



**Superintendent**  
Tyler Ream, Ed. D  
324-2001

**Business Manager**  
Janelle Mickelson  
324-2040

## **Board Work Session**

Capital High School – 100 Valley Dr.  
Virtually - Zoom

**Tuesday August 4, 2020**  
4:00p.m. Meeting

## **MINUTES**

### **ATTENDANCE – Present unless otherwise noted**

Luke Muszkiewicz, Board Chair  
Terry Beaver, Board Vice Chair  
Sarah Sullivan, Trustee  
Jennifer McKee, Trustee  
Elizabeth “Libby” Goldes, Trustee  
Jennifer Walsh, Trustee  
Siobhan Hathhorn, Trustee  
John McEwen, Trustee

Dr. Tyler Ream, Superintendent  
Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent  
Janelle Mickelson, Business Manager  
Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff  
Pat Boles, IT Administrator  
Stacy Collette, Human Resources Administrator  
Jane Shawn, Helena Education Association President  
Tim McMahan, Activities Administrator  
Dave Thennis, CR Anderson Middle School Principal  
Brett Zanto, CHS Principal  
Brian Cummings, Jim Darcy Principal  
Capital High School Staff  
Howard and Kari DeRosier, Guests

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

Vice Chair Siobhan Hathhorn called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**II. REVIEW OF AGENDA**

None.

**III. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mr. DeRosier, parent, made a statement asking that there is a class to help teach skills to whatever career path the student is entering into.

Abby Nyhof, Warren Elementary teacher, voiced concerns about returning to school full time. Concerns about leave for the current pandemic. The teachers have not been surveyed concerning their own concerns about their health and returning to teaching, full time.

**IV. NEW BUSINESS**

**A. Items for Information**

**1. Opening of School Plans 2020/2021**

While disruptive, the spring of 2020 provided a learning opportunity for the Helena Public Schools. In the span of 72 hours last March, we shifted our district to function entirely online and/or remote including teaching/learning, food services, technology services and other business and/or operations related services. This provided all involved with a significant challenge to overcome as our lives were drastically changed over the course of a few days. Part of our planning process related to the 2020/2021 school year included a full consideration of this past spring as we worked to collectively analyze what went well, what did not go well, and how we can improve as an organization.

Key to this process of reflection was data including insights gained from surveys administered in June and July. While far from perfect, these surveys provided quantitative data that helped highlight strengths and needs. For example, the below insights were gained from surveys initiated this summer. Parents/families prefer weekly information (not too frequently or infrequently). Communication is needed across multiple platforms including email, social media, and website posts. A majority (74%) of parents/families reported utilizing district-provided technology for remote learning. A majority (84%) of parents/families reported having access to internet services that could provide a fast/stable environment for remote learning. Only a small percentage of parents/families reported that their child “loved” remote learning (4%) while 39% of families reported that their child “struggled” in this environment. The remaining 57% of families reported that their child “did well” with remote learning. However, doing well does not necessarily mean that their child enjoyed or prefers remote learning in any regard. Only 55% of HSD employees

reported utilizing district-provided technology to facilitate their remote learning environment.

These insights along with feedback gained from emails, conversations, and the outstanding context provided by members of our planning teams, helped form a foundation for improvement as we approached planning for the 2020/2021 school year. Paired with an unparalleled amount of guidance, we collectively sought to build upon learning in an effort to grow and improve. As noted below, these areas of learning helped inform our collective efforts to design, plan, and prepare for a school year full of unknowns. As we journey forward together, these areas of note will be important to consistently remember.

**Consistency is Key:** Students and parents alike reported that inconsistencies across classrooms hindered understanding. It was requested that specific technology tools and practices be employed district-wide in order to provide as much consistency as possible should remote/blended learning become necessary. **Frequent Communication but Within Reason:** Parents/families reported appreciating frequent communication. However, daily communication was a reported hinderance and monthly communication left too many unanswered questions. Weekly school/district communication seemed to be preferred. **Family Connect = Student Connection:** Time and time again, our connection with a family helped determine our enduring connection with a student. As we consider the 2020/2021 school year, it is imperative that we quickly develop trusting relationships with our students and their families. **Grace, Understanding, and Flexibility:** More than anything, students, educators, and families stressed the need of providing one another with grace, understanding, and flexibility during this ongoing time of uncertainty. As we move forward together, it will be vital that we regularly remember that everyone is collectively enduring an international crisis that our current generations have never previously experienced. Therefore, things will not be perfect, and we must work to consistently support one another in order to thrive during this time of ongoing stress, anxiety, and fear.

Planning for the 2020/2021 school year began last spring. As the COVID-19 pandemic continued through May, it became clear that our Helena Public Schools would need a multifaceted plan for the coming school year. Coupled with our need to improve, a public planning process was developed and detailed for the Board of Trustees as part of their June 9th, 2020 meeting. A related update was provided to parents and families as our planning strengthened to include volunteers from across our district and community.

