



Great People...Great Falls Public Schools

November 2024,

As November arrives, we warmly welcome the change of season and the anticipation of the upcoming holidays. This time of year brings joy and reflection for many, though we recognize it can also be a source of stress or anxiety for some in our community. Let's extend kindness and support to one another as we move through the holiday season together. With the first quarter behind us, we're proud of our students' hard work and growth, and we now set our sights on the halfway point of the school year. Thank you for your continued dedication and support in making this journey a positive one for all.

Please be safe. Welcome to the November edition of GFPS Highlights with Superintendent Hoyer.

Great Falls...

Hometown Pride – Celebrating the unique spirit and traditions of Great Falls.

- As we honor Native American Heritage Month this November, we celebrate the rich histories, cultures, and contributions of Native American peoples. At Great Falls Public Schools, we are committed to fostering respect and an appreciation of the heritage that shapes our community. This year, we are privileged to feature lodges on the football field at North Middle School, offering students and community members a special opportunity to engage more closely with Native American traditions. These lodges serve as a visible reminder of the resilience, values, and legacy of Indigenous cultures. Thank you to Indigenous Education Department Director Dugan Coburn, and those involved in making these meaningful installations possible, and to our students, staff, and families for continuing to support a learning environment that honors and respects all cultures.

Helping Hands – Working together to support our students and staff.

- Our Great Falls Public Schools speech and debate teams are off to an incredible start, with 22 talented and passionate students making an impressive showing at their season opener in Butte. Now, they need your support as they prepare for our annual Great Falls Debate meet on December 13th and 14th. We invite you to volunteer as a judge for this exciting event! No prior experience is necessary and it's a fantastic opportunity to be inspired by tomorrow's leaders as they showcase their skills alongside peers from across the state. Use the QR code below to sign up as a judge—your support will make a difference!



Harnessing Innovation – Through State Tax Credits

- The *Innovative Tax Credit* program is helping Great Falls Public Schools (GFPS) provide advanced educational opportunities for students. The dollar-for-dollar contributions are used to support initiatives that prepare students for academic and career success. Donors to GFPS will receive a dollar-for-dollar state tax credit voucher to use on their upcoming taxes. If the contribution covers the tax liability and there is money remaining, unused amounts carry over for up to two years. Funds are used by the District to enhance technology, support students with disabilities, and build partnerships with local businesses. The District is utilizing the money for class curriculum-related field trips as well as remodeling the former Great Falls High School Shop into a cutting-edge Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) learning center for all learners, grades K-12. Donations for 2025 must be received by January 15, with funds capped at \$1.2 million per District. Please call Brian Patrick at 406.268.6050 or check out the District website at <https://gfps.k12.mt.us/departments/business-services-and-operations/business-office-and-finance/innovative-education-programs-tax-credit>

Heroic Employees – Applauding the dedication and hard work of our incredible employees.

- In November, we are proud to recognize two exceptional groups in education whose work often goes unseen but whose impact is deeply felt across our district: school psychologists (November 11-15) and substitute teachers (November 18-22). Our school psychologists are essential in fostering the social, emotional, and academic well-being of our students. They work closely with students, families, and staff, providing valuable mental health support, addressing learning challenges, and creating positive, inclusive school environments. Their expertise in mental health, learning, and behavior equips our students to overcome obstacles and succeed in both school and life. Equally vital are our substitute teachers, who bring flexibility, adaptability, and dedication to our classrooms every day. These educators step in whenever needed, ensuring that learning continues smoothly, even in the absence of regular teachers. They provide stability, continuity, and care, helping students stay engaged and maintain progress in their studies. If you know a school psychologist or a substitute teacher, please take a moment to thank them for their service to Great Falls Public Schools!

Hard Work with our Community – Fostering strong connections between our schools and the community.

- I'd like to take a moment to emphasize the critical importance of school attendance, not only for student success but also for the essential funding that supports our schools. In Montana, state funding for schools is determined by the "average number belonging" (ANB), a calculation based upon enrollment recorded during specific fall and spring official count days. Our fall overall enrollment is down by 136 students, across the district, which could impact overall funding from the state, next year. We will average that number with our second official count day in March, to determine the overall yearly enrollment for our district. In addition, consistent student attendance directly impacts the resources available to support teaching, programs, and activities that enrich our students' learning experiences. Our quarter one average daily attendance remained equivalent to this time last year, at 90.06%. Every school day missed is a lost opportunity for growth and learning, and high attendance is essential for our students to achieve their academic potential. When students attend regularly, they stay on track with their

studies, build stronger connections with teachers and peers, and contribute to a positive school environment. Please join us in encouraging students who miss school to actively engage in their education by attending.

Habits to Build the Future – fostering academic skills and reinforcing habits for after graduation.

- As we move forward in the school year, I want to share an update on academic performance, a key focal area in our Great Falls Public Schools Strategic Plan. This fall, our students completed the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments, which provide us with a baseline to track growth throughout the year. In reading, our median scores and overall distribution analysis reveal that we are right on track with where we stood at this time last year. In math, we are currently one percentage point lower than last year’s fall results. Our curriculum team is actively identifying factors that may influence these scores, such as “summer slide”, specific curriculum bumps where curriculum expectations and measures rapidly increase, and instructional methods so that we can make targeted adjustments to reach our growth goals. Thank you for your continued support in ensuring our students reach their full potential. Through our collective efforts, we can strengthen both academic outcomes and attendance as we work to meet our strategic goals.

Hands-On Learning – Embracing innovative and interactive educational experiences.

- This fall, our high school drama and music teachers have dedicated countless hours to bring the magic of musical theatre to life. Through relentless practice, polish, and production, their hard work paid off in six spectacular performances of *Guys and Dolls* at Great Falls High School, which ran from November 7-16. Now, we eagerly anticipate *The Pirates of Penzance* opening at CM Russell High School on December 5. Come witness our talented students shine on stage and in the orchestra pits! For more information, call the high schools or check out their Facebook pages. Let’s support our young performers and celebrate the arts in our community! For more information on all music concerts during this holiday season, please visit us at https://resources.finalseite.net/images/v1731098674/gfpsk12mtus/laugdgdjmusvu5wmqvc/11-8-2024_GFPS_2024HolidayConcerts.pdf

Heartfelt Commitment – Great Falls Public Schools is proud of the comprehensive opportunities we give our students. From high-quality academics to high-quality opportunities, to tomorrow’s high-quality leaders, we invite you to visit and learn with us!



Warm regards,

Heather Hoyer
Superintendent, Great Falls Public Schools