

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD  
OF THE MONTANA HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATION**  
Parlor 1010, Billings Hotel & Convention Center, Billings, MT  
JANUARY 18 & 20, 2025

**ATTENDANCE**

John Fitzgerald, Red Lodge  
Kara Triplett, Lambert  
Aric Harris, Whitefish  
Jimmy Patelis, Billings  
Joseph McElroy, Missoula  
Krystal Zentner, Bridger  
Dan Mills, Bozeman  
Brian Michelotti, Helena  
Kip Ryan, Helena  
Scott Wilson, Helena  
Greta Buehler, Helena  
Amy Bartels, Helena  
Jenise Cockhill, Helena  
Ryan Richards, Helena

*Delegations:*

*Brooke Meagher, Deer Lodge (Zoom)*  
*Jonathan Walter, Sheridan (Zoom)*  
*Joshua Rose, Frazer (Zoom)*  
*Student MM, Frazer (Zoom)*  
*Shelby Martell, Frazer (Zoom)*  
*Jay Lemelin, Billings*  
*Brian Rayburn, Chinook*  
*Elizabeth Kaleva, Missoula (Zoom)*  
*Brandon Gondeiro, Highwood*  
*Travis Krieger, Hardin*  
*Jody Aimsback, Heart Butte*  
*David Turnsplenty, Plenty Coups*

**CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 8:30 a.m. by Mr. Fitzgerald. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**REVISIONS/ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

Mr. Michelotti gave a schedule overview and revisions to the agenda. Nothing new was added that was not already printed and/or sent out electronically to the Executive Board and MHSA Staff.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were no items for public comment presented.

**APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES**

Mr. Patelis motioned to approve the November 25, 2024, meeting minutes, and Mr. Mills seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

## **DELEGATIONS/APPEALS**

### **TRANSFER RULE APPEAL— ANACONDA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT JJ**

Mr. Wilson introduced Ms. Meagher to the board via zoom. The Executive Board introduced themselves to the delegation. Mr. Fitzgerald gave the option of an open or closed meeting; Ms. Meagher chose to continue with an open meeting. Ms. Meagher explained the communication issues with the Powell County administration and whether they would even have girls' basketball. The family made the decision to transfer the student to Anaconda High School. After the student officially transferred, Powell County High School decided to have a girls basketball program. Mr. Fitzgerald read the requirements to waive the transfer rule from the MHSA Handbook. Mr. McElroy motioned to deny the appeal of the hardship waiver transfer rule; Mr. Patelis seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

### **TRANSFER RULE APPEAL – TWIN BRIDGES HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT JYGW**

Mr. Wilson introduced Mr. Walter to the board via zoom. The Executive Board introduced themselves to the delegation. Mr. Fitzgerald gave the option of an open or closed meeting; Mr. Walter chose to continue with an open meeting. Mr. Walter explained that the Sheridan School administration would not document the bullying that was happening to his daughter. They chose to transfer her to Twin Bridges High School. Mr. Fitzgerald read the requirements to waive the transfer rule from the MHSA Handbook. Mr. McElroy motioned to deny the appeal of the hardship waiver transfer rule; Mr. Patelis seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

### **TRANSFER RULE APPEAL – FRAZER HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT MM**

Mr. Wilson introduced Mr. Rose to the board via Zoom. Mr. Rose introduced the student and Ms. Martell to the Executive Board. Mr. Fitzgerald gave the option of an open or closed meeting; Ms. Martell chose to continue with a closed meeting. Mr. Fitzgerald read the requirements to waive the transfer rule from the MHSA Handbook. Mr. Mills motioned to waive the transfer rule, Ms. Zentner seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously. The student is immediately eligible to participate in varsity athletics.

### **BRIAN RAYBURN – CHINOOK HIGH SCHOOL**

Mr. Wilson introduced Mr. Rayburn to the Executive Board. Mr. Wilson introduced Ms. Kaleva via zoom. Mr. Rayburn explained his frustrations with the NFHS network and with the MHSA including past communications, lack of financial transparency and Title IX investigation mismanagement. He also addressed the increasing fees of officials for high school athletic competitions. Ms. Kaleva explained the process of Title IX investigation. Mr. Michelotti addressed the NFHS Network communications and concerns, the process for approving finances and a plan for better communications going forward.

