

BOARD OF PUBLIC EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES

December 11, 2024
Zoom

Wednesday, December 11, 2024
8:15 AM

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Tharp called the meeting to order at 8:15 AM. The Chair led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance and Ms. Stockton took Roll Call. The Chair read the Statement of Public Participation and welcomed guests.

Board members: Dr. Tim Tharp, Chair; Ms. Susie Hedalen, Vice Chair; Dr. Ron Slinger; Ms. Renee Rasmussen; Ms. Madalyn Quinlan; Ms. Jane Hamman; Ms. Lisa Schmidt. Ex Officio members: Dr. Angela McLean, Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE). Staff: Ms. McCall Flynn, Executive Director; Ms. Kris Stockton, Administrative Specialist; Ms. Jenny Murnane Butcher, Program Officer. Guests: Superintendent Judy Jonart, Butte Public Schools (BPS); Ms. Melissa Johnson, BPS; Mr. Ron Ricketts, BPS; Mr. Keith Miller, BPS; Ms. Suzanne Evans, BPS; Superintendent Tobin Novasio, Hardin Public Schools (HPS); Ms. Jodeen Marston, HPS School Board Chair; Principal Taylor Sidwell, HPS; Ms. Autumn Whiteman, HPS; Superintendent Brad Moore, Fergus County Public Schools (FCPS); Mr. Jeff Southworth, FCPS School Board Trustee; Ms. Rhonda Long, Fergus County Superintendent of Schools; Principal Mathew Lewis, FCPS; Ms. Rebekah Rhoades, Business Manager, FCPS; Superintendent Matt Torix, Laurel Public Schools (LPS); Principal Melissa Byington, LPS; Assistant Principal John Stilson, LPS; Ms. Charla Wetsch, Director of Curriculum and Assessment, LPS; Ms. Brittani Hunter, LPS School Board Chair; Superintendent Ron Goodman, Libby Public School District (LPSD); Mr. Scott Beagle, Curriculum Director, LPSD, Ms. Alida Snow, LPDS School Board Chair; Superintendent Dan McGee, Liberty Elementary School District (LESD); Mr. David Hofer, LESD School Board Chair; Ms. Jenine Synness, Business Manager & Clerk, LESD; Mr. Todd A. Hanson, Managing Partner, 4 Poles Educational Consulting Group; Superintendent Don Christman, Lockwood Public Schools (LPS); Principal Gwen Poole, LPS; Assistant Principal Cole Cavan, LPS; Superintendent Jason Sargent, St. Ignatius Public Schools; Superintendent Dan Grabowska, Park City Schools (PCS); Ms. Breann Streck, PCS School Board Trustee; Mr. Fred Anderson, Former State Representative; Mr. James Easton, Empowered Workforce Strategist, Montana Chamber Foundation; Ms. Donna Hutchison, Vice President of Partnerships and Policy, Pearson Virtual Schools; Superintendent Mark Johnston, Ronan Public Schools (RPS); Ms. Sandra Beal, Director of Curriculum, Federal Programs, and Grants, RPS; Principal Kevin Kenelty, RPS; Principal Frank Jobe, RPS; Superintendent Todd Fiske, Florence Public Schools (FPS); Principal Scott March, FPS; Principal Sheree Jenkins, FPS; Principal Chrissy Hulla, FPS; Ms. Ali Bristow, High School Counselor, FPS; Mr. James Baxley, Teacher, FPS; Ms. Bobbie Kettlehut, FPS School Board Trustee; Mr. Jeff Wium, FPS Parent/Community Member; Mr. Gabe Wium, Student; Ms. Baily Goodwine, School Board Chair, Yellowstone Experience School (YES); Ms. Leslie Kennedy, Applicant; Ms. Emily Post, Applicant; Representative Sue Vinton; Ms. Moffie Funk, Montanans Organized for Education; Mr. Doug Reisig, Montana Rural Education Association; Ms. Patricia Doyle; Ms. Melissa Casanova; Ms. Beth Sampson; Ms. Elizabeth Kaleva, Kaleva Law Office; Superintendent Chad Johnson, Livingston Public Schools; Ms. Kate Bower, Livingston; Ms. Amy Clark, Livingston; Ms. Becky Ayler, Livingston; Mr. Crystal Quillen, Livingston; Ms. Emily Oldaugh, Livingston; Ms. Katy Brenner, Livingston; Ms. Kelly Miller, Livingston; Mr. Sean Batura, Livingston; Mr. John Heidke, Livingston; Ms. Vanessa Kurtz, Livingston; Mr. Joseph Kleinsasser, Livingston; Ms. Sara Maria Driscoll, Livingston; Mr. Sean Batura, Livingston

ADOPT AGENDA

Board member Rasmussen moved to adopt the agenda as presented. Motion seconded by Board member Quinlan.

