

BOARD OF PUBLIC EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES

January 15-16, 2026
Montana Heritage Center
Ponderosa Room
225 Roberts St, Helena, MT

January 15, 2026
8:30AM

CALL TO ORDER – 00:02:05

Chair Tim Tharp called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM. The Chair led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance, 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; Ms. Renee Rasmussen; Ms. Lydia Comstock, Student Representative. Ex Officio members: State Superintendent Susie Hedalen, Office of Public Instruction (OPI); Dr. Angela McLean, Office of Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE); Ms. Rachel Green, Governor's Office. Staff: Ms. McCall Flynn, Executive Director; Ms. Kris Stockton, Administrative Specialist; Ms. Julie Balsam, Administrative Assistant; Ms. Lea Ann Munkres, Program Officer. Guests: Superintendent Paul Furthmyre, Montana School for the Deaf and Blind (MSDB); Mr. Rich Batterman, Board Legal Counsel; Commissioner Sarah Swanson, Department of Labor and Industry (DLI); Ms. Crystal Armstrong, DLI; Ms. Crystal Andrews, OPI; Ms. Isabelle Welch, ABCTe; Ms. Christy Mock-Stutz, OPI; Mr. Patrick Cates, OPI; Dr. Julie Murgel, OPI; Ms. Krystal Smith, OPI; Deputy Superintendent Craig Barringer, OPI; Ms. Kristi Steinberg, University of Montana (UM); Ms. Aislinn Brown, OPI; Ms. Cedar Rose, OPI; Ms. Marie Judisch, OPI; Ms. Katie Madsen, OPI; Ms. Elsie Workman, OPI; Ms. Nancy Hall, Office of Budget and Program Planning; Superintendent Chad Johnson, Livingston Public Schools (LPS); Superintendent Cory Dziowgo, Columbia Falls Public Schools (CFPS); Ms. Jane Hamman; Dr. Melanie Reaves, Montana State University Billings (MSUB); Ms. Julia Gustafson, Friends of the Montana Constitution; Dr. Joe Helbling, Carroll College; Ms. Nicole Bookheimer, MSUB; Ms. Hannah Scheiderer, LPS; Mr. Todd Wester, LPS; Ms. Becky Ayler, LPS.

PUBLIC COMMENT – 00:04:16

No public comment was made.

CONSENT AGENDA – 00:04:29

Vice Chair Slinger moved to approve the Consent Agenda. Motion seconded by Board member Rasmussen.

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

ADOPT AGENDA – 00:05:00

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

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

❖ REPORTS – Dr. Tim Tharp (Items 1-6)

Item 1 CHAIRPERSON REPORT – 00:05:22 Dr. Tim Tharp

Chair Tim Tharp thanked the Montana Heritage Center for their hospitality and reviewed meetings and conferences he attended since the November Board meeting.

**Item 2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT – 00:11:23
McCall Flynn**

Ms. McCall Flynn thanked the Montana Heritage Center for the use of their space then reviewed work pertaining to Public Charter Schools, a presentation given at the Education Interim Budget Committee, and Board Committee meetings.

**Item 3 STATE SUPERINTENDENT REPORT – 00:17:08
State Superintendent Susie Hedalen**

Superintendent Susie Hedalen thanked the Montana Heritage Center for the meeting space, then shared an update on the following information: the Indian Education for All Annual Conference, a Request for Proposal for Indian Education for All, the new Teacher Learning HUB that will interface with MT Teach, Land Board meetings, Data Modernization, work with Montana agriculture to provide locally grown products for schools, work for the Montana 250 Commission, and Federal funding.

Assessment Update: Ms. Cedar Rose provided an update on the MAST Assessment and answered Board members' questions.

Content Standards Update: Ms. Marie Judisch provided an update on the Content Standards revisions.

Accreditation Update: Ms. Crystal Andrews provided an Accreditation Update and answered Board members' questions.

HiSET Report: Ms. Katie Madsen presented the HiSET Report and answered Board members' questions.

Transportation Report: Ms. Elsie Workman presented the Transportation Report and answered Board members' questions.

