



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 Meeting

Capital High School Auditorium via Microsoft Teams

Tuesday, February 9, 2021

5:30 p.m.

MINUTES

ATTENDANCE: Present unless otherwise noted

Luke Muszkiewicz, Board Chair

Siobhan Hathorne, Board Vice Chair

Terry Beaver, Trustee

John McEwen, Trustee

Sarah Sullivan, Trustee

Jennifer McKee, Trustee

Libby Goldes, Trustee

Jennifer Walsh, Board Member

Claire Downing, Helena High School Student Representative

Mariah, Capital High School Student Representative

Dr. Tyler Ream, Superintendent

Josh McKay, Assistant Superintendent

Janelle Mickelson, Business Manager

Stacy Collette, Human Resource Administrator

Gary Myers, Director of Educational Technology

Barb Ridgway, Chief of Staff

Steve Thennis, Helena High School Principal

Tim McMahon, Activities Director

Brett Zanto, Capital High School Principal

Many Guests of the Helena School District

I. CALL TO ORDER/ PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Luke Muszkiewicz called the meeting to order at 5:35 pm and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. REVIEW OF AGENDA

No changes

III. STUDENT & EDUCATOR RECOGNITIONS

The following students have been selected to the 2021 National Association for Music Education All-Northwest Honors Ensemble:

CHS Students: Zach Boles (Senior) - Cello, Maren Elliott (Sophomore) - Violin, Braelyn Germaine (Junior) – Viola, Rebecca Smillie (Sophomore) - Violin

HHS Students: Aine Cleary (Freshman) - Cello, Owen Cleary (Senior)- Violin, Fischer Friend (Senior) - Bass, Lenny Triem (Senior) – Cello

Presented by Mr. Zanto and Mr. Harris, Director. This is a Bi-Annual event with over 1500 applicants. Each student takes time to thank family, friends, and instructors.

IV. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Items for Action

1. School Phasing

Dr Ream presented the school phasing information. The year-to-date recap shows that there were 4 distinct phases aligned in consideration to the local health conditions. It was expected that schools would move out of Phase 1 sooner than they have. Mid to late November there was a phase down at the high school level due to lack of staffing. This allowed staff to be reallocated to elementary and middle schools to keep them open. Using the Harvard Global Health's Path to Zero and Schools: Achieving Pandemic Resilient Teaching and Learning Spaces, guidelines were released to physically return students to school. New guidance shows that the current model is overly restrictive. Numbers have been sitting in 0 phase on the model but we are not seeing school transmission. In a survey, 58% of parents say that their child's social/emotional needs are not being met. Only 24% said they were. The current dropout rate is higher than normal. There has been a lot of slippage. Some kids have been able to recover and some have not. There are gaps in learning that need to be addressed. Fall 20/21 school year, there were 16.3% F's at the middle school level in comparison to the year before where there were 4.6%. At the High School level there were 11.4% F's in the 20/21 Fall semester, in comparison to 3.6% the year before.

The updated guidance says that metrics should be used as general info and not as “on” and “off” switches. Schools are not contributing significantly to higher numbers. School nurses are doing all the contact tracing. The recommendations for being back in school are to continue to mask, provide 4-6 air changes per hour in the classrooms, continue with hand and bathroom hygiene and maintaining social distancing when feasible.

In order to phase up, a plan has been put together by a team and is being presented at this meeting to the Board for approval. The plan they have come up with would be to phase up to a 4-day Mon/Tues/Thurs/Fri model, with Wednesdays remaining out of school days as a “C” day to focus on DLI, quarantined kids, small group interventions and for teacher planning. Bell schedules would remain the same with the possible exception of High Schools. The previously updated transportation plan allows for times to change if needed as busses are now school specific.

Operations will continue with closed campuses, cohort recesses, limited field trips, school-based childcare through SACC, employee childcare on Wednesdays only, and limited external use of schools. Masking will continue, as well as contact tracing and quarantines, and physical distancing where feasible. Quarantine time has dropped from 14 to 10 days for those who show no symptoms.

Recommendation is to return to school 4 days a week on the following schedule: K-1-2 (Feb 22), 3-5 (March 1), 6-8 (March 8), 9-12 (March 15).

