



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 – Annual Retreat

Tuesday, July 14, 2020

MINUTES

ATTENDEES

Luke Muszkiewicz, Chair
Siobhan Hathorn, Vice Chair
Terry Beaver, Trustee
Libby Goldes, Trustee (remote attendance)
John McEwen, Trustee
Jennifer McKee, Trustee
Sarah Sullivan, Trustee
Jennifer Walsh, Trustee
Tyler Ream, Superintendent

I. CALL TO ORDER / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Board Chair, Luke Muszkiewicz, called the meeting to order at 8:44am, and attendees recited the pledge of allegiance.

II. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comments were offered.

III. REVIEW OF AGENDA

Mr. Muszkiewicz requested the MDT Land Purchase action item to be removed from the agenda due to lack of information from the purchaser. Trustees agreed.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Item for Consent: Approval of Personnel Actions
Personnel actions were approved.

B. Item for Information: Board of Trustees Retreat

Mr. Muszkiewicz outlined the board retreat as containing four sections: an update from Dr. Ream on fall planning, a revisiting strategic priorities, a board self-evaluation, and board best practices.

Dr. Ream prefaced the planning overview document by informing trustees the document was the result of over a month of planning by over 100 volunteers across eight planning teams. He said the move to utilize planning teams had been proactive but added there still was a lot of time to make decisions. He continued that the way the district has approached planning gives the district and families options. The planning update provided to the board was a small representation of the information and feedback the district had received. Dr. Ream noted, though a phased plan, the phases did not necessarily align to the state's phases.

Dr. Ream detailed Phase III to trustees, comparing it to as normal as possible with rigorous cleaning and masks encouraged. He added that for any phase more restrictive than Phase III, face masks or face shields would be required. Ms. Sullivan asked if there would be an option for students not to attend school in Phase III. Dr. Ream answered in Phase III, students could attend full-time, part-time, or remotely. Upon returning to school, students would return to their same class and school. He added the remote learning option would help reduce on-site class sizes and the potential for social distancing.

Dr. Ream continued that the Academic Team was working on the logistics of teachers' responsibilities in each phase, adding Microsoft Teams would serve as a consistent platform. He said, based on feedback from the survey sent to families, a consistent platform was important, and Teams ensured secure data. With regards to teachers, Dr. Ream said the Academic Team was considering utilizing teachers who would not return to the classroom as Digital Education Advisors.

Dr. Ream estimated an additional \$4.5 million in costs this year, which would be the district's entire reserve budget. He added that he would prefer to use the CARES act funding to compensate teachers for an additional period taught during the day than to hire 100 one-year contracts. Ms. Hathorn asked for a gauge on how teachers were feeling about the next school year. Dr. Ream answered there were mixed feelings based on the individual teacher.

Ms. McKee noted the importance of communicating with families and the community. Ms. Sullivan relayed feedback she had received regarding families conducting small group learning within groups of families. She asked if the district would still receive ANB in that instance. Dr. Ream answered that if students were attending the Helena Digital Initiative (HDI) they would remain enrolled in the district and would remain connected to a specific class/school. If families chose to homeschool students, they would not be guaranteed neighborhood school placement if they reenrolled. Ms. Hathorn recommended including in communication that teachers were trained in and the highest skilled at teaching.

Dr. Ream continued that the Academic Team was working to determine typical day-to-day schedules for remote learning in each phase, as there were different requirements for each. Ms. McKee added that the option to return to a specific class/school would help parents who decided to temporarily keep their students at home.

Dr. Ream next provided an overview of Phase II, which would include modified school starts, no lunches in cafeterias, recess in small groups in specified sections of the playgrounds, sections of

the school dedicated to lunch, no open campuses at the high schools, restructured bus routes, and masks required.

Phase I, said Dr. Ream, would be an alternative to closure. It would likely include an AAXBB schedule per nationwide trends. “X days” would be online planning days for teachers and intensive cleaning at every school. Additionally, in Phase I, six feet social distance would be mandated unless precluded by the physical space. There would be no SACC.

Dr. Ream told trustees remaining questions to answer were surveillance testing, stipends, face shields v. masks, transmission of materials, and finalization of the HDI.

Ms. Sullivan asked if any consideration had been given to delaying the start of school for a few months and making up the time in the summer. Dr. Ream answered that decision would be best coming from the state level.

