately 71,000–72,000 square feet, and the project team will work to refine the design to approximately 69,000–70,000 square feet to align with the project budget and reduce long-term maintenance costs. This size range is consistent with other recently constructed elementary schools in the district.

Principal Riley Thatcher submitted a comment expressing appreciation for the collaborative process and noting that staff feel their input has been reflected in the design while maintaining flexibility for future needs.

Questions from Board members and staff were addressed during the presentation. Following the presentation, the Board recessed for a short break before continuing the meeting.

2. Capital High School Architecture & Construction Update - Slate + RTA & Langlas

The Board of Trustees received a Capital High School Architecture and Construction update from representatives from Slate and RTA and Langlas. The team reviewed the project schedule and current design phase. The project is in the schematic design phase, which focuses on high-level architectural layouts and narratives from engineers, without fully detailed drawings. The next phases will include Design Development (DD), where full systems and specifications are integrated and vetted, followed by Construction Documents (CD), which provide detailed drawings and documentation for construction. Budgeting and pricing are conducted concurrently to ensure alignment with project scope and cost.

Guiding principles developed with the design advisory group were highlighted:

Exterior/ site improvements: traffic flow, parking, safety, and visibility of the main entrance.

Interior improvements: student-centered, flexible learning environments; a connected “heart of the school” for community use (including cafeteria); improved learning spaces; and integration of Career & Technical Education (CTE) areas into the building.

The design team selected Option B for site and building layout, which provides the valley entry connection, removes the science wing, and addresses exterior and interior priorities. Key site design features include: separate bus, parent, student, and staff parking to enhance safety, improved visibility of entrances, and optimized placement of athletic fields and tennis courts.

The interior plans focus on CTE spaces and flexible, collaborative learning areas. Additional design details are being developed and refined in preparation for future phases.

The team also outlined planned site visits for staff and stakeholders to several regional schools to observe environmental controls, lighting, and collaborative space integration. Insights from these visits will help inform the Capital High School design with best practices and innovative learning environments

Questions and feedback from Board members and staff were addressed, and the team confirmed the plan to move toward Design Documents following the schematic and DD phases.

3. Helena High School Architecture & Construction Update-SMA, A&E, & Dick Anderson

Representatives from SMA, A&E Architecture, and Dick Anderson Construction provided the Board with an update on the Helena High School project following the completion of the schematic design phase. The team emphasized that this milestone marks the transition from broad design decisions to more detailed design development, with most major layout and space decisions finalized. The stadium and some minor elements remain flexible for adjustment.

Key topics discussed included:

Design and development process: Schematic design has been formally delivered, and the project is moving into design development, where detailed systems, specifications, and equipment selections are finalized. The team noted extensive collaboration with staff to ensure programmatic needs are addressed.

Cost and risk management: The team is engaging steel and MEP suppliers early to mitigate potential price increases due to market volatility and tariffs. Early procurement packages and bid alternates are being explored to maximize value and maintain flexibility.

Contingency planning: Contingency funds are being carefully managed. As structural milestones (foundations, steel erection) are completed, risks decrease, allowing contingency resources to be reallocated to enhance quality elements, such as performing arts center seating.

Value optimization: Decisions are being guided by balancing cost, quality, and long-term maintenance, ensuring that investments provide durability and benefit to the district while avoiding unnecessary future replacement costs.

The group discussed Native American library consultation, with staff and the tribal liaison ensuring appropriate cultural representation. They reviewed stadium and field design, emphasizing a durable wall system behind the bleachers for safety, debris control, branding, and seasonal graphics. The wall and stadium will also support

sponsorship revenue for field and track maintenance. Community safety was highlighted, including controlled access under the bleachers.

The update reinforced that the project is progressing on schedule, with careful attention to budget, risk mitigation, and stakeholder input, setting the stage for upcoming design development work.

Questions from Board members and staff were addressed during the presentation.

The Board of Trustees moved on to final board or Superintendent comments.

V. BOARD OR SUPERINTENDENT COMMENTS

The Superintendent expressed appreciation for the expertise and collaboration of the design and construction teams.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:43 p.m.

Candice Delvaux, Recording Secretary