Trustee Hathhorn asks about how the air exchange study went. Kalli Kind explains that the firm doing the study is 90-95 % complete. With the exception of about 20 overall spaces among all the schools, they are achieving the 4 needed amounts of exchanges per hour. Those spaces that are not are generally modulars and the schools are able to achieve the 4 exchanges per hour with portable units.

Trustee McKee asks how many learning spaces are not able to achieve the 3 ft distancing standard. Kalli Kind answers that there are less than 20 across the district.

Trustee Beaver sites page 24 of the information showing that higher transmission rates are among the sports teams who are in closer contact with each other and he is concerned that this will be a similar issue when the students are all back in closer contact. He also asks for clarification on the 4 period per day block model. Dr Ream explains that this is only a starting point and can easily be altered.

Trustee Walsh asks if classroom books and shared supplies, etc. are being considered. Dr Ream says there is a plan for those things. Walsh also asks if cleaning standards will remain the same. Dr Ream explains that they will and in fact the amount of cleaning will have to go up with twice the number of kids there each day.

Another question asks if the C day will be mandatory or if it will be left up to staff, etc. Dr Ream answers that his hope is that it is a mandatory day but no one can be forced.

Dr Ream will leave the issue of safely scheduling lunches up to each school. They will probably use cohort lunches at different times.

Trustee Goldes asks about the iReady assessments and if there is any way to see if DLI student's vs in person students are the ones with the lower test scores. Info not available right now.

It is a concern that there will be a shortage in staff. Helena has a low unemployment rate which provides less subs to the schools to cover when teachers are sick or quarantined.

How are music classes like band and choir being handled? Dr Ream answers that there are masks for instruments and special masks for singing. Once it's warm, being outside is also an option.

Chairman Muszkiewicz asks if there is any update on the ability to test asymptomatic students and staff? Dr Reams says it's not a possibility at this time as the tests can pick up all Corona Viruses that may not be the COVID 19 strand. Nurses are also already too busy.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Those who were at the meeting in person spoke first and those online followed. Each person was given 3 minutes to speak and this was timed by the Chairman. Participants were asked to speak and spell their name and tell whether they were part of the school district. Chairman Muszkiewicz asked all participants to please maintain civility and respect in their speaking.

Auggie Tupper, Capital High Student Body President: Student council had 1 meeting and sent out 2 surveys on the topic. The students were generally split 50/50. The students who are wanting to phase up are also expecting that to mean the readmission of student dances, sports, etc. The ones who do not want to phase up are feeling comfortable in the current model.

Jaida Salois, Capital High Senior: Lists the Pros of phasing up as: better academic success to combat the lower grades, social and mental health improvement. Cons are cited as: more quarantines that create further isolation, worried for teacher's health, changing of the schedules again would be stressful, and DLI kids may be overlooked.

Zach Heller, Capital High Sophomore: He lists the Pros of staying in the current phase as: easier pace of learning on own time, can create own schedules, flexibility to outside lives and jobs, and a lesser risk with a bigger buffer between kids. Cons of staying in current phase: Some kids are not learning, they are just passing, more students are failing, there is less teacher communication, and the social/emotional issues.

Marty Schuma: He thanks the Board for responding to emails. After the presentation by Dr Ream, he is in favor of the 4-day model. He offers the help of Dick Anderson Construction to help with any construction needs to assist with the phase up.

Teresa Kelley-Brewer, kids at Capital High: She agrees with the 4-day model. She says kids need to get back to school. The numbers are skewed because some of the D's are from kids who have been given lots of extra help and extended timelines to even reach that D. She is a case worker at God's Love and is exposed every day and has not gotten it. She sees kids that are at home trying to totally do this on their own because parents have to leave them alone to work. She is hearing of kids becoming suicidal. Kids are getting together and seeing each other outside of school so what's the difference.

Jenise Cockhill, kids at Capital High: She holds education in the highest regard. She believes teachers are underpaid and over worked. However, she believes that to also be true of everyone right now. Everyone has extra cleaning and extra work. She was at Flathead High School in Kalispell and when she walked in, it was full and kids were wearing masks but they were happy. She feels kids can be trusted to go back and follow protocols. She never thought she would have to fight for her kid's education in this way.

Courtney McAdams, in district: She thanks the Board for the dialog. She wants the community to come together instead of seeing the current divide between teachers and parents. She feels a kid's place is in school.

Amy Pfister, in district: She believes that the data that is being looked at only shows those that have voices. She wants the Board to consider those that are

unseen. Some are not safe or happy at home. She speaks on this personally, explaining that her own abuse story may have never been heard if it wasn't for her school when she was a child.

