

1 **MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING**
2 **OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**
3 **HELD DECEMBER 15, 2025**
4

5 A duly called Regular Meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Great Falls Public
6 Schools was held at the District Offices Building, 1100 4th Street South, on the 15th Day
7 of December 2025.

8
9 At 5:30 pm, Chairperson Johnson called to order the Regular Meeting of the Board of
10 Trustees and informed the participants and audience that the meeting was being
11 recorded per Board Policy 1420.

12
13 **ROLL CALL:** Luke Diekhans took roll call.

14
15 **Trustees Present:** Gordon Johnson
16 Kim Skornogoski
17 Bill Bronson
18 Craig Duff
19 Marlee Sunchild
20 Amie Thompson
21 Paige Turoski
22

23 **Others Present:** Heather Hoyer, Superintendent; Luke Diekhans, Director of Business
24 Operations; Jackie Mainwaring and Lance Boyd, Executive Directors for Student
25 Achievement; Jeff Williams, Director of Information Technology; Heather Spurzem,
26 Director of Human Resources; and Stephanie Becker, Director of the Great Falls Public
27 Schools Foundation.

28
29 Also present was Tom Cubbage, Great Falls Education Association President.

30
31 The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
32

33
34 **ADOPT AGENDA**

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36 Motion – Paige Turoski, Seconded – Bill Bronson, passed unanimously to adopt the
37 agenda as presented.
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40 **APPROVE CONSENT AGENDA**

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42 Motion – Kim Skornogoski, Seconded – Marlee Sunchild, passed unanimously to
43 approve the Consent Agenda as presented.
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45 **A. Minutes of the November 24, 2025 Regular Board Meeting** – The Board approved
46 the minutes of the November 24, 2025 Regular Board Meeting as presented.
47

1 **B. Personnel Actions** – The Board approved the Personnel Actions as presented.

2
3 **C. Good Apple Awards** - The Board approved the nominations of Good Apple Awards
4 for Amanda Brumwell, Amber Litzinger, Taylor Willmarth, Mike Mazurkiewicz, Allison
5 Price, Ellen Coogan, Bethany Blessing, Elizabeth Chargois, Jessica Clinesmith, and
6 Memory McCracken, all substitute teachers district-wide.

7
8 **D. Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) TR-35 School Bus Driver Certificates**

9 The Board approved the Montana OPI TR-35 School Bus Driver Certificates for the
10 individuals listed in the agenda.

11
12 **E. Student Activity Monthly Report for September 2025** – The Board approved the
13 Student Activity Accounts for September 2025 as presented.

14
15 **F. Student Activity Monthly Report for October 2025** – The Board approved the
16 Student Activity Accounts for October 2025 as presented.

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19 **COMMUNICATION**

20
21 **A. Report of the Student Representatives**

22 Great Falls High School (GFHS) student representatives Kaitlynn Fulbright and Weston
23 Stoll shared highlights of recent Great Falls High activities, including the winter formal
24 prom, winter concerts featuring choir, band, and orchestra, and the theater department's
25 production of *Steel Magnolias*. They noted community service efforts by the Advanced
26 Chamber Orchestra and Student Council, as well as Student Council participation in the
27 MASC conference and schoolwide initiatives promoting gratitude and positive school
28 culture. Additional updates included engaging classroom projects, recognition of
29 Teachers and Staff of the Month, progress in winter athletics, the Video Production
30 class's continued partnership with the Great Falls Public Library Foundation on the
31 annual Book-a-thon PSA, and a discussion on the history and significance of the
32 Woehner Scholarship Award.

33
34 Paris Gibson Education Center (PGEC) student representatives Aspen Logan-
35 Schwecke and Kaytlynn McClure highlighted a wide range of interdisciplinary learning,
36 cultural activities, and student engagement opportunities, including collaborative art and
37 English projects, literature-inspired artwork, Indigenous arts education, and hands-on
38 science and cultural enrichment activities supported by Great Falls Public Schools
39 Foundation grants. They reported on career exploration experiences, creative arts
40 programs, historical learning tied to the SS *Edmund Fitzgerald*, and student celebrations
41 such as the annual powwow and cross-school social outings. The presentation also
42 noted seasonal activities promoting creativity, community building, and positive school
43 culture, concluding with holiday well-wishes.

44
45 Charles M. Russell (CMR) High School student representatives Emerson Hamma, Lydia
46 Comstock, and Addie Crist highlighted community service efforts such as the Lunch
47 Buddy program, in which high school students visit elementary schools to support
48 attendance and serve as positive role models, as well as holiday family adoptions and

1 charitable donations by athletic teams. They shared examples of engaging classroom
2 learning across English, science, social studies, world languages, and physics, along
3 with updates on career and technical education programs recognized through visits
4 from state and national leaders and continued community partnerships. Additional
5 updates included winter athletics, club and performing arts achievements, student
6 government participation at the MASC state convention, recent cultural and social
7 events, and recognition of Rustler Pride, including the CMR volleyball team receiving
8 the MHSА Stockman Bank Team Sportsmanship Award.