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

Chair Tharp outlined the process for the meeting, explained that time will be made for public comment after each school presentation and at the end of the meeting, and that written public comment can be sent to the Board office.

❖ **CHARTER SCHOOL COMMITTEE – Jane Hamman**

Board Charter Committee Chair Hamman opened the item and asked Executive Director Flynn to explain how the interview process will proceed. Ms. Flynn explained the schedule of interviews, when breaks will be included, that the meeting will be recorded and posted on the Board website at the conclusion of the meeting, and explained how public comment will be handled for each item.

8:30 AM

BUTTE PATHWAY ACADEMY

Judy Jonart, Superintendent; Ron Ricketts, Curriculum Director; Suzanne Evans, Curriculum Coordinator; Melissa Johnson, Special Education, Adult Basic Education, and Alternative Program Director; Keith Miller, Middle School Principal

Superintendent Jonart introduced the BPS team and reviewed the application for the Butte Pathway Academy, an alternative school with enhanced flexibility for students and connections to future careers. Board members asked questions of Superintendent Jonart and team members regarding specific items in the application. Dr. McLean commended BPS on the application.

9:00 AM

BIG HORN ACADEMY

Tobin Novasio, Superintendent; Jodeen Marston, School Board Chair; Taylor Sidwell, Principal; Autumn Whiteman, Counselor

Superintendent Tobin Novasio introduced the team present with him and his team reviewed the application for an alternative school for students who are at-risk of not graduating, then answered Board members' questions regarding the charter proposal. Dr. McLean provided comments in support of the proposal.

9:30 AM

CENTRAL MONTANA CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION ACADEMY

Brad Moore, Superintendent; Jeff Southworth, School Board Trustee; Rhonda Long, Fergus County Superintendent of Schools; Mathew Lewis, High School Principal; Rebekah Rhoades, Business Manager

Superintendent Moore presented the proposal for a Career and Technical Education Public Charter School, a school focused on bridging the gap between high school and career, and discussed how the school will function before County Superintendent Long explained how the Hutterite Colonies in the surrounding community will be included in the school for additional educational opportunities for their students. School Board Trustee Southworth added additional comments before Board members asked questions of the group. Dr. McLean and Mr. Doug Reisig offered supporting comments for the proposed charter school.

10:00 AM

LAUREL VIRTUAL ACADEMY

Matt Torix, Superintendent; Dr. Melissa Byington, High School Principal; John Stilson, High School Assistant Principal; Charla Wetsch, Director of Curriculum and Assessment; Brittani Hunter, School Board Chair

Dr. Melissa Byington gave the presentation for the Laurel Virtual Academy, a new online platform for students in Laurel, which they hope will include local homeschooled students, and students who have left the traditional school model. Members of the team provided information regarding the application before the team answered Board members' questions. Dr. McLean offered support from OCHE.

10:30 AM

LIBBY CENTRAL CHARTER SCHOOL

Ron Goodman, Superintendent; Scott Beagle, Curriculum Director; Alida Snow, School Board Chair

Superintendent Goodman discussed the current school structure in Libby for their alternative school program then reviewed the application for the Libby Central Charter School, which was necessitated by the growing need for alternative education offerings in Libby. Mr. Scott Beagle reviewed the application, and the need expressed from the community for an alternative program. The team answered Board members' questions. Dr. McLean commented that the infrastructure already in place to help support the proposed charter school.

11:00 AM

LIBERTY ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

Dan McGee, Superintendent; David Hofer, School Board Chair; Jenine Synness, Business Manager & Clerk; Todd A. Hanson, Managing Partner, 4 Poles Educational Consulting Group; Lona Running Wolf, Partner, 4 Poles Educational Consulting Group

School Board Chair Hofer gave opening remarks on the request from LESD for a charter school, before Superintendent McGee reviewed the district application specific to offering English as a Second Language for their Hutterite students. Ms. Jenine Synness and Mr. Todd Hanson also made remarks regarding the application from LESD. Members of the team answered Board members' questions.

