

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING
OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
HELD AUGUST 17, 2026**

A duly called Regular Meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Great Falls Public Schools was held at the District Offices Building, 1100 4th Street South, on the 17th day of August 2026.

At 5:30 pm, Chairperson Johnson called to order the Regular Meeting of the Board of Trustees.

Chairperson Johnson reported that, per Board Policy 1420, all Board meetings are recorded and posted on the District website for one (1) year.

ROLL CALL: Luke Diekhans took roll call.

Trustees Present: Gordon Johnson – Chairperson
Kim Skornogoski – Vice-Chairperson
Craig Duff
Bill Bronson
Paige Henning
Marlee Sunchild
Amie Thompson

Others Present: Heather Hoyer, Superintendent; Luke Diekhans, Director of Business Operations; Jackie Mainwaring and Lance Boyd, Executive Directors of Student Achievement; Jeff Williams, Director of Information Technology; Heather Spurzem, Director of Human Resources; and Katelyn Marsik, Director of the Great Falls Public Schools Foundation. Also present was Tom Cabbage, Great Falls Education Association President.

Chairperson Johnson asked everyone to join in the Pledge of Allegiance.

ADOPT AGENDA

Motion – Kim Skornogoski, Seconded – Marlee Sunchild, passed unanimously to adopt the agenda as presented.

APPROVE CONSENT AGENDA

Motion – Paige Henning, Seconded – Craig Duff, passed unanimously to approve the Consent Agenda, as presented.

1 **A. Minutes of the August 3, 2026, Regular Board Meeting** – The Board approved the
2 minutes of the August 3, 2026, Regular Board Meeting as presented.

3
4 **B. Personnel Actions** – The Board approved the Personnel Actions as presented.

5
6 **C. Good Apple Award** – The Board approved the nomination for a Good Apple Award
7 to Dan Barnett, Community Member.

8
9 **D. Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) TR-35 School Bus Driver Certificates**
10 – The Board approved the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) TR-35 School Bus
11 Driver Certificates for the individuals listed in the agenda.

12
13 **E. Incoming Student Attendance Agreements for the 2026-2027 School Year** – The
14 Board approved the incoming student attendance agreements for the 2026-2027 school
15 year for the students listed in the agenda. Tuitions will be paid for by the District of
16 Residence.

17
18 **F. Student Activity Monthly Report for June 2026** – The Board approved the Student
19 Activity Accounts for June 2026 as presented.

20
21 **G. Donation of Hospital Beds from Benefis Hospital** - The Board approved the
22 donation of four (4) hospital beds from Benefis Hospital to Great Falls Public Schools
23 Health Sciences education classes, with thanks.

24
25
26 **COMMUNICATION**

27
28 **A. Great Falls Public Schools (GFPS) Foundation Report** – Director of the Great
29 Falls Public Schools Foundation Schools Foundation, Katelyn Marsik, presented the
30 Foundation's annual report. Katelyn highlighted the five pillars of the Foundation:
31 Student and Teacher Recognition, Student Scholarships, Educator Grants, Building
32 Enhancements, and Food Pantries. She stated that two hundred fifty (250) gold star
33 awards were delivered throughout the 2025-2026 school year. Tara Murillo, Librarian at
34 Chief Joseph Elementary School, and Neil Kynett, retired math teacher at Great Falls
35 High School, were recognized as the recipients of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe
36 Railway Teacher of the Year Award. Fourteen (14) new scholarships were established in
37 the 2025-2026 school year, and one hundred nine (109) students were awarded
38 scholarships to aid in continuing their education. Ninety-one (91) mini grants, fifteen (15)
39 Learning Enhancement grants, two (2) Immersive Professional Learning grants, twenty
40 (20) Heisey scholarships, and five (5) Community Collaboration grants were awarded.
41 She reported on the progress of the C.M. Russell High School Auditorium and the West
42 Elementary School "Shirley's Playground" projects, which were made possible through
43 donor funding. Foundation Chair, Jamie Marshall reviewed the GFPS Foundation Board
44 Committees and their Strategic Plan.

1 **B. Superintendent Report** - Superintendent Hoyer reviewed the dates for the school
2 appreciation days for the 2026-2027 school year. She also stated that many trainings
3 and “back to school” meetings are taking place throughout the District. She recognized
4 Heather Spurzem for her work with professional development.

5 She stated that she was able to attend four (4) presentations given at the Weissman
6 Hood Institutes Summer internship program. She also stated that she really enjoys this
7 event every year and the information given.

8 Superintendent Hoyer updated the Board on construction projects in progress at
9 Morningside Elementary School, Whittier Elementary School, Giant Springs Elementary
10 School, Longfellow Elementary School, and Paris Gibson Education Center.

11 She reviewed the changes in School Resource Officers (SRO) within the District and
12 updated the Board on the redesigned plan for support from the Cascade County
13 Sheriff’s Office.

14 Superintendent Hoyer thanked Benefis Hospital and Rayn Ginnaty for the donation of
15 four (4) healthcare beds to Great Falls Public Schools. Two (2) are hospital beds and
16 two (2) are extended care beds, which are a modern tool to help our teachers prepare
17 students for futures in the health care industry.

18 Superintendent Hoyer read a letter, sent by Cory Reeves, to the Board recognizing the
19 ReStart program. The letter stated that one of the first students to successfully complete
20 ReStart later struggled in the HiSET program; however, instead of giving up, he made
21 the decision to attend the Montana Youth Challenge Academy. While he was there, he
22 faced challenges but continued pushing forward and successfully completed the
23 program and earned his HiSet. His mother gives a lot of credit to the ReStart program
24 for helping her son realize that he is worthy, capable, and that he can accomplish
25 anything he is willing to work for. Mr. Reeves stated that this is exactly why ReStart
26 exists and another sixteen (16) students are enrolled for this coming school year.

27 Lewis and Clark Elementary School Principal, Katy Kennedy, spoke on a project that
28 was started by her father, a Vietnam Veteran, who wrote letters to serve as a “thank
29 you” he and others never received. She spoke on how, after her father’s death, she and
30 her family took his idea and made it into the nonprofit “*Respect with Gratitude for*
31 *Veterans.*”

32
33 **C. Audience Communication** – Community Member, Judy Mortensen, spoke on her
34 research updates and plans on the marijuana use among students. She hopes
35 safeguards will be put in place to protect our students and the District.

36 37 38 **ACTION ITEMS**

39
40 **A. Financial Report and Check Register for June 2026** - Director of Business
41 Operations, Luke Diekhans, reviewed the final Financial Report and Check Register for
42 June 2026 and stated that this closes out the 2025-2026 school year. He reviewed
43 revenue line items and confirmed that all funds were in order, noting the District’s
44 budget was in a favorable position at the close of the fiscal year.

45
46 Motion – Bill Bronson, Seconded – Paige Henning, passed unanimously to approve the
47 Financial Report and Check Register for June 2026 and Accounts Payable checks

1 #144881 - #145614 in the amount of \$6,134,593.70 and Payroll checks #86293 -
2 #86477 in the amount of \$1,105,538.21 as presented.

3
4 **B. Classified and Hourly Staff Compensation for 2026-2027** - Director of Human
5 Resources, Heather Spurzem, explained that Classified and Hourly staff are non-union
6 employees that include paraprofessionals, teachers' aides, hourly classified staff and
7 part-time nurses. There are approximately 305 employees within the four groups. The
8 employees in these groups serve a variety of functions in the District. In all cases, they
9 support the goals and objectives of the District and provide support to students,
10 employees, and programs. The 2026-27 budget reflects base salaries for the
11 employees of these groups with increases of three (3)%. The cost of the base increase
12 is estimated to be approximately \$177,911.

13
14 Motion – Paige Henning, Seconded – Kim Skornogoski, passed unanimously to
15 approve the classified and hourly staff compensation for the 2026-27 school year as
16 presented.

17
18 **C. 2026-2027 Health Insurance, Life Insurance and Voluntary Insurance Contracts**
19 – Director of Human Resources, Heather Spurzem, stated that the District Health
20 Insurance Committee, in collaboration with consultant Mike Bonville of Alliant, reviewed
21 utilization, costs, and renewal rate recommendations for the 2026-27 plan year,
22 resulting in a 15% increase to employer, employee, and Rate Stabilization Reserve
23 (RSR) premium contributions. She stated that employer-paid life insurance will continue
24 through The Standard, along with voluntary employee-paid benefits. The anticipated
25 total cost for active employee's health insurance in 2026-27 is approximately
26 \$13,236,095, with the District's share estimated at \$8,557,516 premium expense plus
27 \$297,908 RSR expense for an estimated total of \$8,855,424 for the 2026-27 plan year.

28
29 Motion – Bill Bronson, Seconded – Paige Henning, passed unanimously to approve the
30 recommendation of the Insurance Committee of an overall increase to the employer and
31 employee premium contributions of 15% respectively, along with the increase of the
32 premium buy-down of \$46.49 from the Rate Stabilization Reserve Fund and the current
33 District's Flexible Spending program and voluntary insurances, as presented.

34
35 **D. Transfer of Budgeted Funds – Elementary and High School General Fund Budget to**
36 **Interlocal Agreement Fund** – Director of Business Operations, Luke Diekhans, explained
37 the existing Interlocal Fund balance came from General Fund budget transfers in the
38 previous year and can be used for future expenditures. He recommended the transfers
39 of \$1,284,720.14 from the Elementary (101), of which \$227,476.99 is for future
40 elementary curriculum purchases and staff development, and \$136,629.07 from the
41 High School (201) General Fund budgets to the Interlocal Fund (182) effective June 30,
42 2026.

43
44 Motion – Kim Skornogoski, Seconded – Craig Duff, passed unanimously to approve the
45 Elementary General Fund Budget (101) transfer of \$1,284,720.14, of which
46 \$227,476.99 is for future elementary curriculum purchases and staff development, and

1 a High School General Fund Budget (201) transfer of \$136,629.07 to the Interlocal
2 Agreement Fund (182).

3
4 **E. 2025-2026 Trustees Financial Summary** – Director of Business Operations, Luke
5 Diekhans, explained that the Trustees' Financial Summary (TFS) is the official
6 document that closes the books on the 2025-26 fiscal year and is required by law to be
7 approved by the Board. Mr. Diekhans explained that when the District is audited each
8 year, the auditors look very closely at the TFS. He noted that the TFS is located on the
9 District's website.

10
11 Motion – Kim Skornogski, Seconded – Amie Thompson, passed unanimously to
12 approve the Trustees Financial Summary that closes out the 2025-26 fiscal year, as
13 presented.

14
15 **F. Budgets for all Budgeted Funds for the 2026-2027 Fiscal Year** – Director of
16 Business Operations, Luke Diekhans, explained that a Board Budget Work Session was
17 held on August 13, 2026, to review each of the budgeted funds in detail. He explained
18 that General Fund Budgets for the Elementary and High School Districts are impacted
19 by successful levies, student enrollment, and legislative actions. He stated that the
20 major impact on the General Fund Budgets was the Student and Teacher Advancement
21 for Results and Success Act (STARS Act) (House Bill 252) which requires Districts to
22 meet a higher salary threshold for beginning teachers. By complying with the
23 requirements of the new law, the District received an additional \$3,091,230. The
24 inflationary adjustment, after the impact of student enrollment changes, added an
25 additional \$1,373,273 to the General Fund Budgets. Both Districts continue to comply
26 with the requirement of the STARS Act, however, moving into the 2026-27 school year,
27 the District will only receive 3% inflationary increase on the STARS Act funds in
28 addition to the inflationary increase in the other parts of the budget. In addition, the
29 enrollment in both high schools and elementary schools continues to decline. As a result
30 of the declining enrollment and the inflationary increase to the General Fund Budget,
31 the elementary will gain \$365,140.76, while the high school will gain \$210,510.67. There
32 were substantial increases in the taxable valuation for both districts. The Elementary
33 Taxable Valuation for the 2026-2027 fiscal year is \$175,605,517. In 2025 the Taxable
34 Valuation was \$158,937,090, which means it increased by \$16,668,427. The High
35 School Taxable Valuation for the year 2026-2027 is \$178,398,872. The previous year it
36 was \$161,764,234, which represents an increase of \$16,634,638. The Tuition Fund
37 enables the District to recover excess costs associated with educating in-district special
38 education students. The District identifies excess costs associated with educating
39 special needs students by using the Office of Public Instruction calculator. Recent
40 legislative changes now require school districts to pay tuition for resident students
41 placed in group home programs, as well as for students attending schools outside their
42 home district. These required tuition payments are included in this budgeted fund. The
43 Tuition Fund is supported through a permissive levy.

1 Motion – Bill Bronson, Seconded – Paige Henning, passed unanimously to adopt
2 Elementary and High School Budgeted Funds for the 2025-2026 Fiscal year as
3 presented.
4

5 **Great Falls Elementary:**

6	General Fund	\$58,165,813.84
7	Transportation Fund	\$ 4,119,987.00
8	Bus Depreciation Fund	\$ 62,981.28
9	Tuition	\$ 3,714,108.00
10	Retirement	\$ 9,228,091.60
11	Adult Education	\$ 579,948.00
12	Technology	\$ 671,418.67
13	Flexibility	\$ 979,000.12
14	Building Reserve	\$ 4,213,921.23
15	Debt Service	\$ 3,466,143.76

16
17 **Great Falls High School:**

18	General Fund	\$27,969,620.34
19	Transportation Fund	\$ 2,067,897.00
20	Bus Depreciation Fund	\$ 32,002.45
21	Tuition	\$ 1,152,673.00
22	Retirement	\$ 7,158,264.80
23	Adult Education	\$ 630,816.00
24	Technology	\$ 118,305.19
25	Flexibility	\$ 525,380.43
26	Building Reserve	\$ 2,213,983.70
27	Debt Service	\$ 4,144,556.26

28
29 **G. Superintendent Evaluation Process and Instrument** - Trustee Thompson presented
30 the Superintendent evaluation process and instrument, which aligns the
31 Superintendent's self-assessment and goals with the District's Strategic Plan. The
32 process includes a September self-assessment, goal progress updates in October
33 through December, and a January community survey for public input. Each goal will be
34 documented on its own page to allow for year-over-year comparisons, similar to the
35 Strategic Plan format.
36

37 Motion – Paige Henning, Seconded – Marlee Sunchild, passed unanimously to adopt
38 the Superintendent Evaluation Process and Instrument as presented.
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40

41 **ACTION: OTHER**

42
43 There were no items extracted from the Consent Agenda to discuss.
44
45

46 **REPORTS, DISCUSSION, AND POLICIES**

1
2 **A. Communication Report** – Executive Director of Student Achievement, Jackie
3 Mainwaring, stated that it is important to foster a transparent, consistent, and effective
4 flow of information among all stakeholders, including students, families, staff, community
5 members, and the broader public. This communication plan aims to build and maintain
6 trust, promote understanding of District goals and initiatives, celebrate achievements,
7 and ensure timely and accurate dissemination of critical information. She stated that by
8 facilitating open dialogue and meaningful engagement, we seek to strengthen
9 relationships, support student success, and uphold the District commitment to
10 educational excellence and community partnership. This plan is a living document,
11 intended for periodic update and change. During the 2026-2027 school year, each
12 school will draft and implement their own communication plan.
13

14 **B. First Reading of Revised Board Policies 4301 – Visitors in Schools**

15 Superintendent Hoyer reviewed the recommended language revisions from the Board
16 Policy Committee to the Board policy listed. Language proposed brings policies into
17 alignment with legislative directives and/or cleans up confusing language. She asked if
18 anyone had questions or concerns to the revisions to contact her prior to the next
19 regular Board meeting.
20

21 **B. Discussion, Committee Reports, and Comments**

22 All Trustees thanked Luke Diekhans and his team for their hard work with the Trustees'
23 Financial Summary and year end budgeting.

24 Trustees Duff and Henning, as well as Chairperson Johnson, recognized the Building
25 and Grounds department and Engineers for their work done at the schools. Trustees
26 Duff and Sunchild, as well as Chairperson Johnson, thanked the Foundation and Katy
27 Kennedy for their presentations.

28 Trustee Sunchild thanked Tom Cubbage and the Great Falls Education Association for
29 serving breakfast to the new teachers at this morning's training.

30 Trustee Bronson thanked Superintendent Hoyer for her update with the Reserve SRO
31 plan. He also stated that the Montana School Boards Association (MTSBA) is continuing
32 to work on what to bring to the next legislative session.

33 Trustee Skornogoski updated everyone on the results of the *Stuff the Bus* and *Back to*
34 *School Blast* events that took place last week. She also encouraged everyone to sign
35 up to volunteer at the upcoming *Worlds of Work* event scheduled for September 15,
36 2026.
37

38
39 **UPCOMING EVENTS**
40

41 Chairperson Johnson said the next Board Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September
42 8, 2026.
43

44
45 **ACTION TO ADJOURN**
46

Chairperson Johnson adjourned the Regular Meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:04 p.m.

Gordon Johnson, Chairperson

Luke Diekhans, Clerk