9
10 **B. Superintendent Report**

11 Superintendent Hoyer highlighted recent district activities, including a staff holiday
12 “Candyland” celebration that featured the Charles M. Russell High School Russell Ayres
13 choir musicians. This yearly event brings employees together for fellowship and
14 collaboration. Several student-led service initiatives supporting the community,
15 including drama students helping serve dinner at the Rescue Mission and the Junior
16 Reserve Officers Training Corp (JROTC) Wreaths Across America project, took place.
17 Updates were shared on literacy efforts emphasizing access to books, elementary
18 literacy programming, and ongoing holiday concerts across schools, with observations
19 on instructional practices that encourage student movement and engagement.
20 Additional reports included student achievement data through Measures of Academic
21 Progress (MAP) growth results and winter sports participation trends. Superintendent
22 Hoyer recognized Kathy Ramey, Student Systems Analyst for Great Falls Public
23 Schools, and her continued collaboration with the State of Montana on a PowerSchool
24 pilot project featuring analytics to improve data use. The goal of the pilot program is to
25 help Montana school administrators and teachers streamline cumbersome data sharing
26 and improve communication. The report also included recognition of alumni (Mr. Jeff
27 Gray) and Governor of Montana, Greg Gianforte, for donations supporting educational
28 projects. *Data for the Day* highlights included mental health screening data and staff
29 training efforts. Superintendent Hoyer concluded with holiday well-wishes from the
30 Cabinet team.

31
32 **C. Audience Communication**

33 Community member, Judith Mortensen, addressed the Board regarding a bill currently
34 before the Montana Senate that would create a joint resolution to study the lack of
35 enforcement of existing marijuana laws. She encouraged the Board to review available
36 research on the physical and academic impacts of marijuana use on students, noting
37 concerns that current practices place youth at increased risk. The Board was urged to
38 monitor the progress of the bill, review the bill provided, and support passage of the
39 resolution to better understand enforcement issues related to marijuana legalization.

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42 **ACTION ITEMS**

43
44 **A. 2024-2025 Financial Statements and Audit Report** – Director of Business
45 Operations Luke Diekhans reported that prior to the Board meeting, a Board Work
46 Session was held to review the Audit Report. He introduced Brian Stavenger of Eide
47 Baily, LLP who confirmed that he reviewed, in detail, the 2024-2025 Financial
48 Statements and Audit Report with the Board during a work session that took place prior

1 to the Board meeting. Mr. Stavenger stated the District audit was currently in draft form
2 due to a compliance supplement for audits of Montana local government entities that
3 was still in draft form up until approximately one hour prior to the Board meeting. With
4 the compliance supplement now finalized, Eide Bailly, LLP will finalize their audit report
5 and make the final version of the audit available to the Board at a regular Board meeting
6 in January 2026. Mr. Stavenger reviewed the highlights of the Audit Report stating that
7 Great Falls Public Schools received a clean opinion audit report for the fiscal year
8 ending in 2025. He explained important components of the audit that included a review
9 of the projected budget compared to actual figures and recommendations from the
10 Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) for Unrestricted and Committed fund
11 balances. Mr. Stavenger highlighted one compliance issue with extracurricular funds
12 that showed a lack of student signatures on money spent from random student activity
13 fund accounts; but stated that even with the turnover and training of new employees
14 and leadership in the Business Office, the overall fiscal responsibility of the District
15 remained very impressive. He thanked the Business Office staff for their help during the
16 audit.

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18 Motion – Bill Bronson, to postpone consideration of the Audit Report until the final
19 version is submitted at a future Board meeting. Kim Skornogoski seconded the motion.
20 Motion passed unanimously.

21
22 **B. Financial Report and Check Register for September 2025**– Director of Business
23 Operations Luke Diekhans explained that on page 42 of the agenda, Accounts Payable
24 Check number 140976 was not on the report because it was a check that was issued to
25 a student for a scholarship to Whitworth College; however, the student un-enrolled from
26 that college, so the check was voided.

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28 Motion – Paige Turoski, Seconded – Bill Bronson, passed unanimously to approve the
29 September 2025 Financial Report and Accounts Payable checks #140977 - #141536 in
30 the amount of \$1,773,938.64 and Payroll checks #84547 - #84724 in the amount of
31 \$307,876.74 as presented.

32
33 **C. Financial Report and Check Register for October 2025** – Director of Business
34 Operations Luke Diekhans stated the Business Department is progressing in getting the
35 financial statements updated through the November cycles, as they are transitioning
36 through new employees in the department. Protested taxes were taken out and the
37 District is working with Cascade County to finalize amounts. Updates for November and
38 December will be made current at a Board meeting in January 2026.

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40 Motion – Kim Skornogoski, Seconded – Craig Duff, passed unanimously to approve the
41 October 2025 Financial Report and Accounts Payable checks #141537 - #142048 in the
42 amount of \$2,140,263.30 and Payroll checks #84725 - #84961 in the amount of
43 \$786,280.52 as presented.

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45 **D. Non-Renew Temporary, Non-Tenured Teachers with Positions Expiring June 5,**
46 **2026** – Director of Human Resources Heather Spurzem presented information
47 regarding non-renewal of temporary and non-tenured teachers whose positions will
48 expire on June 6, 2025. She reviewed the reasons for temporary hire and stated the

1 non-renewed employees may apply for positions in which they qualify through the in-
2 district transfer process.

