



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 – Retreat

May Butler Center | 55 S. Rodney Ave

Wednesday, July 10, 2019 – 8:00am

MINUTES - APPROVED

Board of Trustees: *Others:*

Luke Muszkiewicz, Chair	Tyler Ream, Superintendent of Schools
Terry Beaver, Vice Chair	Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent of Schools
Sarah Sullivan, Past Chair	Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff
Libby Goldes, Trustee	Stacy Collette, HR Director
Siobhan Hathhorn, Trustee	Joslyn Davidson, Curriculum Director
Jeff Hindoin, Trustee	
John McEwen, Trustee	

I. CALL TO ORDER / INTRODUCTIONS

Board of Trustees Retreat was called to order at 8:33am, and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

REVIEW OF AGENDA

There were no requested changes to the agenda.

II. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

NEW BUSINESS: Items for Action

A. Superintendent's Contract

Discussion was had regarding the renewal of the superintendent's contract. A vote was taken with a 6-0 vote approving the contract.

III. ITEM FOR INFORMATION: Item for Information

A. Board Retreat

Mr. Muszkiewicz framed the retreat objectives as follows:

- a. Board calendar of meeting topics
- b. Board goals and priorities

Helena Public Schools Board of Trustees

Luke Muszkiewicz
Board Chair

Jeff Hindoin
Trustee

Terry Beaver
Vice Chair

John E McEwen
Trustee

Libby Goldes
Trustee

Sarah Sullivan
Trustee

Siobhan Hathhorn
Trustee

Jennifer Walsh
Trustee

Mr. Muszkiewicz began by addressed the phishing occurring from his email account. He asked that trustees who receive emails from him confirm his specific email address before responding.

LEGAL OVERVIEW OF THE BOARD

Mr. Hindoin began a discussion on the legal rights and restrictions of the board. He stated that trustees have five best practices to follow:

- a. Two employees who report directly to the board
- b. District policy
- c. Budget and contract approval
- d. Student expulsions
- e. Hiring/terminating employees

Ms. Sullivan inquiring into whether the board evaluated Janel Mickelson, and Mr. Hindoin answered that no, she was appointed as the district clerk. Dr. Ream added that the district evaluates her; just not the board.

Mr. Hindoin continued that district new hires and terminations are listed on board agendas because the board is ultimately responsible for those actions. Mr. McEwen asked why retirements and resignations were listed on the agenda. Mr. Hindoin answered that those actions technically were for information. Mr. Hindoin offered additional clarification that the board makes no hiring/termination decisions for coaches. The board will see a recommendation to hire in a board packet, and if the position is controversial, they will navigate the decision then. He added that it's a testament to the Assistant Superintendent and Human Resources Department that the board typically doesn't encounter controversy on any hiring/termination.

With respect to the rights of trustees, Mr. Hindoin stated that board trustees have no more authority than any member of the public to walk into an administrative building asking for something unless properly noticed. He cautioned that listening to a member of the public voice concerns about a specific issue could result in the specific trustee having to recuse him/herself from board/committee discussion and voting.

As a matter of public trust and to maintain credibility with the community, Mr. Hindoin encouraged trustees – while in a board meeting – not to discuss any issue not listed on the agenda. He added that conversations between trustees outside of a board meeting should be limited to two (2) individuals, stressing that emails qualify as dialogue.

Mr. Hindoin then clarified the difference between an open meeting vs. a closed meeting, noting that open meetings show the transparency respected by the public. Mr. Hindoin expressed his appreciation for the board packets, stating they comply with the Montana constitution, specifically the right to observe and right to participate obligation clause. He added that the more details listed on and accompanying the agenda, the more the board complies with the constitution.

Mr. Hindoin addressed the issue of conflict of interest with trustees, stating it's not typically an issue unless there is a pecuniary benefit involved, for which there is a strict standard. Mr. Muszkiewicz asked if he was addressing nepotism as well, and Mr. Hindoin affirmed. Mr. Hindoin continued that the board – per statute – could have a unanimous vote except for any excused conflict if the situation arose.

QUESTIONS REGARDING THE LEGAL OVERVIEW OF THE BOARD

Dr. Ream asked Mr. Hindoin whether other school districts in Montana conduct a weekly non-quorum meeting. Mr. Hindoin answered that as long as there is no quorum, the meeting technically doesn't qualify as an open meeting, though it could eventually raise public concern and complaint. He added that Montana values transparency, and the constitution is very clear on having an open government; closed meetings are the exception in Montana, not the norm. Mr. Muszkiewicz requested clarification that if there is no quorum, trustees can discuss board items and how trustees will vote. Mr. Hindoin affirmed, and added that the trustees can't form a quorum without having a noticed board meetings and stressed that controversial items shouldn't be discussed.