**Item 4 COMMISSIONER OF HIGHER EDUCATION REPORT – 01:29:04
Dr. Angela McLean**

Dr. Angela McLean reviewed projects at OCHE that included FAFSA completion efforts, the ACT Score Report Code, and Future Ready efforts.

**Item 5 GOVERNOR'S OFFICE REPORT – 01:33:19
Rachel Green**

Ms. Rachel Green announced the receipt of a Federal Grant to fund the Montana Rural Healthcare Transformation Program and stated that a portion of the award will help fund primary and behavioral health services in schools and the Presidential Fitness Test. Ms. Green concluded her report with a review of work completed by the School Funding Interim Commission.

**Item 6 STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORT – 01:36:30
Lydia Comstock**

Ms. Lydia Comstock updated the Board on a National Summit attended by the President of the Montana Association of Student Council and reviewed advocacy the President completed at the Summit, then provided an update on the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) Student Representative Committee meetings she attended.

❖ ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE – Dr. Hannah Nieskens (Item 7)

**Item 7 ACTION ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN EDUCATION RESOLUTION – 02:19:30
Dr. Hannah Nieskens**

Dr. Hannah Nieskens reviewed the Artificial Intelligence in Education Resolution for Board members and outlined the process of writing the proposed resolution. Board members expressed appreciation of Dr. Nieskens' work on this issue.

Dr. Nieskens moved to approve the Artificial Intelligence in Education Resolution. Motion seconded by Board member Schmidt.

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

❖ **CHARTER SCHOOL COMMITTEE – Dr. Ron Slinger (Items 8-9)**

**Item 8 ACTION ON UPDATED PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL CONTRACTS – 02:30:55
Dr. Ron Slinger**

Ms. McCall Flynn reviewed the proposed revisions to the Public Charter School contracts and answered Board members' questions.

Vice Chair Slinger moved to approve the proposed updates with the stipulated changes to the Public Charter School Contracts as listed in the agenda packet. Motion seconded by Dr. Nieskens.

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

**Item 9 WORK SESSION ON THE APPROVAL AND DENIAL OF PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS
– 02:55:27**

Dr. Ron Slinger

Vice Chair Slinger thanked Board members for their review of the applications and noted that action would occur the following day. Vice Chair Slinger reviewed the Board Charter Committee recommendations before Board members discussed the approval or denial of applications.

❖ **LICENSURE COMMITTEE – Dr. Ron Slinger (Items 10-15)**

**Item 10 INFORMATION ON THE TEACHER APPRENTICESHIP GRANT AND REQUEST FOR
PROPOSAL – 04:32:55**

Commissioner Sarah Swanson and Crystal Armstrong

Commissioner Sarah Swanson and Ms. Crystal Armstrong reviewed the Teacher Apprenticeship Grant, progress on the Request for Proposal, and answered Board members' questions.

Item 11 INFORMATION ON ANNUAL EDUCATOR LICENSURE REPORT – 05:20:02

Crystal Andrews

Ms. Crystal Andrews presented the Annual Educator Licensure Report to the Board and answered Board members' questions.

**Item 12 INFORMATION ON ABCTE PROGRAM APPROVAL FOR ALTERNATIVE
CREDENTIALING – 05:32:54**

Isabelle Welch, ABCTE and Crystal Andrews

Ms. Isabelle Welch and Ms. Crystal Andrews presented an update on the ABCTe Program for Alternative Credentialing and answered Board members' questions.

**Item 13 INFORMATION ON THE SITE VISIT AND JOINT ACCREDITATION STATE EXIT
REPORT OF MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY BILLINGS EDUCATOR PREPARATION
PROVIDER IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION – 05:54:46**

Crystal Andrews

Ms. Crystal Andrews presented the Site Visit and Joint Accreditation State Exit Report for MSU Billings Educator Preparation Program. Interim Dean Dr. Melanie Reaves discussed commendations and key takeaways from the review. Ms. Andrews and Dr. Reaves answered Board members' questions.

**Item 14 INFORMATION ON THE QUALITY EDUCATOR LOAN ASSISTANCE PROGRAM –
06:13:57**

Christy Mock-Stutz

Ms. Christy Mock-Stutz presented the Quality Educator Loan Assistance Program update to the Board and answered Board members' questions.

