

BOARD OF PUBLIC EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES

March 11-12, 2025
East Helena High School, 227 Academy
2760 Valley Dr
East Helena, MT

Tuesday, March 11, 2025
8:30 AM

CALL TO ORDER – 00:01:05

Chair Tharp called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM. The Chair led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance and Ms. Kris Stockton took Roll Call. The Chair read the Statement of Public Participation and welcomed guests. Guests in the audience introduced themselves to the Board.

Board members: Dr. Tim Tharp, Chair; Dr. Ron Slinger, Vice Chair; Ms. Madalyn Quinlan; Dr. Hannah Nieskens; Ms. Lisa Schmidt; Ms. Julia Maxwell; Mr. Gavin Mow, Student Representative. Ex Officio members: Dr. Angela McLean, Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE); State Superintendent Susie Hedalen, Office of Public Instruction (OPI); Mr. Dylan Klapmeier, Governor's Office. Staff: Ms. McCall Flynn, Executive Director; Ms. Kris Stockton, Administrative Specialist; Ms. Julie Balsam, Accounting Technician; Ms. Cathy Kincheloe, Director of Planning, Community Choice Schools Commission. Guests: Ms. Cedar Rose, OPI; Ms. Crystal Andrews, OPI; Ms. Marie Judisch, OPI; Ms. Carrie Kouba, OPI; Dr. Julie Murgel, OPI; Ms. Aislinn Brown, Board Legal Counsel, Agency Legal Services Bureau; Mr. Brenton Craggs, OPI; Ms. Tyler Capece, OPI; Superintendent Dan Rispens, East Helena Public Schools (EHPS); Ms. Jordann Lankford Forster, Chair, Montana Advisory Council on Indian Education (MACIE); Superintendent Casey Bertram, Bozeman School District; Superintendent Erik Wilkerson, Jefferson County School District; Dr. Daniel Sybrant, Cognia; Ms. Christy Mock-Stutz, OPI; Ms. Kristi Steinberg, University of Montana; Dr. Rob Watson, School Administrators of Montana; Ms. Shantel Niederstadt, OPI; Ms. Barbara Jean (BJ) Paris, Cognia; Ms. Christine Emerson, OPI; Ms. Ashley McGrath; Mr. Erik Burke, Montana Federation of Public Employees (MFPE); Ms. Deborah Shinn, Marion Public Schools (MPS); Ms. Brenda Knoll, MPS; Ms. Alisa Jones, MPS; Ms. Tess Brist, MPS; Ms. Michelle Thompson, MPS; Ms. Carley Ervin, MPS; Mr. Brad Wever, Cognia.

PUBLIC COMMENT – 00:04:19

Dr. Rob Watson provided public comment related to the proposed Memorandum of Understanding with Cognia for joint school accreditation.

CONSENT AGENDA – 00:06:25

Vice Chair Slinger moved to adopt the Consent Agenda as presented. Motion seconded by Board member Quinlan.

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

ADOPT AGENDA – 00:06:57

Board member Schmidt moved to adopt the Agenda as presented. Motion seconded by Board member Nieskens.

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

❖ REPORTS – Dr. Tim Tharp (Items 1- 6)

Item 1 CHAIRPERSON REPORT – 00:07:19 **Dr. Tim Tharp**

Chair Tim Tharp discussed activities and meetings he has participated in since the January Board meeting including his upcoming participation in an accreditation site visit to Clark County Public Schools in Las Vegas, OPI

groups he has participated in, and trainings he has conducted. The Chair invited Superintendent Rispens for opening comments and the Superintendent welcomed the Board to East Helena High School and the 227 Academy. Superintendent Rispens discussed the tours of the Early Literacy Preschool classes and the 227 Academy. Chair Tharp welcomed Hannah Nieskens to the Board and Ms. Nieskens introduced herself. Chair Tharp reviewed the new Committee Assignments to conclude his report.

