



Great People...Great Falls Public Schools

April 2026,

As we move fully into spring, Great Falls Public Schools is alive with energy, achievement, and possibility. Across our district, students are stepping forward in remarkable ways—competing in academic events from math competitions to Career and Technical Student Organizations, showcasing their skills, knowledge, and dedication. At the same time, a record 501 student-athletes are representing their schools this spring, demonstrating teamwork, resilience, and pride in our community. Simply put, GFPS is bursting with opportunity and hope.

Each of these experiences reflects the strength of our system not only in the opportunities we provide, but in the people who make them possible. Our students, staff, families, and partners continue to bring “Building What Matters” to life in meaningful and inspiring ways. Welcome to the April edition of *Highlights with Superintendent Hoyer*.

Honoring Academic Excellence – National Merit Finalists

- We are proud to celebrate the outstanding achievements of our students who have been named National Merit Finalists. This distinction reflects not only academic excellence, but dedication, perseverance, and a commitment to learning at the highest levels. Last spring, over 1.3 million juniors from over 20,000 high schools entered this program by taking the PSAT (preliminary SAT), resulting in less than 1.0% of high school seniors across our nation becoming finalists.

Congratulations to:

- C.M. Russell High School: *Caimbrie Brost, Kye Wise*
- Great Falls High School: *Lex Leatham*

These students represent the very best of Great Falls Public Schools, and we look forward to all they will accomplish in the future.

Hue of Success – Celebrating Young Artists and Authors

- Creativity and storytelling were on full display as 4th grade students across our elementary schools participated in the C.M. Russell Illustrated Letter Contest, designed to honor the namesake artist and his many illustrated letters sent to friends and family. This annual event celebrates both literacy and artistic expression, encouraging students to bring Montana’s heritage to life through their own voices and illustrations. We extend congratulations to all participating students, the individual school champions, and their teachers for fostering imagination, creativity, and pride in our local history. This year’s Great Falls Public Schools winner was Miss Maren Miller of Riverview Elementary. Her teacher is Mrs. Kristal Thunstrom.

Honoring Service and Support – Military-Connected Families

- April provides an opportunity to recognize and support our military-connected students through our participation in the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (MIC-3) efforts. We invite our community to join us in honoring the resilience, adaptability, and strength of military children and their families. Their contributions enrich our schools and remind us of the importance of connection and support during times of transition. The Purple Star School and Purple Star Champions program is a national initiative designed to recognize schools and educational professionals who are leaders in meeting the specific educational and social-emotional needs of children of service members (active duty, National Guard, and Reserves). Congratulations to Chief Joseph Elementary for being recognized as a 2026 Purple Star School. Our 2026 Purple Star Champions are Mrs. Jackie Mainwaring - Executive Director, Kelli O'Brien – Chief Joseph MFLC (Military & Family Life Counselor), and Lisa Sapp – School Liaison Specialist for the 341st Mission Support Group.

Harnessing Communication – Strong Family Engagement

- We extend our sincere thanks to our parents and community for their patience and partnership as we have navigated several transitions in our mass communication tools over the past few years. Your flexibility has allowed us to refine how we connect, ensuring that communication remains timely, accurate, and meaningful. The implementation of Parent Square has been a significant step forward, allowing us to keep lines of communication open during times of safety concern, while also efficiently sharing important updates and celebrations from our schools. Strong, reliable communication is a key pillar of our Stewardship and Accountability component of our strategic plan, and we are committed to getting it right. In the month of March alone, we reached 9,551 student families (10,502 parents) with a 98.5% success rate. This resulted in more than 1,000 comments, 2,559 messages of appreciation, and 1,744 volunteer engagements across our schools. These numbers tell an important story. They reflect not just communication, but connection through thousands of meaningful interactions, active two-way engagement, and a growing sense of partnership between our schools and families. Together, we are creating a system where students are supported, celebrated, and connected both in and out of the classroom.

Highlighting Opportunities – Spring Activities and Athletics

- Spring brings renewed energy to our schools as students engage in athletics, activities, and extracurricular opportunities. Participation in these programs builds teamwork, resilience, and school pride. We encourage our community to come out, support our students, and celebrate the many ways they represent Great Falls Public Schools with excellence. When Great Falls Public Schools added baseball this spring, we monitored participation numbers carefully, wanting to be sure that baseball provided additional opportunities for student-athletes to connect with their schools, not in lieu of other spring sports. We are happy to share that initial participation numbers show 501 student athletes wearing their school colors this spring; an increase of 93 students over last year (60 are directly related to baseball).

Hey – Did you Know? – Important facts about our comprehensive District!

- At a recent Superintendent's Advisory Panel (SAP) meeting, a panel member encouraged us to share more of the unique stories and data points that reflect the incredible work happening behind the scenes in our district. Here's one that truly stands out: under the leadership of Food Service Supervisor Jessa Youngers, a dedicated team of 101 staff members serves an average of 7,289 meals each day across all 21 of our schools. Through March 31, 2026, that adds up to an astounding 969,501 meals provided to our students. This remarkable effort goes far beyond numbers; it represents care, consistency, and a daily commitment to ensuring every student is nourished and ready to learn. Speaking of SAP, we are looking for new panel members to join our advisory group. While space is limited, we would love to hear from you if you are interested in giving an hour and a half, quarterly, to learn more about GFPS and provide critical insight into the work we do. Contact Sherri Clark at (406) 268-6001 for more information.

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

- Across every highlight this month – from academic honors to artistic expression to partnerships to personal growth – we see a consistent theme in our commitment to students. GFPS remains focused on creating opportunities, removing barriers, and supporting every learner in reaching their full potential. Thank you for your continued partnership in this important work. Together, we are “Building What Matters”.

Warm regards,

Heather Hoyer
Superintendent, Great Falls Public Schools

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