

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
STATE OF MONTANA

Greg Gianforte  
GOVERNOR



Kristen Juras  
LT. GOVERNOR

**State Board of Education Meeting**

November 21, 2025 · 1:00 p.m.  
University of Montana Missoula, University Center Ballroom

- 1:00 Call to order and attendance  
*Lieutenant Governor Kristen Juras*
  
- 1:05 Approval of 2024 State Board of Education Minutes- **ACTION**
  
- 1:07 Motion to adopt the agenda- **ACTION**
  
- 1:10 Welcome and Opening Remarks  
*Lieutenant Governor Kristen Juras*
  
- 1:15 Remarks on behalf of the Office of Public Instruction  
*Superintendent Susie Hedalen*
  
- 1:20 Remarks on behalf of the Board of Regents  
*Chair Todd Buchanan*
  
- 1:25 Remarks on behalf of the Board of Public Education  
*Chair Tim Tharp*
  
- 1:30 Board of Regents and Board of Public Education Joint Resolution Supporting FAFSA Completion and Direct Admissions - **ACTION**
  
- 1:40 Public Comment  
*Limited to 3 minutes. Comments may also be emailed to [Rachel.green@mt.gov](mailto:Rachel.green@mt.gov)*

Adjourn after public comment

**Minutes**  
**Montana Board of Education**  
**November 22, 2024 | MSU-Bozeman**

**Friday, November 22, 2024**

Members present: Governor Gianforte, Board of Regents Chair Buchanan, Regent Dombrowski, Regent Lozar, Regent Bough, Regent Folkvord, Regent Mortenson, Board of Public Education Chair Tharp, Board Member Hedalen, Board Member Slinger, Board Member Hamman, Board Member Quinlan, Board Member Schmidt, Superintendent Arntzen, Commissioner Christian.

Members excused: Regent Southworth and Board Member Rasmussen

Opening by Governor Gianforte | 00:02:55

Governor Gianforte called the meeting to order and took attendance.

Approval of 2023 Board of Education Minutes

Governor Gianforte asked for any corrections or additions to the minutes. There were none so the minutes stood approved.

Adoption of the 2024 Board of Education agenda

Chair Buchanan moved and Regent Folkvord seconded adoption of the agenda. It was unanimously approved on a voice vote.

Remarks by Governor Gianforte | 00:04:48

Governor Gianforte began his remarks by acknowledging that the Board's primary responsibility today is to approve the unified education budget proposal for the 2025 legislative session. He thanked the Board staff and Budget Office staff for their work in compiling the unified budget. The Governor then spoke about the success that has been achieved in education in the current biennium before highlighting his educational goals for the upcoming legislative session. These include increasing teacher pay, expanding personalized learning, expanding career and technical education, reducing youth time on cell phones and social media, and investments in school infrastructure. He also spoke of post-secondary funding to support infrastructure and modernization on campuses as well as a continued focus on supporting college CTE programs.

#### Remarks by Chair Buchanan | 00:13:08

Chair Buchanan began by acknowledging Governor Gianforte's election to another term and Susie Hedalen's election as the new Superintendent of Public Instruction and that he looks forward to continuing to work with them. He then noted the university system's budget includes investments in infrastructure and present law adjustments to combat inflation. He stated that the MUS is well-prepared to respond to changing economic conditions and diverse student learning needs. He then spoke about accountability to taxpayers and the legislature, shared policy goals, accessibility, affordability, diverse pathways for students, public-private partnerships, K-12 partnerships, innovation and career oriented short-term training.

#### Remarks by Superintendent Arntzen and Chair Tharp | 00:17:45

Superintendent Arntzen began by acknowledging successful new education initiatives through partnerships with the Board and Regents. She handed out a memo outlining her legislative priorities. She then turned it over to Chair Tharp. Chair Tharp began by explaining what the Board of Public Education does and that they have been extremely busy with a focus on innovation and flexibility for schools. Examples he cited include charter schools, changes to math standards, changes to teacher licensure regulations, and accreditation reform. He also complimented the budget focus on infrastructure.

- Recognition of Montana Teacher of the Year | 00:25:25

Superintendent Arntzen recognized the 2025 Montana Teacher of the Year Dawn Sievers and Ms. Sievers spoke briefly about her experience.

