

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING
OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
HELD SEPTEMBER 8, 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 8th day of September 2026.

At 5:30 pm, Chairperson Johnson called to order the Regular Meeting of the Board of Trustees and informed the participants and audience that the meeting was being recorded per Board Policy 1420.

ROLL CALL: Luke Diekhans took roll call.

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

Others Present: Heather Hoyer, Superintendent; Luke Diekhans, Director of Business Operations; Jackie Mainwaring, Executive Director for 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 Cubbage, Great Falls Education Association President.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by C.M. Russell High School Principal, Jamie McGraw.

ADOPT AGENDA

Motion – Kim Skornogoski, Seconded – Paige Henning, passed unanimously to adopt the agenda as presented.

APPROVE CONSENT AGENDA

Motion – Paige Henning, Seconded – Bill Bronson, to approve the Consent Agenda.

Trustee Bronson mentioned there was a minor revision to agenda item V. A. *Minutes of August 17, 2026 Regular Meeting*. The words “Finance committee with” on Page 13, Line 31 of the agenda should be stricken, and the complete sentence should read: “He also stated that the Montana School Board Association (MTSBA) is continuing to work on what to bring to the next legislative session.”

Chairperson Johnson reviewed the previous motion made. Motion passed unanimously to approve the Consent Agenda, with the recommended non-substantive revision by Trustee Bronson to agenda item V. A.

A. Minutes of the August 17, 2026, Regular Board Meeting – The Board approved the minutes of the August 17, 2026 Regular Board meeting, with the revision to Page 13, Line 31 as stated during the approval of the Consent agenda.

B. Personnel Actions – The Board approved the Personnel Actions as presented.

C. Good Apple Awards - The Board approved the nominations of Good Apple Awards for Mike Ward, Great Falls Public Schools Technology Core Technician, Little Russell and Rayn Ginnaty, Benefis Health Systems.

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

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

F. Kindergarten Early Entrance for the 2026-2027 School Year – The Board approved the student listed in the agenda to enroll in kindergarten for the 2026-2027 school year by special permission per Board Policy 3110R.

G. Student Activity Monthly Report for July 2026 – The Board approved the Student Activity Accounts for July 2026.

H. Establish Student Activity Account “Class of 2030” at C.M. Russell High School – The Board approved C.M. Russell High School’s request to open the “Class of 2030” Student Activity account.

I. Donation of a 1995 Buick Riviera to C.M. Russell High School – The Board approved the donation of a 1995 Buick Riviera from Theresa Kelly to C.M. Russell High School’s Automotive/Industrial Technology Department, with thanks.

J. Donation of Office Supplies – The Board approved the donation of miscellaneous office supplies from Horizon Credit Union to Great Falls Public Schools, with thanks.

K. Presence of a Therapy Animal at Lewis and Clark, Lincoln, and Giant Springs Elementary Schools – The Board approved the presence of a therapy dog at Lewis and Clark, Lincoln, and Giant Springs Elementary Schools and acknowledged that the certifications and requirements of Board Policy 8426F have been met.

1 **L. Presence of Therapy Animals at East Middle School** – The Board approved the
2 presence of two (2) therapy dogs at East Middle School and acknowledged that the
3 certifications and requirements of Board Policy 8426F have been met.
4

5 6 **COMMUNICATION**

7
8 **A. Introduction and Report of the Student Representatives and Foreign Exchange**
9 **Students for 2026-2027 School Year** – Executive Director Jackie Mainwaring
10 introduced the 2026-2027 Student Representatives from Charles M. Russell High
11 School, Great Falls High School, and Paris Gibson Education Center:
12 Charles M. Russell High School – Lydia Comstock, Addie Crist, and Kade Hobson;
13 Great Falls High School – Kaitlynn Fulbright, Weston Stoll, and Sydney Trunkle; and
14 Paris Gibson Education Center – Jocelyn Salois, Adyson Baez, and Elizabeth
15 Culberson.
16