**Item 15 INITIAL REVIEW AND WORK SESSION ON TITLE 10, CHAPTER 57 CLASS 9
SPECIAL EDUCATION TECHNICIAN LICENSE – 06:21:23**

Patrick Cates and Dr. Julie Murgel

Mr. Patrick Cates and Dr. Julie Murgel reviewed the proposed Class 9 Special Education Technician License and answered Board members' questions.

❖ EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – Dr. Tim Tharp (Item 16-18)

**Item 16 ACTION ON THE TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING PHASE II GRANTS – 07:02:29
Krystal Smith**

Ms. Krystal Smith presented information on the Transformational Learning Phase II Grants and discussed the process used to select recipients. Ms. Smith answered Board members' questions.

Board member Rasmussen moved to approve the funding for the five districts for the Transformational Learning Phase II Grants as recommended by the Superintendent. Motion seconded by Board member Maxwell.

Public comment from Mr. Todd Wester who provided context on the application from Livingston Public Schools.

No further discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

**Item 17 ACTION ON MONTANA ADVANCED OPPORTUNITY GRANTS – 07:26:25
Krystal Smith**

Ms. Krystal Smith presented the Advanced Opportunity Grants and answered Board members' questions.

Board member Quinlan moved to approve the Montana Advanced Opportunity Grant applications as presented. Motion seconded by Vice Chair Slinger.

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

Board member Quinlan moved to approve the Montana Advanced Opportunity Grant Annual Reports as presented. Motion seconded by Board member Rasmussen.

No discussion. Motion passed with Dr. Nieskens abstaining due to her district's application.

**Item 18 INFORMATION AND REVIEW OF THE CREATION OF THE SEAL OF CIVICS
LITERACY – 07:35:50
Tyler Capece and Chris Averill**

Ms. Tyler Capece and Mr. Chris Averill reviewed the proposed Seal of Civics Literacy for high school students and answered Board members' questions.

Public comment from Ms. Jane Hamman in support of the Seal of Civics Literacy.

❖ MSDB COMMITTEE – Lisa Schmidt (Item 19)

**Item 19 MSDB REPORT – 07:53:30
Superintendent Paul Furthmyre**

Superintendent Paul Furthmyre presented the MSDB Report and highlighted Quality Educator payments received by MSDB, the parking lot project, financials, enrollment, a newly created student band, the 2026-27 School Calendar, and the Cognia Accreditation Review. Superintendent Furthmyre reviewed the action items and requested Board approval.

Board member Schmidt moved to approve the MSDB Out of State Travel requests as listed in the agenda packet. Motion seconded by Board member Quinlan.

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

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

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

Board member Schmidt moved to approve the second reading of MSDB Policy 8210 – Procurement for Food Service – as listed in the agenda packet. Motion seconded by Board member Maxwell.

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

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

❖ **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – Dr. Tim Tharp (Item 20)**

Item 20 MSDB SUPERINTENDENT EVALUATION

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

The Board recessed for the day at 5:19 PM.

January 16, 2026

8:30AM

CALL TO ORDER 00:00:19

Chair Tim Tharp called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM. The Chair led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance, Ms. Kris Stockton took Roll Call, and 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; Ms. Renee Rasmussen. Ex Officio members: State Superintendent Susie Hedalen, OPI; Dr. Angela McLean, OCHE. Staff: Ms. McCall Flynn, Executive Director; Ms. Kris Stockton, Administrative Specialist; Ms. Julie Balsam, Administrative Assistant; Ms. Lea Ann Munkres, Program Officer; Ms. Cathy Kincheloe, Director of Planning, Community Choice Schools Commission. Guests: Ms. Jordann Lankford Forster, Chair, Montana Advisory Council on Indian Education (MACIE); Ms. Cedar Rose, OPI; Dr. Julie Murgel, OPI; Ms. Tyler Capece, OPI; Deputy Superintendent Craig Barringer, OPI; Mr. Rich Batterman, Board Legal Counsel; Superintendent Chad Johnson, LPS; Ms. Kristi Steinberg, UM; Ms. Christy Mock-Stutz, OPI; Dr. Jane Karas, Flathead Valley Community College; Superintendent Cory Dziowgo, CFPS; Ms. Jane Hamman; Superintendent Laurie Barron, Evergreen Public Schools; Mr. Todd Wester, LPS; Ms. Hannah Scheiderer, LPS; Ms. Becky Ayler, LPS; Mr. Tony Warren; Ms. Julia Gustafson, Friends of the Montana Constitution; Mr. Paolo DeMaria, NASBE; Mr. Joey Hedger, NASBE.