12:30 PM

LION'S PATH ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

Don Christman, Superintendent; Gwen Poole, High School Principal; Cole Cavan, High School Assistant Principal

Superintendent Christman opened the presentation and Ms. Gwen Poole and Mr. Cole Cavan presented the vision for the Lion's Path Academy Charter School for the Lockwood School District, an alternative school for students who are academically or behaviorally at-risk. Upon completion of the presentation the group answered Board members' questions. Dr. McLean made comments in support of the proposed school.

1:00 PM

MISSION CAREER FORWARD CHARTER ACADEMY

Jason Sargent, Superintendent

Superintendent Sargent presented the application for a Public Charter School for St. Ignatius that will offer career exploration and pathways for students. Superintendent Sargent answered Board members' questions regarding the proposed charter school. Dr. McLean made comments in support of the proposed school.

1:30 PM

MONTANA CONNECTIONS ACADEMY

Dan Grabowska, Superintendent; Breann Streck, School Board Trustee; Fred Anderson, Former State Representative; James Easton, Empowered Workforce Strategist, Montana Chamber Foundation; Donna Hutchison, Vice President of Partnerships and Policy, Pearson Virtual Schools

Superintendent Grabowska and School Board Trustee Streck presented the application for the Montana Connections Academy, a statewide online instructional academy for students. Former Representative Anderson spoke in support of the proposed online charter school. Board members asked questions of the team and discussed concerns over Average Number Belonging funding and the impact to local taxpayers. Ms. Bea Kaleva gave public comment and addressed the previously stated concerns and spoke in favor of parent supported learning. Ms. Beth Sampson, Helena, gave public comment in support of Montana Connections Academy, and Dr. McLean offered support from the Montana University System.

2:00 PM

RONAN CHARTER ACADEMY

Mark Johnston, Superintendent; Sandra Beal, Director of Curriculum, Federal Programs, and Grants; Kevin Kenelty, High School Principal; Frank Jobe, Middle School Principal

Superintendent Johnston and Ms. Sandra Beal presented the Ronan Charter Academy application highlighting aspects of the application which include personalized learning, work based learning, career pathways, and integrating tribal education into the school. Principal Kenelty discussed the personalized learning plans high school students will have available to them and Principal Jobe discussed how the school will be made available for middle school students. The group answered Board members' questions. Dr. McLean made public comments in support of the application.

2:30 PM

SOAR ACADEMY

Todd Fiske, Superintendent; Scott March, High School Principal; Sheree Jenkins, Middle School Principal; Chrissy Hulla, Elementary School Principal; Ali Bristow, High School Counselor; James Baxley, Teacher; Bobbie Kettlehut, School Board Trustee; Jeff Wium, Parent/Community Member; Gabe Wium, Student

Superintendent Fiske presented the Soar Academy request for a Public Charter School for Florence Public Schools which will offer personalized learning for students in an effort to retain students in their district and attract students who have left the district for homeschooling to return. Superintendent Fiske answered Board members' questions. Dr. McLean made comments in support of the proposed school.

3:00 PM

YELLOWSTONE EXPERIENCE SCHOOL (YES)

Baily Goodwine, School Board Chair; Leslie Kennedy, Applicant; Emily Post, Applicant

School Board Chair Baily Goodwine presented the proposal for a public/private school district in a Montessori setting within the Livingston School District. Applicant Leslie Kennedy discussed the Montessori education model,

the project based learning model the school will employ, and applicant Ms. Emily Post discussed additional aspects of the proposed school/school district. Board members asked questions of the group and community members gave public comment in support of and in opposition of the proposal. Ms. Kelly Miller, Ms. Crystal Quillen, and Ms. Sara Maria Driscoll expressed concerns with leadership of the proposed school and ability to manage finances. Ms. Kate Bower and Ms. Vanessa Kurtz spoke in favor of the proposed school. Superintendent Johnson noted that the district has begun the process to notify the electors of the district and to solicit input from the community regarding the request for a new district as required by law. Chair Tharp brought to the Board's attention that several potential members of the school board for the proposed school are not residents of Montana.

Ms. McCall Flynn reviewed the process moving forward for the applications and what is expected of Board members ahead of the January 2025 Board meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment was made.

ADJOURN

Meeting adjourned at 3:45 PM.

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.