17 Each high school presented their student reports.
18

19 C.M. Russell (CMR) High School student representatives Lydia Comstock and Addie
20 Crist shared their backgrounds and goals for the school year and also shared
21 information about new student representative, Kade Hobson, who had a soccer
22 competition and was unable to attend the meeting. They shared highlights from the
23 beginning of the school year at CMR, including welcoming a new foreign exchange
24 student from Milan, Italy, and introducing the Class of 2030 through Rustler Roundup
25 and Rustler Beginnings activities. Students are engaged in a variety of academic
26 experiences, including hands-on AP Chemistry labs, book discussions in AP English,
27 and music analysis in Music Theory. Student clubs and organizations are also getting
28 underway, with new and returning groups participating in meetings, leadership activities,
29 and Homecoming preparations. Athletics are off to an active start, including the
30 successful launch of the first girls' flag football team, strong performances in soccer,
31 football, volleyball, cross country, and golf, and continued cheerleading activities. In the
32 performing arts, numerous students were selected for All-State ensembles, with
33 preparations underway for a trip to Bozeman in October, fall concerts, and an orchestra
34 trip to Chicago. The report concluded by highlighting strong school spirit and Rustler
35 pride following the football team's first win of the season.
36

37 Great Falls High School (GFHS) student representatives Kaitlynn Fulbright, Weston
38 Stoll, and Sydney Trunkle reported on the successful start of the 2026-27 school year at
39 Great Falls High School, including welcoming four foreign exchange students from
40 France, Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands. Fall athletics are underway with strong
41 Bison participation in football, soccer, volleyball, dance, cheer, and girls' flag football.
42 The report highlighted the new scoreboard at Memorial Stadium, 32 students selected
43 for All-State music ensembles, community service improvements to the school's rock
44 beds, and the selection of Homecoming candidates. Additional updates included the
45 opening of the District STEM learning space, Bison Beginnings activities for incoming
46 freshmen, the new JROTC Raiders training course at Paris Gibson Education Center,
47 progress on the start of construction at the High School House, and casting for the fall
48 production of *Seussical the Musical*. The representative also expressed appreciation to

1 the School Board for its service and for the difficult decisions made since its inception in
2 support of students, staff, and the community.

3
4 Paris Gibson Education Center student representatives Adyson Baez, Jocelyn Salois,
5 and Elizabeth Culberson shared their goals and aspirations for the upcoming school
6 year. They reported a positive start to the school year, with students and staff focusing
7 on relationship-building activities during the first few days and welcoming seventy-five
8 (75) new students. Three students have already celebrated bell-ringing milestones,
9 providing an inspiring example for younger students. The Indigenous Education
10 Department welcomed students with Native American games and activities and also
11 reinstalled the Lincoln Elementary School lodge, strengthening relationships developed
12 during the previous school year. Students are participating in introductory culinary
13 lessons, with outdoor cooking to follow. The first blood drive of the school year is
14 scheduled for September 30, with additional drives planned for the winter and spring.
15

16 **B. Superintendent Report** – Superintendent Hoyer recognized District Information
17 Technology (IT) staff as part of the first Day of Recognition, highlighting the 17 Data
18 Center employees and Field Technicians by sharing staff backgrounds and interests.
19 She reflected on the positive start to the school year, including first-day traditions, bus
20 evacuation drills, and the many staff efforts that make a significant difference for
21 students. Early fall unofficial enrollment is tracking as expected, with a slight overall
22 decrease and continued efforts to account for student movement prior to official count
23 day. Superintendent Hoyer also recognized the My Best Day event, which has awarded
24 100 local scholarships totaling more than \$85,500. She provided an update on the
25 American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Montana – Montana Office of Public
26 Instruction (OPI) class action settlement regarding Indigenous Education For All
27 requirements in Montana’s public schools and noted that parent and student
28 notifications have been initiated, with additional notices to be completed by September
29 14th. Finally, she shared fall activity participation data, noting that 1,017 students are
30 participating in activities outside the regular school day and that school event
31 participation increased to 34%, a 13% increase over the previous school year.
32