Ms. Hathhorn requested clarification on the difference between a work session and a board meeting. Mr. Hindoin answered that the lines are blurred because some action items require prompt attention and must be addressed at a work session, though the board attempts to limit action items to board meetings. Mr. Hindoin added that the board makes an effort not to discuss any controversial items at a work session, which is a good procedure.

Ms. Goldes asked at what point a trustee should excuse him/herself from a conversation [in person or via email] related to the public. Mr. Hindoin answered that trustees have to make their best judgement, but it doesn't happen very often.

Ms. Hathhorn requested Mr. Hindoin address student issues, specifically FERPA violations. Mr. Hindoin answered that trustees have no right to discuss specific staff or students; parents are able to waive those rights, but the district and board are not. Dr. Ream added that if the board knows they are going to discuss student data, they will go into a closed session. Mr. Hindoin added that the board could go into a closed session at any time during a meeting. Mr. Muszkiewicz added that [during the last board meeting] the board was unaware they could have transitioned into a closed session. Ms. Sullivan expressed concern that discussing data in a small subset could lead to identifying students, and Dr. Ream added that it is a concern in schools when breaking down demographics, and that the district is aware of the challenge.

Ms. Goldes questioned whether – during the public comment section of a board meeting or committee meeting – a member of the public could be limited by time or scope on his/her comments. She mentioned that she tried to limit speaking time in prior meetings, and the action was not well-received. Mr. Muszkiewicz asked if there was policy regarding public presentations at board meetings, and Mr. Hindoin answered that there was no policy to allow for presentations, and that the board could even restrict comments to written form.

Mr. Beaver asked if the public was invited to school faculty meetings or principals' meetings. Mr. Hindoin answered that Missoula County recently changed their policy to allow for public attendance at administration meetings, but the [Helena Public Schools] could argue that public is not invited because private information is discussed, especially at faculty meetings. Those meetings are staff meetings, not public meetings. He added that it would be up to the school principal on whether public would be allowed.

BOARD CHAIR RESPONSIBILITY

Mr. Muszkiewicz clarified the process for replying to emails received via the board of trustees email account. He will acknowledge receipt of the email within 24 hours. If that is not possible, he will delegate that responsibility. His second step will be to confirm that Dr. Ream has received the email. If a reply to the email is deemed necessary, either Mr. Muszkiewicz or Dr. Ream will respond. Mr.

Muszkiewicz requested that not everyone respond to the email, and Mr. Hindoin reminded trustees that all emails are discoverable. Dr. Ream requested of the trustees that they cc him whenever contacting a staff member via email. This just ensure all parties remain on the same page. Mr. Muszkiewicz added that sending an email to anyone on staff without ccing Dr. Ream should be the exception.

Mr. Muszkiewicz – with reference to board meeting etiquette – asked that trustees communicate with him when they wish to speak during a meeting so no one is overlooked. He continued that consent items listed on agendas typically do not require comment, but if trustees have questions, they are encouraged to reach out to either Mr. Muszkiewicz or Dr. Ream prior to the meeting. Mr. Muszkiewicz continued that trustees can also request consent items be removed from agendas, but that is a grey area and not best practice. Ms. Goldes expressed concern over encouraging few or no questions and/or comments on consent items. With regards to public input, Mr. Muszkiewicz added that he would like to receive public comment prior to a board vote, clarifying that the process should be: 1. Questions from trustees prior to the meeting, and 2. At the meeting, public comments should occur prior to board discussion. Ms. Sullivan added that it the order is at the discession of the board chair. Ms. Goldes concurred, stating she believes some disagreements could have been avoided in the past if they would have been discussed prior to a meeting.

2019-2020 STRATEGIC PLAN

Dr. Ream began to walk through the draft strategic plan for the district, stating that some priorities are more “fleshed out” than others. Areas of focus include communications, budget, facilities, and a million priorities in education and curriculum. He added that listing specific priorities doesn’t mean everything else is going perfectly. He stressed the need for a dynamic document that allows for failure and flexibility. He also added the importance of the staff working in concert to accomplish the plans. Mr. Muszkiewicz thanked Dr. Ream for the work on the future plan and for referencing the previous plan when determining priorities. Ms. Sullivan asked for what Dr. Ream meant by “method.” Dr. Ream answered that he would review the draft plan step by step.