Beginning in mid-June, over 140 volunteers came together as part of eight teams to focus on the development of plans for each of the below-listed interrelated areas. These volunteers typically dedicated up to ten-plus hours per week to meeting and designing the plans contained within this overarching document. Their dedication and continual service to our students, families and community was invaluable to the iterative

development of the best possible plans. Teams continued to meet through mid-July including dedicated feedback sessions with educators, parents, and other school partners. These “design sprints” (figure 2) provided early feedback from fellow stakeholders that successfully informed and shaped developing plans. Following each feedback session, teams utilized the shared insights to inform their designs. In addition, feedback sessions provided many of the initial questions captured on page 36 as part of our developing Frequently Asked Questions section.

**Masks/Face Coverings:** As the primary route of transmission for COVID-19 is respiratory, masks or face coverings are among the most critical components of risk reduction. Masks/face coverings protect the general public against COVID-19 infection, with a recent retrospective study estimating near 80% effectiveness in reducing COVID-19 transmission, especially when worn prior to symptom onset. Therefore, masks/face coverings will be mandated for use by all students and employees on-campus in Phase I and Phase II. This requirement is part of our general health/safety practices when, used in concert with social distancing and hand sanitizing, reduces virus exposure and transmission. Additional mask related information included. The CDC recommends all people 2 years and older wear face masks. Governor Bullock’s mask-related order recommends all people 5 years of age and older wear a cloth face covering in public settings and when around people who don’t live in your household, especially when other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain. While schools were not included in the original order, the Helena Public Schools has aligned our health/safety protocols to include this requirement. All students, employees, and visitors must wear a mask properly at all times unless the student or staff member has a medical contraindication for wearing a mask verified by a medical provider (MD, DO, NP, PA only). Students choosing not to wear a mask will not be allowed in the building or on district buses as alternative education opportunities are available. Masks/face coverings must be worn, and six feet of distance must be maintained in all music, theater, band, and choir classes if events are allowed in a phase. Masks/face coverings are required to be worn by everyone on the bus during school bus transportation. Preferably, masks/face coverings should be provided by the student/family, but extra disposable/reusable face masks are available at the school for any student, employee, and/or visitor. Reusable masks/face coverings provided by families should be washed daily or before the next day of use. Transparent face coverings provide the opportunity for more visual cues and should be considered as an alternative for younger students, students who are deaf and hard of hearing, and their teachers. Supervised mask breaks can occur throughout the day. Breaks should occur when students can be six feet apart and ideally outside or at least with the windows open. Students may remove masks for nutrition breaks, and meals. **Distancing:** Physical distancing is another important practice that helps mitigate transmission of the virus. The CDC has recommended maintaining a physical distance of six feet between individuals.

**Symptom Screening Upon Entry:** Checking for symptoms each morning by families and caregivers is critical and will serve as the primary screening mechanism for COVID-19 symptoms. Schools should provide information to families to support them in conducting this symptom check and families should not send their children to school if they exhibit COVID-19 symptoms. Schools will provide a checklist of symptoms and other guides to help families and students.

**Facility Upgrades:** As we approach the start of 2020/2021 school year, several upgrades and modifications will have been made to our schools and district facilities. Upgrades and modifications include: **Upgraded air filtration:** Our district operations team is working to ensure that the filtration systems within our central heating and/or air conditioning systems are upgraded to the highest possible specifications. These upgraded filters improve air quality, circulation, and ventilation. In addition, the use of fresh-air returns remains an ongoing part of our air circulation/ventilation design. **Designated hallway traffic patterns:** Each school will be working to designate student/employee traffic patterns within each building. If possible, these practices will include one-way halls to reduce congestion and ensure opportunities to remain safely distanced when on campus. **Partitions and other distancing structures:** Most of our schools and buildings have undergone renovations in recent years that provide for distancing options for school-based front office personnel. However, in offices open to the public that have not completed such upgrades, partitions are being included to ensure both visitors and employees are provided opportunities to safely distance. **Hand Hygiene:** **Handwashing and hand sanitizing:** Handwashing removes pathogens from the surface of the hands. While handwashing with soap and water is the best option, alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60 percent ethanol or at least 70 percent isopropanol) will be available to all students/staff when handwashing is not available. Students will be asked to wash and/or sanitize in and out of their classrooms as part of a general practice. **Student Cohorts:** As much as possible, schools will work to cohort students to keep group sizes to a minimum. This practice is expected to be part of lunch and/or recess efforts and may necessitate block scheduling at the secondary level. **Symptomatic Isolation:** In order to minimize transmission of COVID-19, schools will have an isolation space available for students displaying COVID-19 symptoms. Symptomatic students will be cared for by the nurse and/or other trained personnel but will not have access to other students and/or employees. It will be imperative that parents immediately come to school and pick up a symptomatic child when called.