33 **C. Audience Communication** – None
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36 **ACTION ITEMS**

37

38 **A. Financial Report and Check Register for July 2026** - Director of Business
39 Operations, Luke Diekhans, reviewed the first financial report and check register of the
40 2026-2027 school year. He noted that the budgeted items do not include many
41 transactions yet, but the larger amounts are salaries and benefits, which are
42 encumbered.
43

44 **Motion** – Bill Bronson, Seconded – Paige Henning, passed unanimously to approve the
45 July 2026 Financial Report and Accounts Payable checks #145615 - #145836 in the
46 amount of \$1,770,164.59 and Payroll checks #86478 - #86530 in the amount of
47 \$124,474.17 as presented.
48

1 **B. Trustees as Voting Delegates to the Montana School Boards Association**
2 **(MTSBA) Delegate Assembly at the Montana Conference of Education Leadership**
3 **(MCEL)** – Chairman Johnson explained that the Montana Conference of Education

4 Leadership (MCEL) is an annual conference that brings together trustees,
5 superintendents, principals, business officials and other educational leaders for
6 professional development, training, and idea sharing. As part of the conference,
7 MTSBA holds a Delegate Assembly to conduct the business of the Association.
8 Trustees are appointed to serve as delegates to the Delegate Assembly. The Great
9 Falls School District is able to appoint three trustees to serve as voting delegates at the
10 Delegate Assembly. Chairperson Johnson recommended that alongside Delegate
11 Bronson, he, Trustee Henning, and Trustee Skornogoski will serve as voting delegates.
12 Alternate voting delegates will be Trustees Duff, Thompson, and Sunchild.

13
14 Motion – Kim Skornogoski, Seconded – Marlee Sunchild, passed unanimously to
15 approve the appointments of three (3) Trustees, Gordon Johnson, Paige Henning, and
16 Kim Skornogoski, to the MTSBA's Delegate Assembly, along with Delegate Bronson.

17
18 **C. Establish a Bank Account and Implement Credit Card and Cash Transaction**
19 **Machines for Concessions Payment and Inventory Tracking** – Director of Business
20 Operations Luke Diekhans discussed recurring audit concerns related to cash receipting
21 at building concession stands. To improve transparency, accountability, and tracking of
22 cash transactions, the District plans to implement cash box/credit card reader systems
23 that provide receipt tapes to reconcile purchases with cash turned into the Finance
24 Offices. A separate bank account will be established for credit card payments to ensure
25 proceeds are accurately tracked and transferred to the appropriate school and student
26 group. Great Falls High School and C.M. Russell High School will each receive four
27 machines, with the District covering the initial purchase and the schools responsible for
28 future maintenance and replacement costs.

29
30 Motion – Paige Henning, Seconded – Kim Skornogoski, passed unanimously to
31 approve the purchase of eight (8) Clover Mini w/Cash Boxes for a total of \$8,080.00 and
32 the opening of a bank account to facilitate credit card purchases for the District's
33 concessions stand(s).

34
35 **D. Second Reading of Board Policy 4301 (Revised)** – *Visitors in the Schools*
36 Superintendent Hoyer reviewed the policy above and stated that no comments or
37 recommendations for changes were received since the first reading of the policy at the
38 August 17, 2026 regular Board meeting.

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40 Motion – Paige Henning, Seconded – Bill Bronson, passed unanimously to approve
41 revised Board Policy 4301 as presented.

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43 **ACTION: OTHER**

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

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48 **REPORTS, DISCUSSION, AND POLICIES**

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2 **A. Staffing Update Report** – Director of Human Resources Heather Spurzem reviewed
3 the hiring, retirement, resignation, and termination statistics from last year. She also
4 reviewed the current open positions within the District. Director Spurzem reported on
5 the hiring trends from the previous six (6) school years and spoke on the District's
6 recruitment, marketing, networking, and retention strategies and how beneficial they
7 are.

