

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING  
OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
ROBERTS SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 5  
JANUARY 17, 2024**

The regular meeting of the Board of Trustees of Roberts School District No. 5, Roberts, Montana was called to order by Chair Michelle Swansborough at 6:00 p.m. on January 17, 2024 in the library at the Roberts School.

**ATTENDANCE**

Michelle Swansborough, Chair  
Brandon Crane, Vice Chair  
Joel Bertolino  
Nick Dobbel  
Mariah Holdbrook

Alex Ator, Superintendent  
JaLayne Obert, Business Manager/Clerk

Guests: Randy DeVries, Sarah Wade, Kale Douglas, Jackie Douglas, Sanford Langager, Caitlin Hall, Jacqui Jessen, Jen Larson, Crystal Roascio

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The meeting began with the Pledge of Allegiance.

**MINUTES**

Motion was made by Brandon Crane, seconded by Joel Bertolino and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the regular meeting December 20, 2024 as presented. (YES: Swansborough, Crane, Bertolino, Dobbel, Holdbrook. NO—none).

**WARRANTS**

Motion was made by Mariah Holdbrook, seconded by Brandon Crane and carried unanimously to approve warrant 49806 and warrants 49862-49930 as presented. (YES: Swansborough, Crane, Bertolino, Dobbel, Holdbrook. NO—none).

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Crystal Roascio, Carbon County Elections Administrator, addressed the board regarding the upcoming May 7, 2024 Trustee Election. She stated the board decided last spring to have her office run the election this year and spoke of the differences in a poll election and mail ballot election in procedures and costs.

**TEACHER REPORTS**

TEACHER REPORTS – Jen Larson and Jacqui Jessen gave teacher reports for the month.

Mrs. Larson stated she is in her second year of teaching science 7-12. She stated this is also the second year students will be participating in the science fair scheduled for April. She added her goal is to have students motivated enough to want to compete in science fairs in other locations.

Mrs. Larson stated she is also doing NASA again this year with three elementary teams, two junior high teams, and one high school team.

Ms. Jessen stated she is teaching fifth grade social studies and ELA and K-6 reading intervention. She stated the students are studying the Maya, Inca, and Aztec tribes, Native Americans in social studies, and using the new writing program in all subjects.

ACTIVITIES REPORT – Sarah Wade reported the following for Activities:

1. High school basketball is underway and the girls' team is #1 in the conference and ranked at the state level.
2. Boys' basketball is also doing well and is in a multi-way tie for first in the conference.
3. Kara Triplett is the new Class C representative for the Montana High School Association. At the annual meeting, open enrollment was discussed and schools still have to follow the MHSA transfer rule.
4. Changes are coming for cross country and there is a possibility a divisional meet will be added.
5. At the Annual Meeting, Sidney High School dropped the proposal to add esports because of another proposal that passed on how to add a sport.

LITERACY REPORT – Caitlin Hall reported 33 out of 41 elementary students have completed mid-year assessments that show good growth and how interventions have helped with that growth. She added she hopes to have MAP data to share next month that is also showing some good growth.

Mrs. Hall stated we are hopeful there will be funding for another literacy grant and a letter has been drafted for boards to send to the state superintendent to encourage her to apply for the funding. The board agreed to sign and send the letter.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

SUPERINTENDENT NEGOTIATIONS COMMITTEE – Mr. Ator stated by law, if he doesn't have a contract by February 1, he is automatically rehired at the current contract rate and terms. He asked that a committee be set to meet with the superintendent to negotiate language and salary.

COMMUNITY MEETING – Mr. Ator stated we need to start talking about a levy and need to get local support to keep our school going. He stated when he first came here, we had about the same number of students as we have now, are up two certified staff and down two paraprofessionals, and have had grants to help us educate students. He suggested the community meeting be held at the fire hall or gym on February 22.

Michelle Swansborough stated we need to talk more about options for the levy.

Jackie Douglas stated there are about 15 children in the Dot Com who are going to other schools and need to be here.

Mariah Holdbrook stated there has always been a cycle of parents moving students in this county. She asked what kind of information Mrs. Douglas would find meaningful.

Mrs. Douglas stated a chart that shows growth the students are making and what is being done to make children want to come to our school would be meaningful.

Michelle Swansborough stated getting feedback from the community on the levy amount would be good.

Mrs. Douglas stated the board needs to be specific about why a levy is needed.

Sanford Langager stated the district is helping lower achievers but he doesn't know if there is much for the higher achievers.

Michelle Swansborough stated MTDA classes provide opportunities to challenge higher achievers as well as getting dual credit.

INTEGRATED STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN – Mr. Ator stated after reviewing community feedback, he drafted some goals for the plan which are included in the packet material. He asked trustees to read through the goals and get back to him with comments by next week.

GRADUATE PROFILE – Mr. Ator stated he hopes to have a working draft by next month.

LEVY TALKING POINTS – Mr. Ator asked what talking points should be included in a fact sheet about the levy and received the following input:

    Mariah Holdbrook – If our school goes away, people in the district will be paying higher taxes to support schools up or down the road.

    Nick Dobbel – The student growth matrix is important and should be shown and how to corroborate with Red Lodge on our students using the Career Technical Center.

    Joel Bertolino – Consequences if a levy doesn't pass.

    Brandon Crane – Need to show what it will be used for.

    Michelle Swansborough – Levy amount needed and cost per taxable valuation.

Sanford Langager suggested showing where the district could cut some costs.

REVIEW OF EMPLOYEE SABBATICAL – Mr. Ator welcomed Jon Milligan to the meeting via zoom from Cameroon.

Jon Milligan stated he took a two-year sabbatical leave to teach in Cameroon and is required to let Roberts know by February 1 if he is returning to the district.