3
4 Motion – Kim Skornogoski, Seconded – Craig Duff, passed unanimously to non-renew
5 the teachers listed in the agenda as they are in temporary positions that expire June 5,
6 2026.

7
8 **E. Acceptance of Donor-Funded Building Enhancement Project Through Great
9 Falls Public Schools Foundation – Sunnyside Elementary School Library –**

10 Stephanie Becker, Director of the Great Falls Public Schools Foundation reported that
11 two library renovations were completed in June using funds from the Nancy A. Cameron
12 estate donation. A third library renovation at Sunnyside Elementary School was partially
13 funded with the remaining estate contribution and supplemented by a donation from the
14 Gray family, bringing the total donated amount to \$90,000. Mr. Gray, a former School
15 Board member, was recognized for his contribution, and photos of the completed
16 project were presented.

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18 Motion – Bill Bronson, Seconded – Paige Turoski, passed unanimously to accept the
19 funding for improvements to the Sunnyside Elementary School library with special
20 thanks to the Nancy A. Cameron estate and Gray family for their donations.

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23 **ACTION: OTHER**

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25 There were no items removed from the Consent Agenda to discuss.

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28 **REPORTS, DISCUSSION, AND POLICIES**

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30 **A. State of Montana Minimum Wage Increase Effective January 1, 2026 –** Director
31 of Human Resources Heather Spurzem reported per state law, the Minimum Wage will
32 increase to \$10.85 per hour on January 1, 2026. Approximately 90 employee positions
33 will be affected. The increased wages will result in approximately \$3,120 of additional
34 fiscal responsibility to the District.

35
36 **B. Bridged Health Alliance Proposal –** Director of Human Resources Heather
37 Spurzem reported that Bridged Health Alliance is exploring the creation of a self-insured
38 healthcare model exclusively for Montana public school employees, which would require
39 participation from at least 12,000 employees across 150 districts to qualify for a one-
40 time \$40 million legislative incentive. Participating districts would commit to a five-year
41 term, with an option to exit after year threes if renewal costs exceed statutory limits.
42 Representatives have met multiple times with the Great Falls Public Schools Insurance
43 Committee, which has raised questions regarding plan effectiveness, cost savings, and
44 differences from current coverage. At this time, the Committee has recommended
45 delaying a decision pending receipt of additional, specific data.

46
47 Trustee Bronson stated that while he does not vote, he considers committee
48 recommendations. Based on recent communications with consultants, the

1 recommendation is not to proceed at this time until outstanding questions are answered.
2 He also reported a productive conversation with another district regarding GFPS's
3 hesitation, emphasizing that the Board is not obligated to participate and must prioritize
4 its own community. Questions will be compiled, shared with Bridged, and used to make
5 a future decision.

6 7 **C. Discussion, Committee Reports, and Comments**

8 Trustee Turoski spent a half-day as a Physical Education teacher at the CORE School
9 at Morningside with multiple grade levels, noting the energy, educational content, and
10 collaboration between college students and teachers. Math curriculum ideas were
11 discussed and she wished everyone a Merry Christmas.

12 Trustee Thompson is looking forward to her half-day substitute assignment and being in
13 the classroom. She attended the Pop-Up Shop and purchased several student items.
14 She missed recent concerts but plans to attend this week.

15 Trustee Duff extended holiday greetings and thanked staff for their hard work. He also
16 fulfilled his half-day duty assignment with a 2nd-grade class and has "almost recovered"
17 from the experience.

18 Trustee Skornogoski congratulated Heather Spurzem on her new Human Resources
19 Director position. Observed analysis of the math curriculum pilot and foreign language
20 KUDs, noting the challenges of adopting new curriculum and books simultaneously. She
21 visited two elementary schools and observed LIFT (Listen, Inspire, Foster, Trust)
22 students, emphasizing the importance of screening for student anxiety. She wished
23 everyone happy holidays.

24 Trustee Bronson thanked the Board for Zoom access at the last Board meeting and a
25 community member for discussing the important legislative bill. He highlighted the value
26 of online research and acknowledged Superintendent Hoyer's comments on former
27 Trustee Mr. Gray's family history.

28 Trustee Sunchild emphasized the significance of Christmas concerts for community
29 connection. Shared a personal reflection on her daughter subbing in a first-grade
30 classroom, gaining appreciation for teaching challenges.

31 32 33 **UPCOMING EVENTS**

34
35 Chairperson Johnson highlighted upcoming events, including a Board Policy Committee
36 meeting on December 22nd that will put a conclusion to 2025. The next regular Board
37 meeting will be held on January 12, 2026.

38 39 40 **ACTION TO ADJOURN**

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42 With no further comments or items to be discussed, motion by Kim Skornogoski and
43 seconded by Chairperson Johnson to adjourn the Regular Meeting of the Board of
44 Trustees at 7:00 p.m.

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Luke Diekhans, Clerk

Gordon Johnson, Chairperson

