



Great People...Great Falls Public Schools

April 2025,

April in our public schools is a vibrant time of growth, showmanship, and renewal. We are witness to the days growing longer and the first signs of spring. It is during this time that our classrooms and campuses come alive with energy and renewed purpose. Students showcase their talents through concerts, art shows, award assemblies, and athletic competitions, demonstrating the skills and passions they've cultivated throughout the year. Teachers nurture curiosity and resilience, guiding learners through the final stretch of this year's academic journey. It's a season of fresh ideas, budding confidence, and renewed commitment to learning—a time when our school communities blossom alongside the world outside. Welcome to the April edition of GFPS Highlights with Superintendent Hoyer.

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

- There is a deep sense of pride that comes with welcoming officials and guests into our schools—pride in our students, our staff, and the incredible work happening every day across Great Falls Public Schools (GFPS). This spring has been especially rewarding, as we've opened our doors to a variety of visitors eager to witness firsthand the dynamic teaching and learning taking place. From representatives of the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education visiting Morningside-CORE Elementary School to observe both our "little learners" and the "big learners" (college students) gaining real-world experience—to the Superintendent of Public Instruction engaging with students at the High School House and CORE programs, the message is clear: GFPS is a place where learning comes to life. As we prepare to host the Board of Public Education for a visit during their spring Trustee meeting, we remain proud to showcase not only our successes, but also the thoughtful, innovative ways we tackle challenges together.

Heartfelt Thank You for Time Given – Working together to support our students, staff, and community.

- Working together to support our students, staff, and community is one of the cornerstones of Great Falls Public Schools. Our *Building Readers* program is a shining example of that commitment in action. Currently, about 45 community volunteers—retired individuals, business members, church groups, and other dedicated citizens—are giving their time each week in four elementary schools to help our young learners grow in literacy. With just one hour a week, these volunteers have already logged over 1,400 hours this year, making a meaningful impact on our schools, teachers, and most importantly, our students. Early feedback from students, teachers, principals, and volunteers suggests that this program is not only valuable but also boosting reading skills and confidence among our young readers. In early May, we will conduct evaluations and host a reception to celebrate and thank these incredible volunteers. We're excited to continue this program next year—if you or someone you know would like to join this effort, please contact Carol Paul at (406) 268-6779. Together, we are building strong readers and a stronger community.

Helena Updates – From legislation to policy.

- As the legislative session in Helena nears its end, Great Falls Public Schools continues to closely monitor the progress of bills that may impact public education. This month, the Superintendent's Advisory Panel engaged in a hands-on exercise to better understand the journey of a legislative bill—from its introduction and passage into law, to how it influences district policy and ultimately shapes school handbooks. It's an important, albeit lengthy, process that underscores the complexity of running a school district and the importance of staying informed and proactive. We are grateful to our local and state legislators for their dedication, time, and energy throughout this session, and we appreciate their continued efforts to support Montana's students and schools.

Harnessing Achievement– Talking about and measuring how we learn.

- Great Falls Public Schools uses a variety of assessments to guide instruction and measure student growth throughout the year. One key tool is MAST (Montana Aligned to Standards Through-Year), which has largely replaced the traditional SBAC (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium or Smarter Balanced) assessment for students in grades 3–8. Administered multiple times annually, MAST is designed to provide timely, actionable feedback that teachers can use to adjust instruction and support student learning. GFPS has been actively involved in the pilot and field-testing phases of this new assessment on behalf of the State of Montana. Encouragingly, this year's MAST results indicate growth in both math and English Language Arts, moving us closer to our strategic goal of ensuring that at least 80% of students demonstrate a minimum of one year's academic growth. Additionally, preliminary ACT (American College Test) results for our juniors—most of whom have already completed the test—show promising gains across all areas, including math, English, reading, writing, science, and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math). These results reflect the dedication of our educators and students as we continue to strive for excellence.

Heroic Employees and Volunteers – Applauding dedication and hard work.

- April is a month full of meaningful faculty and staff recognition, and Great Falls Public Schools is proud to honor several vital groups whose contributions make a lasting impact on our schools and community. This month, we celebrate Associate Principals (April 1), Aides/Paras/Tutors (April 2), School Librarians (April 4), and Administrative Assistants (April 23). Each of these roles play a critical part in supporting student success, creating safe and welcoming environments, and keeping our schools running smoothly. If you know someone who works in one of these essential positions, please take a moment to thank them. GFPS is stronger, more supportive, and more successful because of their dedication and hard work.

Hard Work Recognized - Fostering strong connections between our schools, students, and the community.

- April and May are special months in our schools as we take time to celebrate the incredible achievements of our students. Across the district, students are recognized for scholarship, citizenship, and leadership through a variety of school and community events. One of the most historic and cherished traditions is the annual Heisey Awards. For 84 years, the Heisey Foundation has generously provided financial awards and recognitions to eligible high school students in Great Falls and the surrounding trade area. Established by the estate of Charles E. Heisey and awarded in

partnership with the Great Falls Public Schools Foundation, this honor celebrates students who demonstrate improvement within their ability in the areas of citizenship, scholarship, and effort. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Heisey Foundation for their enduring commitment to celebrating student growth and achievement—your support continues to make a lasting impact. This year 122 GFPS students were recognized.

Heartfelt Thank You for Time Given – Working together to support our students, staff, and community.

- Great Falls Public Schools is proud to celebrate the remarkable dedication and impact of our 48 retirees, whose careers have shaped the lives of countless students and colleagues. In addition, we honor employees reaching milestones of 25, 30, and 35 years of service—together, representing an extraordinary 1,455 years of specialized knowledge, skill, and unwavering commitment to our schools. These individuals are the heart of our district, and their contributions have left a lasting legacy. If you know one of these amazing individuals, please recognize and thank them for all they have done for our community. We wish our retirees the very best as they begin this exciting new chapter.

Heads-up on Dates– Keeping our community up to date on important events.

- As a reminder to our community, the upcoming School Board election is underway, and voters should watch for ballots in their mailboxes soon. This year, four candidates are vying for three open positions on the Board of Trustees. Incumbents Gordon Johnson and Paige Turoski are joined on the ballot by Craig Duff and Tony Rosales, both seeking to bring new perspectives to the Board. To help voters make informed decisions, Great Falls Rising will host a candidate forum on April 23rd at 6:00 PM in Room B101 at Great Falls College MSU. We encourage all eligible citizens to participate in this important process—your vote helps shape the future of our schools. Let’s “get out the vote” Great Falls!

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

Tell your friends about us: Please feel free to invite family and friends to subscribe to *Highlights with Superintendent Hoyer* by emailing their name and email address, along with a request to get on our mailing list to superintendent@gfps.k12.mt.us.

Learn more about GFPS by following us on Facebook or visiting our website at www.gfps.k12.mt.us