## **REQUESTS**

### **8-PLAYER FOOTBALL REALIGNMENT**

Mr. Wilson gave an overview of the 8-player football division alignment proposal. The 8-Player football divisions for the 2025-26 year will be as follows:

East (10)	South (10)	North (10)	West (11)
Carter County	Drummond/Granite	Belt	Arlee
Circle	Ennis	Box Elder	Charlo
Culbertson	Harlowton/Ryegate	Cascade	Darby
Fairview	Lone Peak	Centerville	Plains
Forsyth	Manhattan Christian	Chinook	Saint Ignatius
Plentywood	Lodge Grass	Choteau	Seeley-Swan
Poplar	Park City	Fort Benton	Superior
Scobey/Opheim	Saint Labre	Harlem/Turner	Saint Regis
Westby/Grenora	Sheridan	Rocky Boy	Troy
Wibaux	Twin Bridges	Simms	Valley Christian
			Victor

Ms. Triplett motioned to approve the proposal, and Mr. Patelis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

### **6-PLAYER FOOTBALL REALIGNMENT**

Mr. Wilson gave an overview of the two 6-player football division alignment proposals. After some discussion by the Executive Board, Mr. Harris made a motion to revisit the proposals after getting more information from Brandon Gondeiro after the 6-Player Football meeting. Mr. Patelis seconded, and the action was tabled.

### **CLASS C BASKETBALL DISTRICT REALIGNMENT**

Mr. Michelotti gave an overview of the process and outcome of the Class C district realignment for basketball, volleyball and track. Ms. Triplett also provided more detail about different districts for basketball and volleyball and track in the Northern Division and the numbering of the districts for all divisions. Ms. Triplett motioned to approve the realignment as proposed with the addition of the numbering of the districts with 3 districts per division. Mr. Harris seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

### **FOOTBALL RECLASSIFICATION OPT DOWN LANGUAGE**

Mr. Wilson gave an overview of the proposal for updated language for the football timeline to add a deadline of December 15<sup>th</sup> for schools to opt to play up or play down without playoffs. Ms. Zentner motioned to approve the date, and Mr. Mills seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Wilson also gave an overview of the proposed language change to require teams to play a full conference schedule with all games played counting toward the overall conference standings if a team opts to play down. After discussion by the Executive Board regarding the scheduling issues for teams playing down, Mr. Mills motioned to approve the language. Ms. Triplett seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Mr. Wilson also discussed the movement of the football reclassification language in the handbook. The language would include reference to the football reclassification timeline availability.

Mr. Patelis motioned to approve the placement of the football reclassification information in the handbook, and Mr. Harris seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Wilson discussed the language change for administrative tickets, and removing coaches from that requirement. Mr. Harris motioned to approve the language, and Ms. Zentner seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

#### **RULES AND REGULATIONS SPORTSMANSHIP CLINIC REQUIREMENT**

Mr. Wilson discussed the sportsmanship clinic requirement and changing from an MHSA-produced clinic to using the NFHS Learn Sportsmanship clinic. The Board discussed tracking and compliance of the requirement. Mr. McElroy motioned to approve the change, and Mr. Patelis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

#### **MOA REPORT**

Ms. Bartels introduced Mr. Lemelin to the delegation. Mr. Lemelin reviewed the decisions made by the Regional Directors at the last meeting in December of this year. He spoke about the postseason hiring of wrestling officials. The regional Directors recommended the following changes: a) one school ballot since boys and girls use the same officials; b) schools will vote for 15 and 20 will be selected for the state tournament; c) top vote getter in each division automatically receives bid for the state tournament; d) all 20 officials will be offered a divisional tournament and e) each divisional tournament will be guaranteed a minimum of one state level official.

Mr. Lemelin also discussed the basketball officiating camps that were approved by the Regional Directors at their last meeting, and that the requirements would be made effective for the 2026-27 school year. Attendance would be required every three years and would be governed by a committee that would be made up of MHSA and MOA Regional Director representatives.

