



Board of Trustees Work Session

Wednesday, July 15, 2026
Bryant Elementary School Library
9:00 a.m.

MINUTES

ATTENDEES

<i>Trustees</i>	<i>Others</i>
Jennifer Walsh, Chair	Rex Weltz, Superintendent
Siobhan Hathhorn, Trustee	Sam Holman, Business Director
Kay Satre, Vice Chair	Gary Myers, Director of Educational Technology
Keller Higbee, Trustee	Taylor Lassiter, Communications Specialist
Keith Meyer, Trustee	Candice Delvaux, Executive Assistant
Lisa Cordingley, Trustee	Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director
	Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent
	Todd Verrill, Facilities Director
	Dr. Kaitlyn Hess, State & Federal Programs Director
	Dr. Justine Alberts, Assistant Superintendent
	Erin Hunt, Data & Assessment Director
	Jane Shawn, HEA President
	Eric Peterson, Activities Director
	Jim Kerins, Communication and Management Services
	Dr. Rob Watson, Executive Director of School Administrators of Montana
	Elizabeth Kaleva, District Legal Counsel
	Several Helena Public School Administrators
	Shannon McNamee, HPS Nurse
	Becca Leaphart, HEF Executive Director
	Guest of the Public

I. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/INTRODUCTIONS

Board Chair Jennifer Walsh called the meeting to order at 9:17 a.m.

II. REVIEW OF AGENDA

Board Chair Jennifer Walsh reviewed the agenda with the Board of Trustees, and the Board removed *Item for Information No. 1: Mentorship Update* from the agenda. 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. Consent Action Items

1. Resolution to Dispose of Personal Property - CHS Equipment Surplus Items
2. 2026 MTSBA Annual Meeting Electronic Ballot Action Items
3. Personnel Actions
4. Approval of FY 2026-27 Out-of-District Attendance Agreements (Non-Resident Students Attending HPS)
5. Acknowledge FY 2026-27 Out-Of-District Attendance Agreements (Helena Resident Students Attending Other School Districts)
6. Warrants
7. 5.26.26 Board of Trustees Work Session Part 1 Minutes
8. 5.26.26 Board of Trustees Work Session Part 2 Minutes
9. 6.2.26 Board of Trustees Special Board Meeting Minutes

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

Motion: Trustee Keith Meyer moved to approve the *Consent Action Items* as presented. Trustee Lisa Cordingley seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 6-0; motion carried unanimously.

This concluded the approval of the Consent Action Items. The Board of Trustees then moved on to review the Items for Action.

B. Items for Action

1. **Approval of the Health Benefits Committee’s Recommendation for the Plan Year 2026 – 2027 Premium Rates**

Ms. Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director, presented Action Item No. 1: *Approval of the Health Benefits Committee’s Recommendation for the Plan Year 2026 - 2027 Premium Rates* to the Board of Trustees. Ms. Mizell discussed topics including, but not limited to, the following: the Health Benefits Committee’s continued review of the previously proposed 15.5% health insurance premium increase; additional analysis completed by the Health Benefits Committee, Bridged Health Alliance,

Allegiance, and Alliant to identify opportunities to reduce the financial impact on employees while maintaining the fiscal sustainability of the District's self-funded health plan; and the revised recommendation of an 8.5% premium increase for the 2026–2027 plan year. Ms. Mizell explained that the reduction from the original recommendation was primarily due to the identification of a high-cost claim that will be funded through a separate account using one-time funds, as well as anticipated savings opportunities identified through contract reviews and negotiations with healthcare providers. Ms. Mizell noted that the District and its partners will continue exploring long-term solutions to maintain the sustainability of the health benefits plan while minimizing future cost impacts. Ms. Mizell addressed questions from the Board.

Trustee Kay Satre provided additional information regarding the Health Benefits Committee's review process and expressed appreciation for the collaborative work completed by committee members, Administration, Bridged Health Alliance, and consultants. Trustee Satre noted that the committee felt reassured by the additional analysis and potential cost-saving opportunities identified, while also recognizing the need for continued evaluation of plan design options and long-term sustainability.

Superintendent Wertz discussed the importance of allowing additional time for the District, Health Benefits Committee, Bridged Health Alliance, and consultants to collaborate on solutions and noted that the one-time funding allocation would provide an opportunity to further evaluate long-term options. Superintendent Wertz clarified that the one-time funding was intended to provide additional time to develop sustainable strategies for future plan years while continuing to support employees and maintain the stability of the health plan.

Board members expressed appreciation for the work completed by the Health Benefits Committee, Administration, and partners involved in the review process. Board members acknowledged that while the revised 8.5% increase represented a significant reduction from the original recommendation, it would still impact employees, particularly those at lower salary levels. Discussion included the continued challenges associated with rising healthcare costs and the importance of balancing employee affordability with maintaining a financially responsible health benefits plan.