Kevin Ward, teacher in district: Teachers have been putting in so much work. It has been long and hard. They are teaching 5 days a week to 3 different populations. The anti-teacher sentiment that seems to be arising makes him less comfortable. He argues that schools have been open all year while schools across the country have been fully closed. He believes the current model is working and to change it now would be a disruption. Teachers are 27% more likely than the general public to contract COVID 19.

Ramsey Beleu: Against going back until teachers are vaccinated. Everyone is struggling but vaccines are so close so why can't they wait just a bit longer until those vaccines can be administered?

Denise Wolfe: We are all disgruntled over lack of transparency and good data. Thank you to Dick Anderson for offer to help with a phase up. She student taught at Smith school. She explains that one lesson centered on counting apples but the apples kept disappearing. They later found that a child who was not getting enough food at home was stealing the apples. She is worried for all the kids like that one. She also says she got her Masters online in a live classroom and wonders why we can't to do more live classrooms for when we cannot have kids in school.

Greta Hageman, 8th grader at CR Anderson: She opposes phasing up. She had COVID and was very sick and her grades dropped. She believes the current phase allows for kids to stay safe but also have a bit of interaction with teachers and peers on their in-school days. She says her Social Studies class took a poll and 66% wanted to stay in the current phase.

Jane Shawn, Teachers Union: Teachers want to go back, just not quite yet. They are putting in more time and effort than ever. In her survey she found that 62% of teachers at elementary levels did not feel safe with a phase up. 72% at Middle school level and 73% at High School level. They site issues with lunch time, more quarantines, social distancing. Many want to be vaccinated and ask that people continue to petition the governor to return teachers to tier 1B.

Tanner Duncan, teacher at Capital High speaking on behalf of **DeLacy Humbert**: DeLacy is a science and physics teacher at Capital. She wants to be back with students however one year ago she had 2 of 5 brain tumors

removed and her health does not allow her to be back with the high risk of exposure. She lives remotely and does not have great internet. Science is hands on. Under the current model she feels safer being at the school. With twice as many students all at once she feels she will have to choose either her health or her career.

Lenny Triem, senior at Capital High: The current Phase is doing a good job of preventing the spread. Phasing up right now is not the way to do things. It will just cause more kids to go full DLI. Consistency is important. It would make sense to possibly open for the younger students and wait on opening back up fully for the older students.

Kaitlyn Webb, teacher in the Helena school district: She commends all the students who have spoken tonight. She agrees that schools fill in many societal gaps. However, she thinks that it is an unnecessary risk to phase up when a vaccine is so close.

Adam Clinch, teacher at Capital: He believes the presentation given interpreted the Harvard Global Report differently than he would. He believes those recommendations are for schools who were completely closed to this point and who are just starting to reopen. He argues that the Helena schools have been open since the first of the year and the current model is working.

Lynn McKeever, in District: The schools in Helena are the only ones who have not gone back to 5 days. She understands the want to wait until vaccinated but says everyone else is still working without the vaccine. People can't continue to stay home. She pleads for those that cannot be heard.

Becca Leaphart, teacher in Helena school district; She understands that she and the teachers at the schools play a big part in the care of these kids. She wants strong relationships and care for these kids. Teachers don't want to phase up because they are worried about more quarantines. At one point this year, she was the only regular teacher in her hall, as the rest were subs. Teachers will get sick and quarantined and then in-person school will just be kids staring at screens with a sub in the room. That's not any better. She would like to wait until the vaccines are available.

Rachel Carol-Revis, in district: Her family has several heart conditions and they appreciate the work the district has done with the current hybrid model. She is concerned for her family if the kids all go back. She would like the schools to wait for warmer weather and until more vaccines are available. Her

family may have to move to fully DLI if the district phases up. She wonders what the health risks are that cannot be traced because of asymptomatic kids.

Lauren Mitchell, teacher in the district: She wants students back in the classrooms full time but wants to wait for the numbers to decrease. We know the current model is safe. The nurses will not be able to keep up with contract tracing if numbers start to rise again. At least at the high school level, they should stay in the hybrid model.

Kari Smoot, para at Capital High: She loves to hear the students comment tonight and appreciates that some have spoken up on behalf of their teachers. She is worried that another change in routine will disrupt something that has become normal. She believes that a small phase up may be a way to start but to leave the Jr. High and High Schools in the current model.