**Item 2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT – 00:17:12
McCall Flynn**

Ms. McCall Flynn thanked Board members for their work and welcomed members to East Helena. Ms. Flynn noted the Legislature is on transmittal break and that over 830 House bills and over 500 Senate bills have been introduced. Ms. Flynn spoke about the work she and the Board Legislative Committee have completed this session and reviewed bills the Board is tracking. Ms. Flynn thanked EHPS for inviting the Board and for the school tours.

**Item 3 STATE SUPERINTENDENT REPORT – 00:24:49
State Superintendent Susie Hedalen**

Superintendent Susie Hedalen welcomed the Board, congratulated Superintendent Nieskens as the newest Board member, and thanked Superintendent Rispens for hosting the Board. Superintendent Hedalen noted that she is working with Montana's Congressional Delegation regarding the status of the Department of Education and that she will be traveling to Washington, DC for meetings to discuss funding and how the new processes will work. The Superintendent reviewed bills the OPI is tracking or supporting and thanked the Board and OCHE for their partnerships before answering Board members' questions.

Assessment Update and NAEP Overview: Ms. Cedar Rose presented the Assessment Update and reviewed the results of the most recent MAST testlets given in Window 2 and answered Board members' questions. Ms. Shantel Niederstadt presented the National Assessment of Educational Progress Overview and answered Board members' questions.

Federal Report: Ms. Carrie Kouba presented the Federal Report and noted changes at the Federal level the OPI is monitoring and answered Board members' questions.

Accreditation Report: Ms. Crystal Andrews presented the Accreditation Report and shared comments from schools regarding the Accreditation process for this year. Board members complimented Ms. Andrews on the success of the new Accreditation process.

Content Standards Revision Update: Ms. Marie Judisch presented the Content Standards Revision Update and answered Board members' questions.

Annual School Food Services Report: Ms. Christine Emerson presented the Annual School Food Services Report and answered Board members' questions.

Superintendent Hedalen concluded the report and noted that customer service hours of operation have been increased, and feedback has been positive.

**Item 4 COMMISSIONER OF HIGHER EDUCATION REPORT – 02:01:36
Dr. Angela McLean**

Dr. Angela McLean thanked the Board and OPI for their partnership, welcomed Board member Neiskens, and reviewed legislation OCHE is tracking.

**Item 5 GOVERNOR'S OFFICE REPORT – 02:06:21
Dylan Klapmeier**

Mr. Dylan Klapmeier thanked EHPS for hosting the Board and welcomed Board member Neiskens. Mr. Klapmeier reviewed school visits and student events the Governor has hosted, a reception held for education stakeholders at the Governor's home and bills the Governor's Office is tracking.

**Item 6 STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORT – 02:12:36
Gavin Mow**

Mr. Gavin Mow presented the results of the Student Survey he conducted and answered Board members' questions.

Mr. Brenton Craggs reviewed the request from Superintendent Hedalen for revocation of the educator license in BPE Case #2025-01.

Vice Chair Slinger moved the Initial Review of BPE Case #2025-01, Reger, be moved to a contested case hearing at the July 2025 Board of Public Education Meeting. Motion seconded by Board member Quinlan.

Clarifying question from Board member Schmidt.

No further discussion. Motion passed with Board member Schmidt dissenting.

**Item 13 ACTION ON CONTESTED CASE HEARING BPE CASE #2024-09, EVANS – 06:52:16
Aislinn Brown**

Ms. Aislinn Brown reviewed the process for the hearing. Mr. Evans was available via Zoom and stated that it was his understanding that he was not allowed to have representation at the meeting. Ms. Brown clarified that it was her recommendation that he should not have representation by anyone other than an attorney.

Mr. Craggs presented a summary of the request from the Wolf Point School District for breach of contract by Mr. Evans and their request for the Board to issue Mr. Evans a letter of reprimand.

Mr. Evans presented a summary of issues at the school that caused his resignation.

Wolf Point High School Principal Kim Hanks was called as the first OPI witness, was sworn in, and was questioned by Mr. Craggs. Mr. Evans cross examined Ms. Hanks.

Wolf Point Elementary Principal Tara Thomas was called as the second OPI witness, was sworn in, and was questioned by Mr. Craggs. No cross examination from Mr. Evans.