Ms. Sullivan stressed the importance of letting kids experience failure. Dr. Ream added that teachers are caught between content and experiences; the acceleration of education has become faster, not deeper. Ms. Goldes asked that the trustees be realistic about how many horus a day students are at school and emplasize life-long learners. She also expressed concern over the emphasis on college. Mr. McEwen asked who is responsible for the results. Dr. Ream answered that there needs to be consistency among schools, and that his philosophy is to set goals and then determine how each school can get there. Mr. McEwen asked what cost is attached to each goal. Dr. Ream answered that eventually each will lead to a budget item. He added that education tools now exist outside schools, and digital curriculum is accessed outside the classroom. He stated it’s a matter of knowing what [the district] wants and determining the cost to get there. Mr. Muszkiewicz added that in terms of a strategic sense, [this strategic plan] is not something the board needs to revisit each year; it should be long term.

Dr. Ream addressed the strategic plan, specifically what qualifies as authentic, meaningful, and relavent. According to Dr. Ream:

- a. Authentic is the art of teaching; it’s replicating what really good teachers do – taking profiles of the students and crafting the information to fit the needs of each student.
- b. Meaningful references real-time learning – “why are we learning this today?”
- c. Relevant means “why will this be important in my future?” Teachers have to show why students will use a specific topic as adults.

Dr. Ream expressed appreciation to the district for supporting PLC (Professional Learning Commitment) and stressed the importance of:

- a. an established scale of standard and mastery and what resources do teachers need to help students pass each level; and
- b. diving deep into data to determine additional resources needed to limit slippage and shorten time between assessments.

Dr. Ream applauded Ms. Joslyn Davidson for receiving a grant for focused reading intervention at Bryant and Central. She started at one grade level, looked at the realignment of standards, and pulled together data for a more purposeful awareness. Dr. Ream would like to have her look next at non-grant school, adding that the data may look different based on demographics. Dr. Ream said that teachers are more actively engaged in the progress because they can see the results more quickly; they want to know they are hitting the mark with kids more often than three times a year. Mr. McKay stated that administration wants to work with teachers to find a systematic way of showing how/what assessments are/aren't being done and plan how to get continually better. He added that assessments should happen daily, and students should learn from and feel good about the assessments. Ms. Davidson added the need for training for the entire school – paras, coaches, every person who interacts with students – that is focused on instruction and helping students excel. Dr. Ream added that it's important the district works with its teachers rather than telling them what to do. He added that in some assessments, administrators know which students score where on standards, but the district is still working on a growth index/average to find trends and paint a cohesive picture.

Dr. Ream expressed the importance of being able to identify which teachers produce the most growth and determine how the district can calculate social and emotional connections to the school by educators and students, noting that the district currently has no baseline in place. Ms. Sullivan inquired whether it was Dr. Ream's goal to put this baseline in place by 2020. Dr. Ream responded that he would like to have the pilot in place this school year. He mentioned the importance of providing proactive services rather than reacting to emergencies. Mr. McEwen expressed an interest in adding preparing students to be contributing members of society with a healthy lifestyle. He also mentioned the strategic plan doesn't include an assessment of teachers. Dr. Ream concurred that the district won't be able to find pockets of excellence in teachers without assessment, and the district has to have qualitative aspects to the assessment. Ms. Sullivan stated the importance of teaching leaders how to give meaningful evaluations and expressed concern over the length of time between educators' evaluations. Mr. Muszkiewicz mentioned an interest in finding an effective way to evaluate teachers and recommended adding a staff component into the goals. Ms. Hathhorn expressed concern for the length of time between tenured teacher evaluations, and Dr. Ream replied that the length of time would be difficult to change since most employees are covered by a CBA (Collective Bargaining Agreement).

Dr. Ream moved on to the communication aspect of the strategic plan, addressing the importance of pushing out information through the increasing number of channels available for accessing information. He stated he would like to implement a communications schedule for this year and create more consistency with communications, mentioning it is hard to navigate which teachers utilize which communication platform. He mentioned that parents are looking for information, but they can't find it; the district should be working in concert for the best of the district's students. He

also would like a way to monitor the percentage of positive v. neutral v. negative stories, and expressed a need to determine where to place the most focus.