Tricia Rummel, Capital High teacher: She appreciates the students, families, teachers, Board, Dr Ream and Jane Shawn for all their hard work so far this year. She feels the current hybrid model is consistent for the students and has shown to be safe. She would like to see things continue as they are.

Kimberly Cook, teacher at Capital High: She is remote teaching this year for health reasons. The proposed new model is concerning. The school nurses can't contract trace at a higher rate for both teachers and students. The hallways will be overcrowded again. She urges people to continue to petition the governor to change the vaccine schedule to include teachers sooner. The proposed timeline is worrisome. She believes it is too fast to implement the right amount of safety measures.

Jessica Fisher, Bryant school Special Education teacher: She is speaking on behalf of those teachers who DO want to go back. He students are not making any gains; in fact, the gap is growing. The current model is not working for the kids she sees. They need more face-to-face time. She would like a slower phase possibly, but a phase up.

Board Comment:

Trustee Sullivan: Many thanks to the speakers tonight, the committee and Dr Ream. We have been responsible. Teachers have worked much harder this year. We need to carry out what is best for the kids. The phase up does not mean things will be like they were before. The schools have the right to phase back down should numbers rise. People are fearful but they were also fearful of the hybrid model and it has worked.

Board Vice Chair Hathhorn: Thank you to the team who put together the plan, also everyone who has called and emailed, etc. She respects every opinion and letter. She is sad to see the teachers being attacked on some levels. She appreciates that many people are willing to compromise with the 4-day model that is being proposed.

Trustee Goldes: She recognizes the hard work of all the staff. The change in vaccine tier for teachers is unfortunate. There are variant strains coming. In March, the numbers are expected to go up again. She agrees with Adam Clinch that some people are only now moving to reopen, whereas we have been open all year. She would be more receptive to elementary phasing up first and waiting on the higher grades.

Trustee Beaver: The current status is actually similar to where we were a year ago. There are 5 new strains of the virus and they are unknown and spreading. Vaccines may not even work on the new strains. Isolation is the best way to keep the virus from spreading. The current model works while still allowing students to have some in school time. We should not deviate now.

Trustee Walsh: There are always two perspectives on every decision. She has her own personal experience and she believes that students and parents want to come back. It is important to look at what is best for the students overall.

Trustee McKee: The scientific facts have changed and that is why we are having this discussion. Her faith is in the facts and in Dr Ream. We fought something with the sacrifices this past year and what we did is not in vain.

Chairman Muszkiewicz: He is thankful for all the comments. He trusts Dr Ream's guidance as he has done a great job guiding us so far. It is still important to note that numbers are continuing to decrease. He is excited to think about the possibility of future testing for asymptomatic people. Vaccine will be the most significant tool they can have. It was heartbreaking to see the teachers moved to Tier 1C, and we have no idea when 1C will begin to have vaccines ready. He is very concerned about the variants. We will need to monitor other countries and their infection rates with the new strands. The timeline is the only concern so that should be left up to Dr Ream to alter if needed. This is not Dr Ream's decision or the Board's decision, but it is "our" decision.

Motion: Phase up as outlined in Dr Ream's plan made by trustee Sullivan,
Second by Trustee Hathhorn

Public Comment: None

Board Comment: None

Vote: 6-2. Trustee Libby Goldes and Trustee Terry Beaver voted no. Motion carried.

2. Bid for Jefferson boiler update

Kalli Kind explains that the steam pipes at Jefferson are failing and leaching steam. This is causing the floor to pop up, etc. They will need to remove all the pipes and replace with a central heating system that will also have central air, as it is actually more cost effective. 2 bids were received. Tri County is a local company and Central Heating is a company from Great Falls. Central Heating was a considerably lower bid at \$1,045,776. It is expected to last at least 40 years. This will also provide better air quality and be like a new school. The work will begin in late May after hours and through the summer with a completion date estimated at mid-August.

Motion: Motion to accept the bid from Central Heating made by Trustee McEwen, second by Trustee Sullivan

Public Comment: None

Board Comment: None

Vote: 8-0. Motion carried

3. Policies for Final Review/Approval

a. **Policy 3000: Equal Educational Opportunities Policy** No change

b. **Policy 4005: School Support Associations** No change

c. **Policy 4020: Visitors to Schools** No change

d. **Policy 4330 Community Use of School Facilities**

a. **Procedure 4330P: Community Use of School Facilities-**

Administrative Procedures Line 136 to add- alcohol, narcotics including medical and recreational marijuana

Motion: Motion to approve made by Trustee Goldes, Second by Trustee Beaver

Public Comment: None

Board Comment: None

Vote: 8-0. Motion carries.

