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

Friday, November 22, 2024

Members present: Governor Gianforte, Board of Regents Chair Buchanan, Regent Dombrouski, 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 Dombrouski 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