❖ **CHARTER SCHOOL COMMITTEE – Dr. Ron Slinger (Items 21-22)**

**Item 21 UPDATE ON COMMUNITY CHOICE SCHOOLS COMMISSION – 00:03:19
Cathy Kincheloe**

Ms. Cathy Kincheloe updated the Board on work the Commission completed to prepare for Choice Schools including draft policies and procedures for the application process, templates for schools, and a draft Annual Report. Ms. Kincheloe answered Board members' questions.

**Item 22 ACTION ON THE RESOLUTIONS TO APPROVE AND DENY PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS – 00:22:01
Dr. Ron Slinger**

Ms. McCall Flynn reviewed the Resolution to Approve Public Charter Schools.

Vice Chair Slinger moved to approve the Resolution to Approve the applications for Public Charter Schools. Motion seconded by Board member Schmidt.

Vice Chair Slinger thanked the Board members, schools, and districts for their work.

Board member Rasmussen requested Director Flynn to discuss with the schools that were not approved the reasons for the Board's decision.

Superintendent Johnson thanked the Board for their work.

No further discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

Ms. McCall Flynn reviewed the Resolution to Deny Public Charter Schools.

Board member Rasmussen reiterated her previous statement that clarification is needed on the requirements of the law and what “innovative” means.

Dr. Nieskens concurred with Board member Rasmussen and stated that work may be needed to define “innovative”.

Board member Maxwell also concurred and stated that the Board should communicate what the expectations are to the applicants that were denied.

Vice Chair Slinger moved to approve the Resolution to Deny the applications for Public Charter Schools. Motion seconded by Board member Quinlan.

Chair Tharp stated that the Board is still working to determine the intent of the law.

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

❖ **MACIE LIAISON – Julia Maxwell (Item 23)**

**Item 23 MACIE REPORT – 00:35:25
 Jordann Lankford Forster**

Ms. Jordann Lankford Forster reviewed the recent MACIE meeting and answered Board members’ questions.

❖ **ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE – Renee Rasmussen (Items 24-25)**

**Item 24 ACTION ON THE PROPOSED NOTICE OF ADOPTION PERTAINING TO RULEMAKING
 IN ARM TITLE 10, CHAPTER 54, EARLY TARGETED INTERVENTION STANDARDS
 AND ARM TITLE 10, CHAPTER 63, EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION STANDARDS,
 AND AUTHORIZE FILING OF THE NOTICE WITH THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
 PUBLICATION IN THE MONTANA ADMINISTRATIVE REGISTER – 00:38:41
 Renee Rasmussen**

Board member Renee Rasmussen noted that no comments were received during the public comment period. Ms. McCall Flynn stated that without any public comments the Board can act now and the rules will become effective upon publication. Ms. Flynn answered Board members’ questions.

Board member Rasmussen moved to approve the proposed Notice of Adoption pertaining to rulemaking in ARM Title 10, Chapter 54, Early Targeted Intervention Standards and ARM Title 10, Chapter 63, Early Childhood Education Standards, and authorize filing of the Notice with the Secretary of State for publication in the Montana Administrative Register. Motion seconded by Board member Quinlan.

No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

**Item 25 INFORMATION ON MAST ASSESSMENT IMPLEMENTATION – 00:44:41
 Cedar Rose**

Ms. Cedar Rose provided an update to the Board on the MAST Assessment Implementation and answered Board members’ and public members’ questions.

Public comment from Superintendent Laurie Barron who stated her concerns with the test.