Mr. Hindoin asked for the correlation/connection between the strategic plan and day-to-day operations. Ms. Goldes mentioned, based on the perceived lack of accountability to the public, she wants to look at how things are going and be more proactive for the future. Mr. Muszkiewicz suggested the forming of a committee to evaluate the effectiveness of the goals. Ms. Hathhorn mentioned having a committee with a student focus. Mr. Hindoin questioned – based on the conversation – whether an additional committee encompassing another segment would place extra burden on the staff. Mr. Beaver asked if the creation of a committee would be in lieu of a meeting with three trustees every other week. Dr. Ream expressed concern that the additional two meetings each month would take more of trustees' time. Ms. Sullivan voiced that she feels more disconnect [from the board] since stepping down as chair. Mr. Hindoin stated it's a challenge navigating too much and not enough. Mr. Muszkiewicz questioned the increasing trustee engagement, mentioning the importance of determining if the additional committee would be necessary. Mr. McEwen recommended the committee report at the work session, and other trustees disagreed, with Mr. Muszkiewicz suggesting the committee report with the other committees at board meetings for consistency. Ms. Hathhorn and Ms. Sullivan volunteered to determine when the new committee will meet.

Mr. Muszkiewicz stated the need for goal-setting for all committees going forward. Mr. Beaver mentioned he makes all decisions based on: is it educationally sound, fiscally responsible, and socially acceptable. He suggested the district, board, and committees follow that philosophy in their decision-making processes. Mr. McEwen brought up that he believes the board has a leadership role with staff supporting it. He asked if the board receives a list of everything that needs to be approved and asked if the board decides on all of them. Ms. Sullivan answered that staff, specifically mentioning Ms. Kalli Kinds, has to make certain decisions based on emergency situations. Dr. Ream also answered that committees bring recommendations to the board and recommended the new committee maintain the same structure. Mr. McEwen asked if the role of the trustees was to view the district from 5,000 feet or 60,000 feet, mentioning that he would like to be at the 5,000 feet level.

Ms. Sullivan confirmed the district is definitely conducting a demographic study. Dr. Ream answered that he would like to wait until the public meets and falls in love with the new schools before spending any more money. Ms. Sullivan asked if the bond was at capacity, and Ms. Ridgeway answered that it had \$136 million left. Ms. Sullivan made a recommendation to proceed with a demographic study, set a date for completion, and set dates for new studies every 10 years. Ms. Hathhorn asked if the new committee could take care of some projects before waiting for the completion of a demographics study. Ms. Sullivan answered that she would like to see the full picture to see where the priorities are. Dr. Ream added that perhaps the first objective of the new committee could be to determine the scope of study for the demographics study.

2019-2020 COMMITTEE GOALS

Mr. Muszkiewicz then addressed the budget committee, noting that it's primary objective is to monitor the budget and how it changes. Mr. Hindoin added that it's a good model for other committees. Dr. Ream praised Finance Director, Janel Mickelson, and said she is firm on managing [the district's] money the right way.

Mr. Muszkiewicz stated the policy committee encapsulates everything affecting day to day activities within the district, and asked Ms. Goldes if she would like to make any changes for the next school year. Ms. Goldes answered that she would like to look at adding a 9000 series, into which some existing policies could be moved. She added that the committee should continue to keep an eye on MTSBA, and though some things look different for the district policy numbers, that's a good thing. She also added that sometimes having a boiler plate is easier and good enough.

Mr. Beaver asked it still benefited the district to hire an attorney and recommended using the services through SAM (School Administrators of Montana) or MTSBA (Montana School Boards Association). Ms. Ridgway answered that Ms. Elizabeth "Bea" Kaleva covers SPED (special education) issues and other legal issues as they arise; she doesn't just cover policy meetings. Mr. Hindoin added that MTSBA is not qualified to handle a lot of the legal issues in AA districts. Ms. Ridgway concurred and added that [having Ms. Kaleva] on board it worth it; it has saved the district a lot of money.

RENAMING OF CENTRAL SCHOOL LIBRARY

Dr. Ream brought up the effort of naming of part of Central School in former Superintendent Jack Copps's name – specifically the library, but mentioned that current policy states a person either has to be deceased or a past employee of the district for at least five (5) years for a district facility – or portion of facility – to be named after him/her. He requested an adjustment to policy language which would allow the district to name the library at Central School after Mr. Copps. Mr. Muszkiewicz recommended striking "five (5) years" from the policy and recommended removing the naming ceremony from all promotional pieces until the board has reached a final decision. Ms. Hathhorn expressed interest in removing all restrictions from the policy. Mr. Beaver suggested looking into why the policy was initially added, and Ms. Ridgway answered that it was motivated by a desire to limit the namings of facilities, giving the district and board a proper length of time to carefully consider the decision and the quality of the person for whom the facility will be named. Ms. Goldes emphasized the need to have a proper length of time to consider the decision, but added that [the decision to name the library after Mr. Copps] is not a controversial one. Ms. Sullivan concurred and added that the new school may not have been built without him. Mr. Muszkiewicz stated that policies are in place as guidelines, and he expressed concern about changing anything that would potentially damage future boards. Dr. Ream clarified the change in policy actually would require two action items: 1. A change in policy decreasing the length from leaving the district to the naming of part of a facility, and 2. The specific naming of the library. Mr. Muszkiewicz recommended Ms. Ridgway and the policy committee take the changes into consideration and bring it before the full board in a special board meeting next Friday at 11:00am.