**Phase I** is our most restrictive, in-person model for operating school on campus. Most notably, Phase I includes a hybrid model that utilizes an alternating day schedule to limit the number of students on campus at any given time. As a result, students attend both in-person and online in a blended model for teaching and learning. This alternating-day schedule

will provide students with two days of in-person instruction and three days of online learning. This should be considered an “alternate to closure” model as a hybrid effectively provides a highly restrictive environment while retaining a limited number of in-person learning opportunities. While not optimal, district and/or school closure may necessitate a shift to remote learning. Should health or health-related conditions necessitate such a decision, schools would generally close to in-person student attendance for a defined period. During that time of physical closure, all student/family services would shift to an online environment. Given the ongoing challenges of this pandemic, students and families will be provided a remote only option for the school year. This Digital Learning Initiative (DLI) will ensure that students/families that choose to remain involved via a digital option will retain their enrollment in their current grade and school. Students will receive instruction from designated teachers including grade-level consistent content and resources. Pacing of academic content will be similar to in-person classrooms and small-group, online opportunities will be provided in an effort to provide students with access to additional support. Additionally, schools will work to connect students to their on-campus peers through digital/online opportunities. Students attending via the Digital Learning initiative will have full access to our Helena Public Schools curriculum, materials, and technology. Furthermore, students may have additional access to electives, activities, and athletics both during and beyond the school day (details/specifics are forthcoming).

Upon return from this remote option, students will retain their enrollment in their current school and will be able to rejoin their classes and grade level peers. Families will not be asked to unenroll in any regard and will remain active as students within the Helena Public Schools.

Further information will be added to this draft plan as details are finalized. Families will be able to select this option in early August as part of our general back-to-school procedures. As we worked to prepare for the 2020/2021 school year, a number of needs arose that informed our decision to start this school year in a different manner.

First, in order to provide a safe, healthy, and aligned environment across phases, increased teacher/employee training and professional development will be required. Typically, collective time provide for training/professional development prior to the start of a school year is limited. Given our increased needs as we prepare for the coming school year, additional time for training/professional development will be required.

Second, our students and educators have largely functioned in a remote environment for the last five months. Aside from designated services provided across the summer months, few have been in an in-person, teaching and learning environment since mid-March. In order to effectively transition back into our schools, small, designated groups/cohorts will be needed in an effort to provide both physical and

emotional safety. Small student groupings will allow educators to better develop needed relationships and provide more one-to-one opportunities. Third, our students have likely developed needs, both academic and social/emotional since the onset of this pandemic last March. Small student groups across the first few days of school will assist teachers in assessing student needs so that we can effectively plan according to student needs. Finally, students need time to reorient themselves and become comfortable in school. Small student cohorts will provide meaningful opportunities in this regard with the small-group support of educators and other support personnel. Many routines have changed since students were last in school and a dedicated adjustment period can better support a physical and cognitive shift back to school.

For the above reasons, the Helena Public Schools are planning to open the 2020/2021 school year with a designated Rolling Start schedule.

Additional specifics will be provided by your child's school, but a draft district-wide schedule includes the following for the first eight days of this school year (August 26th through September 4th). When our students return to school, their needs may be very different. To facilitate a successful school start, HSD has created guidance for school-based teams in order to be proactive in considering, planning, and implementing both procedural and substantive aspects of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities and other vulnerable student groups. Ongoing guidance for school-based teams will focus on several noted priorities including safety, health, and the welfare of all students; provision of FAPE; identification of the need for and provision of compensatory services; consistent and detailed documentation of services and supports; and consistent communication with families regarding the Individualized Education Program (IEP). HSD has aligned the priorities, supports, and services of special education with general education. These priorities focus on academic as well as auxiliary supports needed to close achievement and opportunity gaps that existed before and may have changed since last school year. The needs of our students receiving special education services and other vulnerable students will be aligned to individualized supports and resources. These students and their families/caretakers will be at the forefront of team planning when creating district and/or school-level plans. Our planning response includes professional development, technical assistance, and/or training opportunities which includes educators/specialists who play a vital role in the provision of services to students with disabilities and vulnerable student populations. This includes but is not limited to teachers, special education staff, bus drivers, general education staff, paraprofessionals, and administrators. During any crisis, personal or public, emotional needs are intensified. The pandemic of 2020 has taken this intensification to an entirely new level as our community, state, nation, and world seek to endure the rigors of this ongoing crisis. Educators and families alike are working through levels of fear and anxiety that surpass norms of what we have previously experienced. As we approach this 2020/2021 school year, social and emotional supports (SES)

will be a vital component to our collective ability to endure and thrive amidst crisis and confusion.

**V. BOARD COMMENTS**

Additional discussion within the proposed plan by all board members to include specific dates, however, there is not a specific date currently. There needs to be more information provided from the health department to gain a better understanding to have a date to start school.

**VI. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no other topics for future meetings and no public comment on issues not on the agenda, the meeting adjourned at 6:38p.m. by Board Chair Luke Muszkiewicz.

Respectfully submitted,

Luke Muszkiewicz, Chair

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Jessica Evans, Recording Secretary

Date