❖ **LICENSURE COMMITTEE – Dr. Ron Slinger (Item 26)**

**Item 26 ACTION ON THE PROPOSED NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING AND TIMELINE
 PERTAINING TO RULEMAKING IN ARM TITLE 10, CHAPTER 57, SPECIAL
 EDUCATION TECHNICIAN LICENSE, AND AUTHORIZE FILING OF THE NOTICE WITH**

**THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR PUBLICATION IN THE MONTANA
ADMINISTRATIVE REGISTER – 01:52:36
Dr. Ron Slinger**

Vice Chair Ron Slinger reviewed the presentation that was given the previous day by OPI that proposed a new Special Education Technician License and reviewed the proposed dates for the public hearing and rulemaking process.

Vice Chair Slinger moved to approve the Proposed Notice of Public Hearing and Timeline pertaining to rulemaking in ARM Title 10, Chapter 57, Special Education Technician License, and authorize filing of the notice with the Secretary of State for publication in the Montana Administrative Register. Motion seconded by Board member Rasmussen.

Board member Rasmussen stated her appreciation for this work and extended her thanks to OPI.

Chair Tharp noted that additional revisions will be needed in Chapter 55 once the license is approved.

No further discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

❖ **ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE – Madalyn Quinlan (Item 27)**

**Item 27 INFORMATION ON THE SUPERINTENDENT’S RECOMMENDATION ON THE
INTENSIVE ASSISTANCE PROCESS FOR ACCREDITATION – 01:56:57
Dr. Julie Murgel and Tyler Capece**

Ms. Tyler Capece presented the Superintendent’s recommendation on the Intensive Assistance Process for Accreditation and Dr. Murgel discussed the timeline for approval and implementation. Ms. Capece and Dr. Murgel answered Board members’ questions.

❖ **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – Dr. Tim Tharp (Items 28-30)**

**Item 28 ACTION ON MSDB SUPERINTENDENT CONTRACT – 02:45:58
Dr. Tim Tharp**

Chair Tim Tharp reviewed the MSDB Superintendent Contract and answered Board members’ questions.

Chair Tharp moved to approve the \$6,000 pay increase for Superintendent Furthmyre to align with increases in the STARS Act. Motion seconded by Board member Schmidt.

Board member Quinlan expressed her support for the motion.

No further discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

Board member Schmidt moved to approve the 2026 MSDB Superintendent Contract. Motion seconded by Dr. Nieskens.

Dr. Nieskens noted items in the contract that pertain to benefits and disability that may need revision.

Mr. Batterman noted that the Board can act on the contract and still modify the contract to address the benefits and disability concerns noted but the change does not affect the employment status.

No further discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

**Item 29 ACTION ON THE CREATION OF THE SEAL OF CIVICS LITERACY – 02:54:34
Dr. Tim Tharp**

Chair Tim Tharp reminded the Board about the presentation on the proposed Seal of Civics Literacy from the previous day and answered Board members’ questions.

Board member Maxwell moved to approve the creation of the Seal of Civics Literacy. Motion seconded by Board member Quinlan.

Public comment from Ms. Julia Gustafson in support of the Seal of Civics Literacy.

No further discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

Item 30 RECOGNITION OF EXITING BOARD MEMBER – 02:58:10

Dr. Tim Tharp

Chair Tim Tharp thanked exiting Board member Madalyn Quinlan for her service to the Board and her years of service in public education. Ms. McCall Flynn presented Board member Quinlan with a gift of appreciation for her service.

Ms. McCall Flynn reviewed the upcoming March meeting in Ronan and items that will be on the agenda.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS March 19-20, 2026, Ronan, MT

- MACIE Update
- Action on MSDB School Calendar
- Action on Early Literacy Screening Tools (Odd Years)
- Assessment Update
- Federal Update
- Accreditation Report
- Annual School Food Services Report
- Review Draft CAEP MOU
- Content Standards Revision Update

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment was made.

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 11:44 AM.

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, kmstockton@mt.gov, 406-444-0302.

❖ BOARD OF PUBLIC EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLANNING – Dr. Tim Tharp

12:00PM REVIEW OF NASBE DOCUMENTS

12:30PM REVIEW OF MISSION AND DISCUSSION OF VISION

1:45PM WRAP UP AND NEXT STEPS

The Strategic Planning adjourned at 2:00 PM.