#### **MOA ACTION ITEMS**

Regarding football the MOA would like to allow Class AA Semifinal and Championship games to have the option to utilize a 5-person mechanic with an alternate or a 7-person mechanic with no alternate. They would also like to have the restriction for playoff football officials to work only two playoff games below the championship removed. The Regional Directors will assign these officials. Mr. Harris made a motion to approve the proposed mechanics for semi-final and championship games, as well as removing the restriction for playoff and championship games. Mr. Mills seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Lemelin further explained that the MOA would like the postseason mileage for football and soccer to revert to one driver round trip reimbursement to help lower costs for schools. Ms. Triplett motioned to approve reverting to one-way round-trip mileage. Mr. McElroy seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Lemelin also reported that the MOA requests approval to change outside pool location mileage to pay only one official round trip driver and per diem if multiple officials are assigned the same contest from the same pool city. If other officials are assigned from outside pool cities, they will be paid round trip per diem from their home zip code to the pool city zip code. In addition, the MOA would like all officials to have background checks with the Peoples Trail for the 2025-26 year. Thereafter only new officials, transfer officials from other states or those with 5-year breaks will require background checks.

Lastly, they seek approval for a fee increase of \$5.00 for the first sport and \$2.00 for additional sports to help cover the costs of the background checks and this would go into effect for the 2025-26 year. Ms. Zentner made a motion to approve outside pool location mileage, background checks and officials fee increases. Mr. Harris seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

#### **6-PLAYER FOOTBALL FINANCIAL POLICY**

Mr. Wilson and Mr. Michelotti discussed the current 6-player football financial policy that sends money from the football playoffs back to all 6-player football schools rather than only to the 16 schools involved in the playoffs. Six-player schools will discuss the issue during their meeting. The funds from this year will be distributed per the current policy. Ms. Triplett motioned to table the motion until Monday, and Mr. Harris seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

#### **MIAA MEMBERSHIP**

Mr. Michelotti gave an overview of the cost of membership for the Montana Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association and has requested that the MHSA continue to partnership with the MIAAA and that MHSA employees become members. Mr. Patelis motioned to approve the partnership with, and payment of dues to, MIAA, and Mr. Mills seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

#### **ADMINISTRATOR REQUIREMENTS**

Mr. Wilson explained that the MOA has requested a change for the football playoffs to require each team to have an administrator present for playoff games and for that administrator to be inside the ropes on the football field. Discussions included adding the requirement for soccer. Mr. Harris motioned to approve the football and soccer administrator proposal, and Ms. Zentner seconded the motion. The Board discussed developing better language for where the administrator should be located. Ms. Triplett motioned to table the approved motion until April and Mr. Harris seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

#### **BOYS AND GIRLS PRACTICE RULE**

Mr. Michelotti gave an overview of his discussions with Mr. Llew Jones regarding a legislative bill related to boys and girls practicing together for sports, specifically wrestling. Based on the conversation with Mr. Jones, the MHSA is proposing a new policy for practice in MHSA individual sports. Mr. Michelotti read the exact language of the proposal

“All participants in MHSA individual sports (Cross Country, Golf, Swimming, Tennis and Track and Field) will be allowed to practice with either gender during MHSA Practices.

For wrestling, if a school district adopts a policy addressing circumstances under which a female wrestler may practice with or prepare for meets with participants on the boys’ team, the girls will be allowed to wrestle boys from the same school in practice and warm-ups. The policy must be aligned with an objective of providing equitable opportunities for participation that assure safety of and meet the interests and abilities of the underrepresented sex in any extracurricular activity. Schools must use the following criteria in allowing this option:

A parent of any participant must be allowed to opt their child out of any practice or preparation for an extracurricular activity with participants of the opposite sex.”

Schools can choose to opt out of this policy on the individual district level. Ms. Zentner motioned to approve the proposed language, and Mr. Harris seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

## **FINANCES**

Mr. Michelotti highlighted the bills paid. Mr. Patelis motioned to approve the bills paid from November 1-December 31, 2024, and Mr. Mills seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Michelotti presented the financial statement. Mr. Patelis motioned to approve the financial statement as of December 31, 2024, and Ms. Zentner seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

## **GENERAL OFFICE REPORT**

Mr. Michelotti handed out the general office report and commented on the following topics:

### Insurance

There are no changes currently.

