



Great People...Great Falls Public Schools

January 2025,

*Happy New Year, Great Falls! As we ring in 2025, we welcome our community, staff, and students back with excitement and purpose. The end of the first semester is just around the corner, marking a time for students to summarize their learning from the fall and celebrate their achievements. Looking ahead, students are gearing up for an exciting spring semester filled with opportunities for growth and discovery. Registration for the upcoming school year is on the horizon, offering a chance to explore the diverse programs and pathways available in Great Falls Public Schools. As we move forward into the new year, our focus remains steadfast: **providing high-quality education, empowering every student to reach their full potential, and working together as a community to create bright futures.** Here's to a fantastic year ahead!*

Welcome to the January edition of GFPS Highlights with Superintendent Hoyer.

Hometown Pride – Celebrating the unique spirit and traditions of Great Falls.

- Great Falls Public Schools thanks our generous community. 47 community members and their families came together to donate \$916,188.00 through the State of Montana's Innovative Tax Credit initiative. The money from this initiative is used to fund student-centered experiences and support that falls outside the scope of the district's general fund. Through this dollar-for-dollar tax credit, GFPS is able to enhance the amazing work our educational experts provide every day and allows students to create vivid educational memories in and out of the classroom. A special thank you to Anders Blewett for his continued advocacy and support of this program.

Helping Hands – Working together to support our students, staff, and community.

- We encourage you to share this newsletter with friends, family, or colleagues who might be interested in supporting our schools, staff, and community. By spreading the word, you help us strengthen the connections that make our educational environment thrive. Readers can subscribe to this monthly newsletter by emailing a request to get on our mailing list to superintendent@gfps.k12.mt.us. Together, we can create a positive impact and foster a stronger, more engaged community. Thank you for your support!

Harmony Through Collaboration– Collective work around important initiatives.

- The Great Falls Public Schools continues its important Consensus Building process with Diane Groves, fostering collaboration and transparency in support of strategic plan initiatives focused on communication. Under the leadership of Executive Director Jackie Mainwaring, this year-long effort has engaged both community members and employees in meaningful conversations to identify shared priorities as we approach the budget cycle and consider potential reductions to balance the budget. The process will culminate in early February with an intensive three-day session aimed at developing consensus recommendations for the Board Budget Committee. Key areas of focus identified through this process include school safety (physical buildings and student behavior),

student learning (comprehensive programming, professional development, and student retention/wellness), community trust and partnerships, essential operational needs (accreditation standards and critical expenses), and teacher recruitment and retention. This collaborative effort underscores our commitment to addressing the challenges ahead while maintaining a focus on what matters most to our schools and community.

Heroic Employees and Volunteers – Applauding dedication and hard work.

- January is National School Board Appreciation Month, and we proudly celebrate the seven dedicated trustees who comprise the Great Falls Public Schools Board of Trustees. These community representatives play a vital role in shaping the future of our schools by providing guidance and oversight that reflects the values and priorities of our community. Serving in these unpaid, three-year positions requires an average commitment of 2-4 meetings per month, legal certification, and residency within the Great Falls Public Schools boundaries. This spring, three trustee positions are up for election, offering an opportunity to join this important team. The deadline to submit candidacy forms is March 27, 2025, at 5:00PM. If you're interested in learning more about running for the Board of Trustees, please contact Mr. Brian Patrick, Director of Business Operations and Clerk of the Board, at (406) 268-6050. Thank you to our school board for their unwavering dedication to the students and families of Great Falls.

Honoring Hard Work - Fostering strong connections between our schools and the community.

- Great Falls Public Schools is thrilled to announce a groundbreaking Direct Admission project in partnership with the University of Providence, aimed at reducing barriers for students interested in pursuing higher education. This initiative is designed to support students who may need guidance in navigating the college admissions process. Through this program, all juniors who meet the University of Providence's admission criteria will automatically receive, with parent permission, a non-binding admittance letter along with scholarship information. There is no application fee with this process. This year, students will learn about this exciting opportunity during their Junior English classes. For more information on the Direct Admission program and this valuable partnership, please visit <https://www.uprovidence.edu/admissions/direct-admission/>. This collaboration exemplifies our commitment to empowering students to achieve their academic and career aspirations.

Horizon Focused – Looking ahead to reach potential.

- The new year brings a time of reflection and planning, and our secondary schools are buzzing with activity. Teachers and students are preparing for their mid-year finals, which will assess learning from the first semester. These exams take place over three days, with extended testing periods, a longer lunch break, and an adjusted release schedule to give teachers time to grade and post scores promptly. January also marks an important step in planning for the future as our counselors meet with students in grades 8-11 to begin registering for classes for the 2025-2026 school year. Student course requests, alongside core graduation requirements, play a key role in shaping the high school master schedules. If you have or know a student in grades 8-11, take some time to talk with them about their interests and goals. Annual class requests help us evaluate elective options that inspire and support students in reaching their aspirations.

Helena Connection – Working with local legislative leaders as they face decisions that impact our schools, community, and state.

- While students and teachers focus on finals and preparing for next year, education leaders are hard at work tracking the 2025 Legislative session in Helena. Over 250 bills with potential impacts on education are under review, addressing topics ranging from reading instruction requirements and teacher retirement to public education funding and more. We are closely monitoring these bills and the legislative process to understand their implications for our schools and community. We encourage community members to stay informed and engaged as well. You can find your local legislator at <https://www.legmt.gov/districts/> and track bills by visiting <https://bills.legmt.gov/#>. Together, we can ensure that the voices of students, educators, and families are heard in shaping the future of education in Montana.

Heartfelt Commitment – Great Falls Public Schools is proud of the comprehensive opportunities we give our students. From high-quality academics to high-quality opportunities, to tomorrow's high-quality leaders, we invite you to visit and learn with us!

May the New Year bring new opportunities, adventures, and joy. We are lucky to live, grow, and learn right here in Great Falls with you!

Warm regards,

Heather Hoyer
Superintendent, Great Falls Public Schools