Mr. Milligan thanked the board for allowing him to have this incredible experience. He stated he and his family do intend to return to Roberts but if he leaves Cameroon at the end of this school year, there is a very real possibility the school won't have a science teacher next year. He asked the board if it would consider extending his sabbatical leave for another year.

Mr. Ator suggested extending the date to give the board a decision to March 19 and then action could be taken at the regular March meeting on March 20.

Motion was made by Nick Dobbel, seconded by Joel Bertolino and carried unanimously to extend the date for Jon Milligan to inform the board of his intent to return from sabbatical leave to March 19, 2024. (YES: Swansborough, Crane, Bertolino, Dobbel, Holdbrook. NO—none).

**OLD BUSINESS**

SUPERINTENDENT EVALUATION – conducted at the end of the meeting.

**SUPERINTENDENT REPORT**

MEETING DATES – Mr. Ator stated the community meeting will be held on February 22 at 7:00 p.m. at the Fire Hall. Regular board meeting will be held on February 23 at 5:00 p.m.

COTEACHING ASSIGNMENT AND ADJUSTMENT TO CLASS SCHEDULE – Mr. Ator reported Tera Baver and Kennedee Blankenship have requested to change their teaching assignment for the second semester for one period and have Mrs. Baver teach Montana History and Mrs. Blankenship teach Junior/Senior English. Board consensus was to allow the switch in teaching assignments for Tera Baver and Kennedee Blankenship.

**SUPERINTENDENT EVALUATION**

Chair Swansborough called for an executive session at 8:15 p.m. for the superintendent’s evaluation, stating the next item of business concerns an individual and it is her determination that the individual’s right to privacy supersede the merits of public discussion.

RETURN TO REGULAR SESSION/SUPERINTENDENT CONTRACT – Michelle Swansborough returned the meeting to regular session at 10:00 p.m.

Motion was made by Nick Dobbel, seconded by Joel Bertolino and carried unanimously to approve a contract with Alex Ator for Superintendent for the 2024-2025 school year with adding additional days off in lieu of a salary increase, with the ability to cash out up to five days of unused leave. (YES: Swansborough, Crane, Bertolino, Dobbel, Holdbrook. NO—none).

**ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Michelle Swansborough called for adjournment at 10:04 p.m.

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Board Chair

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District Clerk

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING  
OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
ROBERTS SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 5  
JANUARY 29, 2024**

The special meeting of the Board of Trustees of Roberts School District No. 5, Roberts, Montana was called to order by Chair Michelle Swansborough at 8:48 a.m. on January 29, 2024 in the library at the Roberts School.

**ATTENDANCE**

Michelle Swansborough, Chair  
Brandon Crane, Vice Chair  
Joel Bertolino  
Nick Dobbel  
Mariah Holdbrook

Alex Ator, Superintendent  
JaLayne Obert, Business Manager/Clerk

GUESTS: John Holdbrook, Seth Holdbrook

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The meeting began with the Pledge of Allegiance.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**SUPERINTENDENT NEGOTIATIONS**

Michelle Swansborough stated she received two calls this morning about calling this expedited meeting of the board. She stated this meeting was called because the negotiations committee felt it needed to meet with the whole board so requested the meeting. She stated she was also told there are concerns with offering a contract at this time and informed those people of the process to express those concerns.

John Holdbrook stated it wasn't known the meeting was going to be held and any motions should be tabled to give people a chance to express themselves.

Mr. Ator stated the negotiations committee called this meeting as they want Board input on the proposed contract for the superintendent. He added the board has already offered a contract without terms as that has to be done by February 1.

Mr. Ator stated there are two contract options he would like to review with the board and outlined the following:

Option B      One-year contract presented with a freeze in salary.  
                    Twenty-six personal days and language for flex time for supervising events outside school hours.  
                    Clarification of hours when school is in session of 8-4 and 9-2 in the summer.  
                    Payout of personal days.

Mr. Ator stated if he informs the board by March 1 that he is resigning, he doesn't want to have to be gone an undue amount of time using up unused leave and is offering the payout as an alternative.

Mariah Holdbrook stated we are all responsible for our professional behavior and doesn't know if she supports this option.

Nick Dobbel stated he doesn't agree with this language and doesn't feel the district can afford 26 personal days.

Michelle Swansborough asked how many personal days are in the current contract.

Mr. Ator stated he has fourteen now.

Michelle Swansborough stated the board was trying to give personal days in lieu of a salary increase but those should be required to be used.

Brandon Crane stated the board tentatively voted on this already and it is fair to pull it back now.

Mr. Ator outlined the following for the second option:

Option A                      Reduces the contract from a 260-day contract to a 220-day contract in line with others in the district reflecting a change to a four-day week.  
Includes 12 personal days.  
Clarification of hours when school is in session of 8-4 and 9-2 in the summer.

Mr. Ator stated this contract would mean someone else would have to run Friday School.

Michelle Swansborough stated this contract is more transparent and in line with other employees in the district. She added it appears to be more fiscally responsible while still giving Mr. Ator personal time. She asked Mr. Ator which contract he felt was more beneficial to him.

Mr. Ator stated summer flexibility gives him an opportunity to make extra revenue.

Mariah Holdbrook stated the superintendent gets 12 days of sick leave, 18 days of vacation, and personal days on top of that and this contract aligns with the rest of the district.

Mariah Holdbrook asked how we explain the 9-2 in the summer.

Michelle Swansborough stated it could be worded as summer hours will be 9-2 with ability to work from home for the remaining hours.

Nick Dobbel stated this option is a big change and he likes it better.

Michelle Swansborough stated we will need to formally rescind the motion made at the last meeting to go forward with this option and that gives the community time to give their input.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Michelle Swansborough adjourned the meeting at 9:55 a.m.

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Board Chair

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District Clerk