### Recent and Upcoming Events

Mr. Michelotti reported on the NFHS Winter Meeting January 2-6, 2025. Mr. Michelotti reported on the administrative meetings that he attended. Mr. Wilson attended the NFHS Football Rules Committee meeting in Indianapolis. Mr. Ryan and Ms. Bartels will be going to the Volleyball and Spirit Rules Committees, respectively.

Mr. Michelotti will be attending the NFHS Legal Meeting in Indianapolis in April.

Mr. Michelotti and Ms. Bartels will be attending an Arbiter conference in Salt Lake City in February.

Mr. Ryan reported on the Academic Excellence winners and presentations.

Ms. Buehler reported on attending the funeral of previous Executive Board member and Lady Griz Basketball alumni and teammate, Malia Kipp.

Mr. Ryan stated that the MetraPark in Billings would like to bid for the All-Class State Volleyball Tournament.

### Policy Manual Changes

There are no changes.

### AIM Higher

Mr. Wilson reported on past and upcoming Aim Higher student leadership conferences.

### Road to 182

All 182 member schools were visited, and the last visits were to Helena High School and Capital High School.

### Technology

Mr. Michelotti reported we are continuing to work with ArbiterSports on several items including the online directory, record of transfer and officials' management to name a few.

### Building Update

Mr. Michelotti reported that we have an accepted offer for the sale of our current building. Demolition is set to start this month on the new location.

### Other Issues

Mr. Michelotti reported that Universal Athletic has requested our logo to be put on District and Divisional merchandise. Mr. Michelotti spoke with a representative from Universal Athletics and has verified that yes, we would like our logo on all district and divisional gear that they make and distribute. Universal Athletics also agrees that they will not continue to sell State Championship merchandise as MHSAs has a contract with Northwest Designs Ink and would like to keep the relationship with Universal Athletics amicable.

Mr. Michelotti suggested further discussion on creating an award/scholarship in the name of Malia Kipp. The discussion will take place at a future meeting.

### **CORPORATE SPONSORSHIPS**

Mr. Richards reported on the relationships he is trying to build with new sponsors. He also reported on social media engagement of the Road to 182 campaign and that ironically, one of the smallest schools in the MHSA membership has the highest engagement on social media with the post about their school.

Mr. Michelotti talked about the need for copyright and/or trademark of the MHSA logo. The logo was created in the 1960's and revised again in the 1980's. The association will get 2-3 bids and bring more information to the Executive Board.

### **FALL TOURNAMENT FINANCES**

The Board reviewed the following financial reports and summaries: football financial summary, volleyball financial summary, state volleyball financial report, and soccer financial summary.

### **OFFICE ACTION**

Mr. Michelotti stated 73 hardship waivers have been submitted this year. Of those, 53 have been approved and 20 have been denied. Mr. Michelotti reported there have been no age rule waivers. Mr. Michelotti stated there have been 5 penalties imposed thus far, all of them being self-reported. There were 14 fines and fees so far this year, including postseason ballot non-compliance, expedited appeal fees and late registration for state cross-country. Mr. Rayburn requested that fines issued for postseason officials ballots non-compliance not be publicly shared in the Activity News. There was discussion and consensus from the Executive Board that the current protocol of posting these will remain.

### **LEGAL**

Mr. Michelotti reported on legal costs this fiscal year to December 31, 2024. He also brought attention to the ongoing costs of a particular appeal that went to court.

### **REPORTS/MISCELLANEOUS**

Mr. Michelotti gave a report on the winter rules clinics and that there are increased views. Ms. Bartels reported that there have been 30 ejections thus far.

### **ANNUAL MEETING**

Mr. Ryan highlighted the activity schedule and discussed the Board schedule and assignments for the Annual Meeting. Mr. Ryan presented a summary of each classification's caucus items and Mr. Michelotti reviewed the proposals and proposed budget. Various MHSA staff reviewed the caucus items. Mr. Ryan went over the Annual Meeting agenda.

### **TWO-WEEK NOTICE ITEMS**

Final action was taken on items from the April 2024 Executive Board Meeting. These items include: Plentywood High School from Class C to Class B. Plentywood High School is tentatively assigned to District 2B for basketball, volleyball and track and field and Class B for boys' and girls' cross country and the Southeast division for golf. Plentywood will remain in the Eastern division for 8-Player football and the Eastern division for B-C boys' and girls' wrestling.