- Presentation and Action on the 2025 Unified Education Budget | 00:28:20

Budget Office analysts Nancy Hall and Ben Ternes walked the Board through the 2025 unified education budget. The only Board discussion was by Superintendent Arntzen requesting further dialogue on proposed legislation impacting adult education and Board Member Quinlan requesting clarification on how school infrastructure funding will flow. Board Member Hedalen and Superintendent Arntzen offered their support of the budget. There was one public comment that was meant for general public comment, not on the unified budget. Board Member Slinger moved and Regent Bough seconded a motion to approve the budget. It passed unanimously on a voice vote.

- Joint Resolution Supporting Math Attainment and Proficiency | 00:41:15

Chair Tharp gave background on the Board of Public Education and Regents separately passing resolutions supporting a third year of math in high school and greater emphasis on math proficiency resulting in a joint resolution for the Board's consideration. Chair Buchanan and Board Member Hedalen expressed their support and flexible pathways for math attainment. No public comment. Dr. Tharp moved and Regent Dombrowski seconded a motion to support the resolution which passed unanimously on a voice vote.

- General Public Comment | 00:46:00

In-person public comment was received from:

Gary Lusin, Bozeman Trustee who spoke of his recent meeting to provide stakeholder feedback to the constitutional education officers. The meeting was meant to be a consensus building forum to discuss the worst and best case scenarios if we make change or fail to make change in education.

Trevor Nichols, Bozeman High School science teacher who attended the meeting organized by Gary Lusin who spoke about the future of education as a current teacher

Laslo Baumgartner, Gallatin high school student who attended the meeting organized by Gary Lusin and gave his perspective on the future of education as a current student

Sandy Wilson, retired teacher, trustee, and Bozeman parent who attended the meeting organized by Gary Lusin

Carrie Fischer, Belgrade schools business officer who attended the meeting organized by Gary Lusin

Tim Tharp spoke as a private citizen to thank the Governor for his efforts to reduce cell phone use in schools and more broadly talked about mental health challenges in youth related to social media and constant online access

Bridger Beach, MSUN student who spoke about college faculty pay being too low

Tricia Seifert, Dean of MSU College of Education and Health, spoke about her participation in Gary Lusin's meeting and the role of teacher prep programs

Sarah Hays, school administrator from Bozeman who spoke about her participation in Gary Lusin's meeting

Written public comment was received by Laura Crist of Great Falls. She is a parent and recent graduate who spoke about her participation in Gary Lusin's meeting. A joint written comment was submitted by Pam Birkeland (Madison Co. Supt.), John Nielson (Gallatin Co. Supt.), and Rhonda Long (Fergus Co. Supt.) speaking to their participation in the meeting organized by Gary Lusin.

- Meeting Adjourned | 01:05:55



# Montana Board of Education

## RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Montana Constitution and the Montana Board of Education affirm that access to educational opportunity is essential to the well-being of Montana's students, families, and communities; and

WHEREAS, Montana's high schools play a vital role in helping students explore and prepare for the full range of postsecondary and career options available in Montana, including pathways through colleges, universities, apprenticeships, and workforce training programs; and

WHEREAS, completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a key step in accessing financial aid, including grants, scholarships, work-study programs, the upcoming Workforce Pell, and federal student loans, that can make higher education and workforce training more affordable for Montana families; and

WHEREAS, in 2024, Montana's FAFSA completion rate was 44 percent, compared to the national average of 54 percent, leaving an estimated \$12 million in financial aid unclaimed by Montana students; and

WHEREAS, the Montana University System's proposed Direct Admissions initiative will help simplify the college exploration process by proactively informing high school students of the in-state postsecondary options for which they already qualify, without requiring any application fee or obligation to enroll; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Montana Board of Education encourages all Montana public high schools to:

1. Improve students' and families' understanding of, and completion of, the FAFSA by incorporating FAFSA awareness into financial literacy curriculum, hosting FAFSA completion events; and
2. Participate in the Montana University System's Direct Admissions initiative to help students and families better understand their postsecondary opportunities in Montana; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Montana Board of Education encourages the Montana Office of Public Instruction and the Montana Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education to assist interested school districts in these efforts through technical assistance, data-sharing protocols, and outreach to families and communities; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Montana Board of Education shall charge a stakeholder working group, including representatives of the Montana University System, the Montana Office of Public Instruction, school administrators, counselors, families, and community partners, to develop coordinated approaches that strengthen access to postsecondary opportunities and support local implementation efforts.

RESOLVED BY THE MONTANA BOARD OF EDUCATION ON NOVEMBER 21, 2025.

Todd Buchanan  
Chairperson  
Board of Regents

Dr. Tim Tharp  
Chairperson  
Board of Public Education