



Great People...Great Falls Public Schools

February 2026,

As we move through February, a month often dedicated to recognizing and reflecting on the bonds that sustain us, we are reminded that at Great Falls Public Schools relationships are at the core of everything we achieve. These vital connections span our entire community: from the dedicated community partners who open doors for our students through workforce development and mentorship, to the medical professionals who work tirelessly to support the physical and mental well-being of our youth. We are equally grateful for the first responders and law enforcement officers who stand as a shield for those we cherish most and the faculty and staff of our buildings who challenge our students to think deeply, analyze closely, and act with intention. February is truly a time to celebrate these essential partnerships; it is the strength of these collective relationships that allows us to do what we do best—Build What Matters for our students. Welcome to the February edition of GFPS Highlights with Superintendent Hoyer.

Honoring Amazing Groups – Exceptional students and families deserve exceptional staff!

- On February 3, we joined schools across the nation in recognizing two groups of professionals who play an essential role in the daily life of Great Falls Public Schools: our crossing guards and our school counselors. These dedicated individuals are often the first and last faces our students see each day. Our 27 crossing guards provide far more than traffic support—they create a safe, welcoming start to the morning and a reassuring presence in the afternoon, helping ensure every child arrives and returns home safely. Inside our schools, our 29 counselors serve as trusted advocates and guides, supporting students' academic planning, social-emotional growth, career exploration, and overall well-being. Together, these 56 team members help build the secure, supportive environment our students need to learn, grow, and thrive. We are deeply grateful for their commitment to our children and our community.

How Teamwork Pays Off; Creativity, and Ingenuity – Working together to support each other.

- Our students continue to excel through dedication and specialized programming. We are proud to celebrate Lily Kirkaldie, Charlie Kotthoff, and Danica Sabo, 9th graders at GFHS, who were named the 2nd Congressional District Champions in the Congressional App Challenge. Code Girls United continues its mission to empower girls in grades 4-12 with technology literacy and business skills. These ladies are raising funds to support their trip to Washington DC to display their apps at the U.S. Capitol Building during the National Science Fair's "House of Code", April 21st and 22nd.

Here, We Grow Our Own – Lifelong learning is what we do.

- As we celebrate National Career and Technical Education (CTE) Month this February, I am filled with immense pride reflecting on the robust pathways we've built together at Great Falls Public Schools. Our CTE programs are no longer just "electives"; they are the heartbeat of workforce development in our city. This year, we celebrate the dedication of 532 students who have committed to mastery by completing four or more semesters of CTE coursework. This deep dive

into specialized skills is made possible by our 44 expert educators working across 8 diverse departments, ranging from industrial technology to health sciences.

We believe in learning by doing, which is why GFPS proudly hosts 10 student-run businesses and supports 7 Career Technical Student Organization (CTSO) chapters where our students sharpen their leadership and competitive edge. Our connection to the "real world" has never been stronger: we currently have 202 students in internship or pre-apprenticeship roles, 383 students earning dual credit for their future careers, and a staggering 577 workplace learning experiences occurring across our community. Looking ahead, we are thrilled to expand these horizons even further with upcoming programs in Cosmetology and HVAC. If a student is looking to find their passion and a paycheck, GFPS is the place to do it—all thanks to the unwavering support of our vital community partners and our tireless staff.

How We Measure Growth –Hard work and achievement go hand in hand.

- At the heart of effective teaching lies a critical core competency: assessment. Far from being just "another test," assessment is the engine that provides real-time feedback on student growth and achievement, allowing our educators to pivot and tailor instruction to every child's needs. In grades K-10, we rely on two primary tools to gain this valuable insight—MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) and MAST (Montana Aligned Student Testing). Montana Aligned to Standard Through-Year (MAST) Assessment progress reports were recently released from the Montana Office of Public Instruction. This report shows student progress toward end-of-the-year goals. This report is based on student performance after approximately one quarter to one third of the school year has elapsed. We would not expect students to have mastered all of the standards for the year after only learning for a portion of that school year. It could be thought of as looking at how a student might perform on a "final" test at the end of the first quarter of school. This report could show whether students are on track for mastering grade level standards and provide guidance for areas in which to provide additional support. We expect more accurate data on this report as the school year progresses and students complete more of the assessments. Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Testing is a Reading and Math benchmarking assessment we give to all students in grades K-10, three times each school year. This assessment is a norm-referenced test based on student performance across the country. We are so proud of the growth our GFPS students have made this school year, so far. From Fall to Winter, on average, students across the district made more growth than expected on this assessment. On average, students in our district grew 4-5 achievement *percentile* points in both Math and Reading. In order to grow this much, students would need to not only increase their score to match the increased level requirements for Winter norming but additionally increase their score to account for the percentile growth beyond that. In short, this data indicates that we are increasing student achievement and closing gaps in student learning. This achievement is a testament to the teachers who inspire, the students who put in the hard work, and the families who reinforce literacy and numeracy at home.

Horizon Bound – Looking Ahead to Opportunities through GFPS

- There is tremendous energy and opportunity on the horizon for Great Falls Public Schools. Thanks to the generosity of community members who utilize Montana's Innovative Educational Program Tax Credit to invest directly in our students, we have launched a series of Innovative Summer Courses for elementary and middle school learners. The response has been remarkable—all three courses are filled to capacity, each with a waiting list. This level of enthusiasm affirms both the quality of these experiences and our community's deep commitment to education. We are excited to continue offering these free summer learning opportunities for years to come. Planning is already underway for next summer's engaging lineup:
 - **American Indian Astronomy & Earth Science** – June 8–9 (Grades 4–6)
 - **Code Quest: A 2-Day Adventure** – June 22–23 (Grades 7–8)
 - **Exploring Rocketry 101** – August 5–6 (Grades 6–8)

Opportunities like these expand learning beyond the traditional school year, spark curiosity, and inspire students to explore new interests. We are deeply grateful to the community partners who make this possible and help us continue building innovative pathways for our students' success.

Heartfelt Commitment – Building What Matters (motto for 2025-2026)

- Great Falls Public Schools remains guided by a heartfelt commitment to *Building What Matters*—creating opportunities for every student to feel supported, connected, and inspired. Whether it is providing opportunities for students to connect to school via CTSO's, Montana High School Association sanctioned athletics, academics, or all three, we are dedicated to making each experience in our district unique and rewarding. Stay warm and please find time to visit us in 2026!

Warm regards,

Heather Hoyer
Superintendent, Great Falls Public Schools

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