FUTURE DIRECTION OF THE BOARD AND DISTRICT

Dr. Ream then requested direction on the district's early admission stance, mentioning policy states a September 10 cut off for both kindergarten and grade 1. He expressed concern that the district doesn't look at a age at all for 2nd grade on, and that there's no policy for private school kindergarten students enrolling in 1st grade unless trustees vote to admit them. Ms. Sullivan requested recommendation from the superintendent regarding the issue, and Dr. Ream answered that he would like to align the age cut off date on 1st grade admissions to state statute. Mr. Hindoin asked for any historical knowledge of these decisions. Mr. McKay stated that it began when kindergarten was ½ day and optional. Mr. Muszkiewicz suggested the policy committee discuss the issue at their August meeting to determine how the district will proceed in future cases. Dr. Ream added that the intent should be in finding the "gap kids" and the process should include principals and community

partners. Ms. Goldes expressed support for a two (2) year program for kindergarten and requested more information on the success of past early kindergarten enrollment students. Dr. Ream stated that policy was followed and all previous decisions were made at the site level. In the future, he would like to see the district continue to evaluate each early kindergarten admission case and let the board make the final decision. Mr. Muszkiewicz emphasized the need to determine a process for kids on the border of the cut off date. Mr. Hindoin stated that, by law, the board can only exercise discretion on whether the case is an exceptional circumstance. Ms. Sullivan asked if the board has any criteria on what makes a child exceptional, if yes, the board should make the decision. If not, the decision should be made at the site level. Ms. Hathhorn questioned the accuracy of the assessment results, stating that typically kids don't benefit from starting school early. Mr. Beaver mentioned he believes the administration has done their job in proving "exceptional," and once it becomes an action item on a board agenda, it becomes the decision of the board. He added that a two year kindergarten program, ie. Kindergarten A and B, would put private preK programs out of business. Mr. McKay answered that the district [through a preK program] would be able to provide for kids who wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity for private preK, adding that most AA districts around the state already have some form of preK program.

Ms. Sullivan asked whether there needed to be a change in policy to allow parents to present their [early kindergarten admission] case in a closed door session. Mr. Muszkiewicz answered that there are three issues regarding this: 1. Should policy require an age requirement for transfer into the district, 2. How should the district communicate with families during the request, and 3. Should the district pursue an early kindergarten program – Kindergarten A and B. Ms. Sullivan asked if early kindergarten admissions were state statute or district policy. Mr. Hindoin answered that the district is limited by state statutes 20.3.102 and 20.7.17 and suggested district policy align with state statute. Mr. Muszkiewicz mentioned he still has concerns with early admission. Dr. Ream asked if it would be legal to say our philosophy doesn't allow for special admissions. Mr. Hindoin answered that legally the board is required to give special permission for parents to state their case.

Mr. Muszkiewicz asked if new trustees had any feedback for their involvement so far on the board. Mr. McEwen said it has been a trial by fire. He asked if there was any way to receive documents for committees and board more than three (3) days in advance. Mr. Muszkiewicz asked what the board could have done differently, and Mr. McEwen requested an orientation. Ms. Hathhorn echoed that though and requested a history of important issues.

Mr. Muszkiewicz expressed interest in work sessions to include board training, board self evaluations, and review the safety piece at the high schools. Ms. Sullivan inquired into the status of school SRO's (school resource officers), and Dr. Ream answered that according to the city manager, there will be no loss of service. He added that the district should anticipate paying for a portion of those services as there are no other AA districts who do not contribute towards SROs. Ms. Sullivan asked if they could add that to the November ballot under a safety levy. Dr. Ream said the district could, but the money takes almost a year to be received. Ms. Sullivan asked if any decisions had been made on the K-8 tech portion of the building bond. Dr. Ream answered that he would need to know the specific amount and whatever was remaining.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Chair, Mr. Muszkiewicz, adjourned the retreat at 4:47pm.

**Next Board Meeting:
11:00am on July 19, 2019, at the May Butler Center**