Board Chair Jennifer Walsh entertained a motion to approve Action Item No. 1: *Approval of the Health Benefits Committee's Recommendation for the Plan Year 2026 - 2027 Premium Rates.*

Motion: Trustee Lisa Cordingley moved to approve the *Health Benefits Committee's Recommendation for the Plan Year 2026 - 2027 Premium Rates* as presented. Trustee Siobhan Hathhorn seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 6-0; motion carried unanimously.

2. Approval of the Transition to an Administrative Step Salary Matrix

Superintendent Rex Weltz and Mr. Jim Kerins, with Communication and Management Services (CMS), presented Action Item No. 2: *Approval of the Transition to an Administrative Step Salary Matrix*. Superintendent Weltz provided background regarding the District's multi-year work to develop consistent compensation systems across employee groups and emphasized the importance of utilizing an external, neutral partner to support the review and development of compensation structures. Mr. Weltz noted that the administrative salary matrix represents the final phase of the District's broader compensation plan work.

Mr. Kerins discussed topics including, but not limited to, the following: the development of the administrative salary matrix in alignment with the Board-approved compensation philosophy; the salary review process, including market analysis, classification review, and internal equity considerations; and the purpose of establishing a structured system that provides consistency, predictability, and transparency for administrative compensation. Mr. Kerins explained that the proposed matrix is designed to support recruitment and retention, address wage compression, improve budget planning, and provide a consistent framework for future compensation decisions while maintaining Board authority regarding annual wage adjustments.

Mr. Kerins noted that the proposed administrative salary matrix includes approximately 30 administrative positions across 13 classifications and represents the completion of the District's transition to a comprehensive compensation structure for both represented and non-represented employee groups. Mr. Kerins and Administration addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding the development process, implementation, and long-term use of the administrative salary matrix.

Board Chair Jennifer Walsh entertained a motion to approve Action Item No. 2: *Approval of the Transition to an Administrative Step Salary Matrix*.

Motion: Trustee Keith Meyer moved to approve the *Transition to an Administrative Step Salary Matrix* as presented. Trustee Siobhan Hathorn seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 6-0; motion carried unanimously.

3. Approval and Ratification of the HPS-International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 233 Collective Bargaining Agreement for 2026-2028

Ms. Keri Mizell, Human Resources Director, presented Action Item No. 3: *Approval and Ratification of the HPS-International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 233 Collective Bargaining Agreement for 2026-2028* to the Board of Trustees.

Ms. Mizell discussed topics including, but not limited to, the following: the successful completion of negotiations between the District and IBEW Local 233; the tentative agreement reached on June 11, 2026; the proposed two (2)-year agreement

covering July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2028; the recommended 2.5% wage increase, retention bonus, and estimated fiscal impact; and the collaborative relationship between the District and IBEW. Ms. Mizell noted that Administration recommends approval and ratification of the collective bargaining agreement as presented.

Board Chair Jennifer Walsh entertained a motion to approve Action Item No. 3: *Approval and Ratification of the HPS-International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 233 Collective Bargaining Agreement for 2026-2028*.

Motion: Trustee Kay Satre moved to approve Action Item No. 3: *Approval and Ratification of the HPS-International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 233 Collective Bargaining Agreement for 2026-2028* as presented. Trustee Lisa Cordingley seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 6-0; motion carried unanimously.

4. Character Strong Curriculum Approval

Dr. Justine Alberts, Assistant Superintendent of PreK-5, introduced Action Item No. 4: *Character Strong Curriculum Approval*. Dr. Alberts discussed topics including, but not limited to, the following: the recommendation to approve Character Strong as the District's elementary social-emotional learning curriculum resource for grades K-5, with additional licenses supporting middle school Tier 2 interventions; the curriculum review process conducted by district counselors, including a comparison of Character Strong and the District's current resource, Second Step; and the evaluation criteria used to assess curriculum effectiveness, usability, implementation supports, and alignment with District goals.

Dr. Alberts explained that Character Strong was selected due to its comprehensive approach to building school culture, belonging, community connections, and student social-emotional skills, while also providing consistent resources and support across schools. She noted that the five-year investment would provide curriculum access, professional development, and implementation support for elementary schools and identified middle school intervention needs.

Discussion included the importance of a consistent, districtwide approach to supporting student social-emotional development, the role of counselors and teachers in implementing the curriculum, student screening and intervention processes through the District's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), and ongoing improvements to data management systems. Dr. Alberts addressed questions from the Board of Trustees regarding curriculum implementation, assessment processes, and areas for continued improvement.

Board Chair Jennifer Walsh entertained a motion to approve Action Item No. 4: *Character Strong Curriculum Approval*.

Motion: Trustee Siobhan Hathhorn moved to approve Action Item No. 4: *Character Strong Curriculum Approval* as presented. Trustee Kay Satre seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 5-0; motion carried unanimously. *(Board Chair Jennifer Walsh abstained from voting as she is a trustee strictly for the high school district, and this action item only pertains to the elementary district.)*

5. Approval of Mount Ascension Elementary and Middle School Removal from Charter Status

Mr. Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent 6-12, presented Action Item No. 5: *Approval of Mount Ascension Elementary and Middle School Removal from Charter Status*. Assistant Superintendent McKay discussed topics including, but not limited to, the following: background regarding the District's previous decision to pursue charter school status, which was intended to preserve unique educational opportunities for students, maintain market relevance by continuing innovative programs already offered within the District, and provide additional financial resources through charter school funding mechanisms.