Fort Benton High School from Class C to Class B. Fort Benton High School is tentatively assigned to District 1B for basketball, volleyball and track and field, and the Northern Division for girls' and boys' golf. Fort Benton will remain in the Northern Division for eight-player football, and the Eastern Division for B-C boys' and girls' wrestling.

Superior High School from Class B to Class C. Superior High School is tentatively assigned to District 13C for basketball, volleyball and track and field and the Western Division for boys' and girls' golf. They will remain in the Western Division for B-C wrestling, the Western Division for eight-player football and the Northwest Division for girls' tennis.

Park City High School will be reclassified from Class B to Class C. Park City High School is tentatively assigned to District 6C for basketball and track and field, 4C for volleyball, Class C for boys' and girls' cross country and the Eastern Division for boys' and girls' golf. They will remain in the Southern Division for eight-player football.

Relocation of the MHSA office in Helena. The building will enable MHSA staff to host board and membership meetings in a central business district, ensuring ADA compliance and incorporating advanced technology. It will provide a dedicated space for staff to serve our membership effectively for many years to come.

Baseball conferences for the 2025 Season shall be as follows: East – Billings Central, Billings Senior, Billings Skyview, Billings West, Columbus/Red Lodge/Park City, Huntley Project, Laurel, Sidney/Fairview; Central – Beaverhead County/Twin Bridges, Belgrade, Broadwater, Butte, Butte Central, East Helena, Lone Peak, Park/Sweet grass County; South – Corvallis, Florence-Carlton, Frenchtown, Hamilton/Darby, Missoula Big Sky, Missoula Hellgate, Missoula Sentinel, St. Ignatius/Arlee, Stevensville; North – Bigfork, Browning/Heart Butte, Columbia Falls, Lincoln County, Noxon/Thompson Falls, Plains/Hot Springs, Polson, Ronan, Troy, Whitefish.

Moving the 6C District Basketball Tournament to a new date. The new dates will be February 27-March 1, 2025.

Class B Golf qualifying criteria revert to the same number of qualifying players and teams as last year. The change will be that in addition to the top four (4) teams that qualify, the top fifteen participants with the lowest score will also qualify.

A change to the Awards rule for Class C Girls Divisional Wrestling Awards: a Trophy will be awarded to the first, second, and third place teams as per General Rules for Awards (6).

A change to the procedures for Football Realignment. Football divisions impacted by the reclassification rubric can present their conference alignment (if needed) at the Executive Board meeting on Saturday of the January meeting. Any schools that wish to appeal their conference alignment can appeal at the January meeting.

A change to the 8-Player Football Playoff Financial Arrangements. Host sites will be allowed to retain up to \$1500 in itemized costs for postseason games.

Ms. Zentner made a motion to approve all two-week notice action items, Mr. Harris seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

### **BOARD ASSIGNMENTS TO SPRING ACTIVITIES**

Board members were assigned to upcoming spring events.

### **RECESS**

The meeting was recessed at 3:09 pm and will reconvene after conclusion of Annual Meeting business on Monday.

### **MEETING RECONVENES**

At 1:32 pm on January 20<sup>th</sup>, the meeting reconvened.

### **6-PLAYER FOOTBALL REALIGNMENT**

Ms. Bartels introduced Mr. Gondeiro to the Executive board. Mr. Gondeiro reported that during the 6-Player football meeting, the member schools present unanimously voted to approve the following realignment:

East (9)	South (7)	North (7)	Northwest (7)	Southwest (8)
Bainville	Broadview-	Big Sandy	Alberton	Absarokee
Broadus	Lavina	CJI	Heart Butte	Bridger
Brockton	Custer-Hysham-	Great Falls	Hot Springs	Fromberg
Froid-Lake	Melstone	Central	Lincoln	Gardiner
Jordan	DGSG	Hays-Lodgepole	Noxon	Reed Pt-Rapelje
Plevna	Grass Range-	Highwood	Power-Dutton	Shields Valley
Richey-Lambert	Winnett	North Star	Brady	W. