



Great People...Great Falls Public Schools

September 2026,

Great Falls...

Welcome to the September edition of *Highlights with Superintendent Hoyer*. The 2026–2027 school year is officially underway, and our classrooms are buzzing with energy as we put our annual theme, **“Building Tomorrow, Together,”** into action. As the buzz of energy associated with the first day of school gives way to activities, routines, and experiential opportunities, we turn our focus forward to amazing opportunities ahead. Lights are on at the Stadium, lessons are being delivered, students and staff are visiting as they make their way to class. Well done to our staff who set the stage for an amazing year!

How we Return Makes a Difference – Spirit, Support, and Community.

- The opening weeks brought incredible energy to campuses across Great Falls. From welcoming back friends, to establishing new traditions, to making safety a priority with the reteaching of drills and emergency responses we reunited, practiced, and celebrated. Here are a few things that our schools did to kick off the year: Meadowlark celebrated with "Feel Good Friday," Valley View staff members got moving when they danced to Dolly, Lincoln hosted a mascot welcome, and high schoolers launched Bison and Rustler Beginnings. Safety also took priority with district-wide bus drills and emergency response reviews.



Hands on Learning – Worlds of Work and Montana Post Secondary Educational Opportunities Council

- Preparing students for what comes next is central to our mission. Through Worlds of Work (WOW) (worldsofworkgf.org) on September 15, GFPS 8th and 10th graders engaged in immersive, hands-on career exploration. WOW directly connects middle and high school students with regional industry leaders across high-demand sectors such as healthcare, trades, technology, and agriculture by igniting passion and real-world skills early on. MPSEOC (Mop-Soc) or the Montana Post Secondary Educational Opportunities Council (<https://www.montanacollegefair.com/>) has served Montana students for over thirty years through a series of statewide college and career fairs. 98% of all Montana high schools attend

these regional career fairs with the Great Falls fair being hosted in the Great Falls High School Fieldhouse.



Honoring our Team– National Information Technology Professional Day, September 15

- Behind every building, classroom, student, staff member, and program is a team of 17 incredible Information Technology professionals who help keep GFPS connected, protected, and moving forward. From monitoring cybersecurity and safeguarding our data, to supporting the technology that makes learning possible, to collecting and reporting the information that helps us make informed decisions, their work touches every corner of our district. They are problem-solvers, innovators, and creative thinkers—and they are also authors, musicians, thrill seekers, outdoor enthusiasts, and martial artists. We are grateful for the expertise, creativity, and quiet dedication they bring to GFPS every day.

Hometown Pride – Extraordinary Fall Activity Participation

- This fall, data shows that just over one in every three GFPS students (34%) is actively involved in an extracurricular activity. We know that students who connect to their schools both inside and outside the classroom build vital, enduring skills including leadership, resiliency, compassion, teamwork, and time management while gaining a powerful sense of belonging that positively impacts graduation rates. Thanks to grant funding from the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation and generous local donors, we expanded our programs this season by introducing Girls' Flag Football and the new GFPS Marching Band. These exciting additions contributed to a 13% increase in student participation across our fall activities, giving even more students the opportunity to learn, compete, grow, and build tomorrow together. For more information on athletic and fine arts events, please visit our athletics department at <https://gfps.k12.mt.us/departments/athletics-sports-schedules> , call Athletics' Department Assistant Mrs. Paula Byrd at 268-6083, or visit the fine arts website <https://gfps.k12.mt.us/departments/fine-arts>, call Fine Arts Department Assistant Mrs. Amber Dresen at 268-6079.

Historic Trends in Enrollment – Watching our changing enrollment closely

- Because student enrollment directly impacts district funding, GFPS monitors enrollment numbers continuously. Years ago, demographic projections anticipated that district enrollment would drop below 9,000 students by 2026. Over the last five years, the district has

averaged a student enrollment decrease of 136.5 students/year. While we experienced a slight decrease in enrolled students again this school year, the rate of decline is visibly slowing. While it is important to note that enrollment fluctuates every day with families moving to and away from us, we are mindful of the official count date on October 5, 2026. Comparing last year to this year as of September 16, the district saw an estimated change of just 88 fewer students served. As of September 16, 2026, GFPS proudly serves 9,681 full-time, part-time, and remote students in grades PreK–12, substantially outperforming past demographic forecasts and demonstrating the enduring confidence our families place in Great Falls Public Schools.

Heartfelt Commitment – Here is to another year, serving our community!

- At the very core of our district is an unwavering commitment to serving our students, families, staff, and the Great Falls community. As we move into the rhythm of this school year, we warmly encourage you to step inside our buildings: visit our schools, experience our beautiful learning spaces, and see our dedicated teachers and coaches actively guiding and inspiring our youth. Please watch for opportunities to participate in our three-year Long Range Strategic Planning process in our next *Highlights* edition. Until then, we invite you to stay connected with us; share your concerns, lend your voice, and join us in celebrating all that is truly GREAT about our public schools as we carry out the meaningful work of building tomorrow, together.

Warm regards,

Heather Hoyer
Superintendent, Great Falls Public Schools

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