Ms. Sullivan noted it might be a good time to reassess the gifted and talented program. Dr. Ream said options had been discussed, including a part-time program or bringing the services to students rather than students traveling to the services.

Dr. Ream said all planning teams were looking for the best solution while balancing health and safety with the best education. He continued every teacher and community member who asked to volunteer was placed on a team.

Mr. McEwen asked for the district’s obligation if a teacher didn’t want to return to the classroom. Dr. Ream answered it needed to be finalized through the district attorney whether the teacher would take personal leave without pay if there was not a medical reason. Ms. Goldes asked for the protocol if a teacher was underperforming with digital learning. Dr. Ream answered it was the role of the principal to have that discussion, and common expectations would be established up front.

Mr. Beaver asked what would happen if a teacher tested positive for COVID-19. Dr. Ream answered they were entitled to their sick days, but they could choose to teach remotely if they waived their sick days. Ms. McKee asked for the status of substitute teachers. Dr. Ream answered finding good substitute teachers was all always a challenge, but it would be worse this year.

Mr. Beaver expressed concern that some students wouldn’t return to school if remote learning was the only option and would instead start working full-time. Dr. Ream answered that last year, some students started working during the day and completed their remote learning in the evenings.

The board then transitioned to a review of the strategic priorities. Dr. Ream provided context for the strategic priorities, which emphasized teaching and learning. According to Dr. Ream, priorities represented the “optimal state” and were aligned to board committees.

Dr. Ream continued that some priorities had been added to adapt to remote learning amidst the pandemic. One new priority was the data dashboard, which would build an understanding of a student’s strengths and opportunities across grade levels. He added this would have been an

initiative for this summer in the absence of COVID-19 but would be revisited in the 20-21 school year. Dr. Ream noted several aspects of curriculum development work had been paused and adapted due to the pandemic. For instance, the district was working to ensure every student would get a device like each received a textbook. However, the backlogged supply chain with affecting that. Dr. Ream referenced the added importance of self-awareness and mental health, telling trustees seven elementary schools will utilize PAX this year, and they had received fiscal support from the state to pay for staff training. Dr. Ream added the district was working to develop a student services protocol for students exhibiting trauma symptoms, including what services look like if students are not in school.

With regards to facilities, Dr. Ream said the Facilities Department prioritized safe, healthy, and neutral to additive to learning spaces. He added the elementary and middle school bond would be completed by the first day of school, and the high school bond would be completed sooner than expected. Dr. Ream said there still were needs at Helena High School; the school should function at a high capacity, and the district needs to look at when it could run another bond.

Dr. Ream outlined the financial priorities for trustees. A FY2019 audit was completed, along with multi-year budget projections, a retirement incentive, a transition to electronic time and payroll reporting, and the difficult work of determining the need for fewer full-time educators at Helena High.

Dr. Ream described communications priorities accomplished as a refreshed website, social media enhancement, and regular internal and external communications.

Mr. McEwen asked what was not listed among the priorities that Dr. Ream wished was. Dr. Ream answered the three needs are continuing to build out teaching and learning to have a wealth of resources, when to run the next facilities levy, and revising the social and emotional piece – how to assess students' mental health when staff don't see them every day.

Ms. Sullivan asked Dr. Ream if he intended to have committee meetings next year. Dr. Ream replied that committee meetings should resume – and the Budget Committee and the Policy Committee would begin meeting in August. Mr. Muszkiewicz added other committees should resume no later than September.

Ms. Sullivan asked what the district was doing to enhance online learning. Dr. Ream answered adding hardware, software, training, and common expectations.

Ms. Goldes asked if there had been experience within other districts with teachers and students being required to wear masks. Dr. Ream answered current summer school students and staff were wearing masks in the building, as were attendees of the extended school year at Bryant. Mr. Beaver advocated for face shields for educators since facial expressions and enunciation were so important.

The board reviewed the results of their self-evaluation and conducted a roundtable discussion on why each trustee wanted to become a member of the board. Questions discussed included what

the board has done well, where the board can improve, what has changed for trustees in the last year, and what makes the board unique from other boards.

V. BOARD/SUPERINTENDENT COMMENTS

No additional comments were offered.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

The retreat adjourned at 4:46pm.