Mr. McKay explained that while the charter school designation provided benefits, the ongoing reporting requirements, goal measurements, and accountability processes associated with charter status have created challenges that do not align well with the current operation and evaluation of Mount Ascension Elementary and Middle School programs. Specifically, some charter goals have been difficult to measure due to program structures, student enrollment patterns, and differences between charter reporting requirements and traditional accreditation expectations.

Mr. McKay clarified that removal of charter status does not eliminate the programs or educational opportunities currently provided by Mount Ascension Elementary and Middle School. The District may reinstate charter status in the future if it is determined to be beneficial for students and the District. Mr. McKay addressed questions from the Board of Trustees throughout the presentation.

Board Chair Jennifer Walsh entertained a motion to approve Action Item No. 5: *Approval of Mount Ascension Elementary and Middle School Removal from Charter Status*.

Motion: Trustee Keith Meyer moved to approve Action Item No. 5: *Approval of Mount Ascension Elementary and Middle School Removal from Charter Status*.

Trustee Lisa Cordingley seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Vote: 5-0; motion carried unanimously. *(Board Chair Jennifer Walsh did not vote because she serves as a Trustee for the High School District only, and this action item pertains only to the Elementary District.)*

The Trustees moved on to review the Items for Information.

C. Items for Information

1. CAMPS School Funding Proposal

Dr. Rob Watson, Executive Director of the School Administrators of Montana, provided an update on the CAMPS School Funding Proposal. Dr. Watson discussed topics including, but not limited to, the School Funding Interim Commission, potential changes to the state's inflationary funding cap, declining enrollment trends, the current school funding formula, and the importance of evaluating funding structures to support the operational needs of Montana public schools. Dr. Watson also provided information regarding future legislative discussions and potential recommendations related to school funding. Dr. Watson addressed questions from Trustees throughout the presentation.

2. Board Advocacy

Board Chair Jennifer Walsh discussed Board advocacy efforts and opportunities to engage with legislators and community members regarding public education issues. Discussion topics included, but were not limited to, advocacy training, legislative outreach, collaboration with education organizations, and opportunities for Trustees and community members to participate in advocacy efforts during upcoming legislative sessions.

The Board of Trustees took a brief recess before moving on to the next Item for Information.

3. Board Training with Legal Counsel

Legal Counsel Representative Elizabeth Kaleva provided Board training regarding Trustee roles, responsibilities, and legal authority. Topics discussed included, but were not limited to, Board governance, the distinction between governance and management, Trustee authority under Montana law, and effective Board processes. Ms. Kaleva addressed questions throughout the presentation.

The Trustees also discussed the District's membership with the Montana School Boards Association (MTSBA). Discussion topics included, but were not limited to, membership benefits, Trustee resources and training opportunities, legal resources, and advocacy efforts supporting Montana public schools.

4. Educational Data and Curricular Training

Superintendent Rex Weltz and Dr. Justine Alberts provided the Board of Trustees with an overview of educational data and curriculum processes. Discussion topics included, but were not limited to, understanding educational data, measuring student growth, curriculum development and alignment, instructional practices, and continuous improvement efforts. Superintendent Weltz and Dr. Alberts addressed questions throughout the presentation.

5. Performance Indicators and Data Dashboard Implementation

Superintendent Rex Weltz provided an update on the development and implementation of the District's Performance Indicators and Data Dashboard.

Discussion topics included, but were not limited to, creating a transparent, public-facing data resource, identifying key performance indicators, tracking trends over time, and utilizing data to support strategic planning and continuous improvement efforts. Superintendent Weltz addressed questions throughout the presentation.

6. Trustee Engagement and Operations

Board Chair Jennifer Walsh led a discussion regarding Trustee engagement and Board operations. Discussion topics included, but were not limited to, committee assignments, Trustee communication and engagement, governance processes, Board policies, and opportunities for future strategic planning.

7. Wrap Up and Next Steps

Superintendent Weltz and the Board of Trustees discussed the development of a future strategic plan for Helena Public Schools. The Board expressed support for moving forward with a strategic planning process and discussed the importance of creating a sustainable, system-focused plan aligned with District goals, guiding principles, and continuous improvement efforts. The Board discussed identifying a consultant and developing a timeline for the process. Superintendent Weltz will research options and provide a proposed timeline for Board consideration. The Board also discussed reviewing and updating district guiding principles as part of the strategic planning process.

The Board reviewed next steps, including finalizing committee assignments and preparing for upcoming committee work prior to the August Board meeting.

V. BOARD/SUPERINTENDENT COMMENTS

There were no further Board or Superintendent comments.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Board Chair Jennifer Walsh adjourned the meeting at 4:07 p.m.

Candice Delvaux, Recording Secretary

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