8
9 Trustee Thompson questioned if the thirty-three (33) paraeducators still needed was
10 typical for this time of year. Director Spurzem stated yes, because some of the
11 positions have been open for years; however, funds are available if all thirty-three
12 positions are filled.

13
14 **B. First Reading of Board Policies 1104 (New) –*Student Representatives*; 2105R**
15 **(Delete) – *Instruction*; 2250 (Revised) – *Adult Education*; and 4550 (Revised) –**
16 ***Registered Sex Offenders*** – Superintendent Hoyer reviewed several policies for first
17 reading, including new Policy 1104, written by Trustee Bronson and Student
18 Representative Lydia Comstock, which establishes provisions for student
19 representatives to serve on the Board. She stated the committee also recommended
20 deleting Policy 2105R, as its provisions regarding grade organization are no longer
21 necessary. Minor terminology and naming updates were made to Policy 2250.
22 Significant discussion and legal review occurred regarding Policy 4550, Registered Sex
23 Offenders, including revisions recommended by Montana School Boards Association
24 (MTSBA) and clarification of restrictions related to registered sex offenders being within
25 1,000 feet of District-owned buildings or properties. One grammatical change was
26 brought to Superintendent Hoyer's attention on page 67, line 44. The word "a" should
27 be added to read "... has a child attending the District, ..." Superintendent Hoyer
28 commended the Policy Committee for its work, particularly on Policy 4550. Chairperson
29 Johnson expressed appreciation to Trustee Bronson and Lydia for developing Policy
30 1104, with Superintendent Hoyer noting that the policy is more comprehensive than the
31 MTSBA model and is designed to strengthen and encourage student participation as
32 Student Board Representatives. She asked if anyone had further questions or concerns
33 regarding any of the new policies or revisions to contact her prior to the next regular
34 Board meeting.

35
36 **C. Discussion, Committee Reports, and Comments**

37 Trustee Henning reflected on the Superintendent's report and noted the connection
38 between teachers who have taught multiple generations of her family. She expressed
39 appreciation for the number of opportunities now available to elementary students,
40 including pep band.

41 Trustee Duff expressed excitement for the new school year and commended
42 Superintendent Hoyer for her work on policy development and the difficult conversations
43 that often accompany it.

44 Trustee Thompson expressed appreciation for participation statistics that highlight
45 student involvement outside the classroom, noting that extracurricular activities can be
46 an important factor in helping students remain engaged in school.

47 Trustee Skornogosi reminded everyone that the Worlds of Work (WOW) event is
48 scheduled for the following Tuesday and that volunteers are still needed. She

1 highlighted the event's impact, with approximately 2,000 students from across the
2 region participating in hands-on learning experiences. She also expressed appreciation
3 to District schools and staff for their flexibility in accommodating students following the
4 closure of St. Patrick's Academy and the significant effort required to prepare for and
5 process background checks for classroom volunteers.

6 Trustee Sunchild reported that the Fan Show meeting set a record for attendance and
7 praised the students for their performance. She also commended Lewis and Clark
8 Elementary School for its handling of the shelter-in-place situation last week during
9 police activity in the area.

10 Trustee Bronson expressed appreciation for the development of the new Student Board
11 Representative policy and commended Lydia for having the initiative and courage to
12 bring the idea forward. He noted that colleagues across the state often ask how we get
13 so many things done; to which he replies, "just set it up and do it!"

14 15 16 **UPCOMING EVENTS**

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18 Chairperson Johnson highlighted upcoming events to include the High School House
19 Groundbreaking on September 17, 2026, a future Board meeting on September 21st,
20 and the Safe and Secure Schools Board Work Session on October 1st.

21 22 23 **ACTION TO ADJOURN**

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25 With no further comments or items to be discussed, motion by Vice-Chairperson
26 Skornogoski and seconded by Chairperson Johnson to adjourn the Regular Meeting of
27 the Board of Trustees at 6:43 p.m.

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37 _____
Gordon Johnson, Chairperson

38 _____
39 Luke Diekhans, Clerk