B. Consent Items

1. Approval of the 01.12.2021 Board meeting Minutes

2. Approval of the 01.28.2021 Special Board meeting Minutes

3. Approval of Personnel Actions
4. Approval of Warrants
5. Approval of Sabbaticals for 2021-2022 school year
Motion: Motion to approve made by Trustee Sullivan, Second by Trustee Hathhorn.
Public Comment: None
Board Comment: None
Vote: 8- 0. Motion carries.

C. Reports

1. Policy Committee Report

Trustee Goldes reports that they have been working on 5 different policies. There were no changes made so nothing needed by the Board. Those policies were 4025, 4030, 4035, 4036, 4040. They will move on to the 1000 series next.

2. Teaching & Learning Committee Report

Trustee Sullivan reports that they have been looking over the math curriculum. 5 or 6 years ago it was voted on to require 3 years of math to graduate and that is something they may reconsider.

3. Budget and Finance Committee

Trustee McEwen reports that they went over the monthly financial report and things are going as planned. They looked at High School FTE counts and keep adjusted as population increases. Meeting moved from 1st Friday to the 3rd Tuesday of every month.

4. Health Benefits Committee Report

Trustee McEwen tells the Board that they went over the yearly Allegiance Report of the Employee Healthcare Plan. The average age of employees has dropped by about 2 years in the last 18 months making it a bit cheaper. 9 Million in claims were made in the year. About 1/3 of that went to St. Peter's Hospital locally. A large portion of that money also went to Express Scripts. Stop loss premium also rose.

5. Negotiations Update

Stacy Collette reports that by the next Board meeting they should have an agreement to submit to the Board. Negotiations with the Secretaries Union has just begun.

6. Montana School Board Association Report

They are still working to secure the inflationary increase of 1.5% for 21/22 and 2.57% for 22/23. The state has 10% reserves money and the state decides where it goes. A portion of funding is based on Title 1. MTSBA is trying to secure Special Education funding and some money has already been allocated to computer and data systems. HB279 is the Espinosa Decision. The Tax Credit Scholarship is constitutional and it raises the credit from \$150.00 to \$200,000.00. MTSBA opposes. They want to compel that money to go to public education versus private schools. Janelle explains that the argument is that tax dollars should go to public schools.

7. Helena Education Association Report

Jane Shawn speaks on SB89 which says that payroll deductions can no longer be made for union dues. They are opposing this. They believe the government is getting in the way of what an employee can do with their own paycheck. HB143 is sponsored by Lou Jones. It states that if the starting salary of the lowest teacher is at 70% of the average salary, the district will get \$3350 for every teacher that is a 0,1 or 2 on the pay scale. That money would go into the general fund for use in paying salaries.

8. HHS/CHS Student Representative Report

Claire states that HHS is starting registration for the next school year. There will be some new course offerings. There are 4 National Merit Finalists from that school.

Mariah tells the Board that Capital High is also beginning registration for the next school year. They are doing an external review of Capital High and interviews with both staff and students in the review. They are also working on a credit recovery program for Seniors.

VI. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Last summer the city council discussed SRO's (School Resource Officers). City Council and the Manager are continuing those discussions. High School admin, staff and students will be asked to participate in the discussions to help better understand the views on SRO's. He also mentions that Ron Whitmoyer, Superintendent of East Helena School District, is retiring from East Helena after 19 years.

VII. BOARD COMMENTS

Chairman Muszkiewicz reports on the superintendent search. The semifinalist interviews will be held Feb 10 & 11. Dr Keith Brown is a finalist in another district and they have decided this may not be the best fit at this time. After the interviews

there will be a closed session and then the finalists will be announced and released to the press. The process is expected to conclude around the 18th or 19th.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no other topics for future meetings and no public comments on issues not on the agenda, the meeting adjourned at 11:00 p.m. The next Board of Trustees meeting will be March 9, 2021.

Respectfully Submitted,

Luke Muszkiewicz, Chair

Gretchen George, Recording Secretary Date