Mr. Evans was called as the third OPI witness, was sworn in, confirmed he holds a Class 1 Montana Educator License and confirmed the expiration date and the SEID #, and was questioned by Mr. Craggs.

Mr. Eric Peterson was called as the fourth OPI witness, was sworn in, and questioned by Mr. Craggs. No cross examination from Mr. Evans.

Dr. David Perkins was called as the fifth OPI witness, was sworn in and questioned by Mr. Craggs. No cross examination from Mr. Evans.

Mr. Evans explained that there are record keeping issues in the Wolf Point School District that caused him to take another job, and when he requested his personnel file his letter of resignation was not in it and that this is indicative of the systemic problems within the school district. Mr. Evans stated that other staff have resigned after signing contracts with no disciplinary action and that he did not sign the contract. Mr. Evans stated that there is no proper chain of command for the signing of the contracts.

Mr. Craggs gave closing statements and requested a letter of reprimand be issued for breach of contract.

Mr. Evans stated that without evidence he signed the contract that everything that has been said is conjecture.

Vice Chair Slinger moved to approve the request from the Superintendent of Public Instruction to issue a letter of reprimand to the educator in BPE Case #2024-09, Evans. Motion seconded by Board member Nieskens.

Ms. Brown explained the repercussions of issuing a letter of reprimand.

Ms. Crystal Andrews explained that a formal letter of reprimand is reported to the national database and that the letter of reprimand is on file for the educator. Ms. Andrews confirmed that the letter itself is not uploaded to the national database, just a notation that a letter exists. Another state agency would need to contact OPI for specific information.

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

Superintendent Hedalen stated that she would encourage school districts to have policies in place to cover instances such as this to protect the district.

*****CLOSED SESSION*****

The Board entered Executive Session at 4:20 PM.

❖ **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – Dr. Tim Tharp (Items 14-15)**

Item 14 DISCUSSION OF YELLOW KIDNEY SETTLEMENT – 07:51:24
Aislinn Brown

Ms. Aislinn Brown reviewed the proposed settlement agreement in the Yellow Kidney et al lawsuit and answered Board members' questions.

*****OPEN SESSION*****

The Board ended Executive Session at 4:49 PM.

Item 15 ACTION ON YELLOW KIDNEY SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT – 08:19:59
Dr. Tim Tharp

Vice Chair Slinger moved to approve the Yellow Kidney Settlement agreement as amended in Executive Session and authorize the Board Chair to sign on behalf of the Board. Motion seconded by Board member Quinlan.

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

Meeting recessed for the day at 4:49 PM.

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

8:30 AM

CALL TO ORDER 00:00:38

Chair Tharp called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM. The Chair led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance and Ms. Kris Stockton took Roll Call. The Chair read the Statement of Public Participation and welcomed guests.

Board members: Dr. Tim Tharp, Chair; Dr. Ron Slinger, Vice Chair; Ms. Madalyn Quinlan; Dr. Hannah Nieskens; Ms. Lisa Schmidt; Ms. Julia Maxwell; Mr. Gavin Mow, Student Representative. Ex Officio members: Dr. Angela McLean, OCHE; State Superintendent Susie Hedalen, OPI. Staff: Ms. McCall Flynn, Executive Director; Ms. Kris Stockton, Administrative Specialist; Ms. Julie Balsam, Accounting Technician. Guests: Superintendent Paul Furthmyre, Montana School for the Deaf and Blind (MSDB); Ms. Tyler Capece, OPI; Ms. Crystal Andrews, OPI; Ms. Marie Judisch, OPI; Dr. Julie Murgel, OPI; Dr. Jason Neiffer, Montana Digital Academy; Ms. Christy Mock-Stutz, OPI; Ms. Kristi Steinberg, University of Montana; Ms. Ashley McGrath; Dr. Daniel Sybrant, Cognia; Ms. BJ Paris, Cognia; Mr. Erik Burke, MFPE; Ms. Alisa Jones, MPS; Ms. Brenda Knoll, MPS; Ms. Michele Thompson, MPS; Ms. Deborah Shinn, MPS; Ms. Tess Brist, MPS; Ms. Carley Ervin, MPS; Superintendent Pete Joseph, Corvallis Public Schools; Ms. Rebecca Kaufmann.

