



Great People...Great Falls Public Schools

May 2026,

Great Falls...

As spring gives way to the final stretch of the school year, Great Falls Public Schools continue to shine with energy, achievement, and opportunity. Across our district, students are competing, creating, serving, performing, building, and preparing for their futures in remarkable ways. From mathematics competitions and Career and Technical Student Organizations to music festivals, Advanced Placement testing, and a record 501 student-athletes representing their schools this spring, GFPS is bursting with opportunity in classrooms of all shapes and sizes.

Behind every success story are dedicated staff members, supportive families, and community partners who help bring “Building What Matters” to life each and every day. Welcome to the May edition of *Highlights with Superintendent Hoyer*.

Honoring a Legacy of Literacy – Building (Raising) Readers

- One of the most powerful gifts we can give a child is the ability to read with confidence and joy. This spring, we celebrate the incredible impact of our volunteer literacy efforts across Great Falls Public Schools. Through the dedication of 30 volunteers serving in four schools, students have benefited from more than 14,000 volunteer hours focused on reading support and encouragement. We extend a very special thank you to Carol Paul, whose passion project and unwavering dedication to literacy has helped strengthen readers and relationships across our schools. Her work reminds us that one person’s commitment can change the trajectory of countless students.

Helping Hands and Healing Hearts – Lincoln Elementary Community Support

- Sometimes “thank you” simply does not feel like enough. This month, we continue to recognize the remarkable collaboration and compassion shown following the challenges faced at Lincoln Elementary. Community partners, businesses, district staff, JROTC students, Buildings and Grounds crews, and volunteers came together to support students, staff, and families during a difficult season. The efforts of individuals including Building and Grounds supervisors and staff, the GFPS Executive Leadership Cabinet, Lincoln Elementary Leadership and students, in addition to community partners like Dick Anderson Construction, the Great Falls Area Realtors, the Great Falls Area Chamber, Russell Country Credit Union, and many others demonstrated what makes Great Falls such a special community. Their willingness to step in with rakes, shovels, and lawn equipment as we supported our Lincoln neighbors in cleaning debris from yards, reflects the very best of public education and community partnership.

Highlighting Inclusion and Joy – Special Olympics Area Games

- The campus of Great Falls High School was filled with sunshine, smiles, encouragement, and determination as athletes participated in the Charlie Russell Area Special Olympics competitions this spring. Special Olympians competed in track and field, bocce, swimming, and cycling while peers and staff from all 21 schools came together to cheer them on. The event was a beautiful

reminder that athletics are about much more than competition; they are about belonging, confidence, perseverance, and community. We congratulate all participating athletes, unified partners, and coaches!

Honoring Academic Excellence – Scholarship Night 2026

- This year's Scholarship Night was a powerful celebration of student achievement and community generosity. A total of 109 students were recognized, earning 227 local scholarships valued at approximately \$500,000.00. The celebration was a packed evening filled with excitement, gratitude, and hope for the future. A special thank you goes to the Great Falls Public Schools Foundation, Executive Director Katelyn Marsik, Joan Dailey, donors, and countless volunteers/scholarship reviewers who helped make the evening possible. Opportunities like these are life-changing for students and families, and they reflect a community deeply invested in the success of its young people.

Harnessing Academic Rigor – Advanced Placement Testing Season

- While much of spring is filled with visible activities and celebrations, another important season has quietly unfolded behind the scenes across GFPS: Advanced Placement testing. Months of rigorous instruction, studying, and preparation culminated this spring as AP students completed 356 Advanced Placement exams over 16 days and across 14 course topics including Biology, Macroeconomics, Microeconomics, Chemistry, US Government, English Literature and Composition, English Language and Composition, Physics I, Statistics, US History, Calculus AP, Calculus BC, Psychology, and Art History. This significant effort was supported by 24 proctors, including high school counselors, alongside one curriculum director coordinating the work. These numbers represent far more than tests. They reflect hours of dedication from students and teachers alike, a commitment to academic excellence, and opportunities for students to earn college credit while still in high school. We are incredibly proud of the perseverance and preparation demonstrated throughout this process.

Hands-On Futures – Kindergarten to Capstone Career and Technical Education

- Career and Technical Education continues to thrive across Great Falls Public Schools as students engage in meaningful, hands-on learning opportunities from elementary school through graduation. This spring, fourth-grade students explored agricultural education experiences that introduced them to Montana industries and real-world applications of learning. At the secondary level, students continued developing skills through Career and Technical Student Organizations and workforce partnerships that connect classroom instruction to future careers. An annual spring milestone is the high school house ribbon cutting, celebrating students who participated in the Pre-Apprenticeship Training Program through the Department of Labor and Industry in the trade of carpentry. Through this opportunity, students earned 343 hours of on-the-job training and 122 hours of related technical instruction while helping construct a home that will benefit a local family. These experiences embody our "Kindergarten to Capstone" vision—creating pathways

where students can discover passions, build skills, and graduate prepared for college, careers, and community leadership.

Harmonizing Excellence – Best Communities for Music Education

- Great Falls Public Schools was once again recognized as one of the Best Communities for Music Education in the nation, our 17th overall recognition and 15th consecutive year receiving this honor. Great Falls Public Schools is the only district in Montana to receive this distinction in 2026. This recognition reflects the dedication of our music educators, the talent and commitment of our students, and the value our community places on arts education. Music continues to play a vital role in developing creativity, collaboration, confidence, and connection for students across our schools.

Highlighting the People Behind the Work – Recognition Month

- May has been filled with opportunities to recognize the extraordinary individuals who make Great Falls Public Schools strong each day. From the end of April through May, GFPS recognizes days dedicated to highlight 60% of our employees. From bus drivers safely transporting students across hundreds of thousands of miles each year, to food service employees serving over one million meals, to teachers, nurses, principals, paraprofessionals, administrative professionals, occupational/physical/speech therapists, every role matters deeply in the success of our students. We are especially proud to celebrate Erica Harp, named Montana's School Nurse Administrator of the Year. Her leadership, advocacy, and commitment to student wellness continue to positively impact students, staff, and families across our district. Public education is truly a team effort, and we are grateful for every person who contributes to making GFPS a place of learning, belonging, and opportunity.

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

- As graduation approaches and another school year nears its conclusion, we are reminded that the work of education is ultimately the work of hope. Whether students are reading their first book, competing in athletics, earning scholarships, building homes, taking college-level coursework, or crossing the graduation stage, each experience represents growth and possibility. Thank you for continuing to support our schools, our students, and one another. Together, we are building what matters.

Warm regards,

Heather Hoyer
Superintendent, Great Falls Public Schools