❖ **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – Dr. Tim Tharp (Item 16)**

Item 16 PRESENTATION ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN EDUCATION – 00:02:26
Dr. Jason Neiffer

Dr. Jason Neiffer presented a report on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Education, how it is being used, different types of AI, and the pros and cons and challenges with Media Literacy due to AI. Dr. Neiffer discussed the bill in the Legislature to fund opportunities at the Digital Academy for AI, before answering Board members' questions.

❖ **MSDB LIAISON – Lisa Schmidt (Item 17)**

Item 17 MSDB REPORT – 00:34:51
Paul Furthmyre

Superintendent Paul Furthmyre presented the MSDB report, reviewed the action items in the packet, discussed legislation that pertains to MSDB, Spring events at the school, and answered Board members' questions before requesting approval of the action items.

Board member Schmidt moved to approve the MSDB Out of State Travel Requests as listed in the agenda packet. Motion seconded by Vice Chair Slinger.

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

Board member Schmidt moved to approve the MSDB Personnel Items as listed in the agenda packet. Motion seconded by Board member Quinlan.

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

Board member Schmidt moved to approve the 2nd Reading of the MSDB 2025-2026 School Calendar as listed in the agenda packet. Motion seconded by Board member Nieskens.

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

❖ **LICENSURE COMMITTEE – Dr. Ron Slinger (Items 18-20)**

**Item 18 ACTION ON REGENERATED TEST REVIEW AND QUALIFYING SCORES – 01:05:55
Crystal Andrews**

Ms. Crystal Andrews presented the proposed regenerative tests and qualifying scores discussed at the January 2025 Board meeting. Ms. Andrews provided additional information regarding the Social Studies score as requested by the Board.

Vice Chair Slinger moved to approve the regenerated test #5581 Social Studies and the qualifying score of 153. Motion seconded by Board member Schmidt.

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

Vice Chair Slinger moved to approve the regenerated test #5123 Family Consumer Science and the qualifying score of 153. Motion seconded by Board member Quinlan.

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

Vice Chair Slinger moved to approve the regenerated test #5053 Technology Education and the qualifying score of 153. Motion seconded by Board member Nieskens.

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

**Item 19 ACTION ON MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY SPECIAL EDUCATION
CERTIFICATION PROGRAM – 01:09:15
Crystal Andrews**

Ms. Crystal Andrews reviewed the presentation from the January 2025 Board meeting and Ms. Leslie Rogers and Dr. Lauren Davis from Montana State University thanked the Board for the review of the Special Education Certification Program and requested Board approval of the new program.

Vice Chair Slinger moved to approve Montana State University's request to implement a Special Education Certificate Program. Motion seconded by Board member Nieskens.

Board member Quinlan asked if the program was a separate degree program or part of the Elementary and Secondary degree program. Ms. Rogers responded it is an optional part of either program allowing students to supplement their education.

Board member Quinlan asked how an educator who has a degree and currently teaching could add this to their license. Ms. Rogers responded that is the next step once the program is approved.

Chair Tharp noted that a remote option would be preferred, and Ms. Rogers responded that will be considered.

The Montana Board of Public Education is a Professional Development Unit Provider. Attending a Board of Public Education Meeting either in person or via Zoom may qualify you to receive professional development units. Please complete the necessary information on the sign-in sheet if you are applying for professional development units.

Agenda items are handled in the order listed on the approved agenda. Items may be rearranged unless listed "time certain". Public comment is welcome on all items listed as "Action" and as noted at the beginning and end of each meeting.

The Board of Public Education will make reasonable accommodations for known disabilities that may interfere with an individual's ability to participate in the meeting. Individuals who require such accommodations should make requests to the Board of Public Education as soon as possible prior to the meeting start date. You may write to: Kris Stockton, PO Box 200601, Helena MT, 59620, email at: kmstockton@mt.gov or phone at 406-444-0302.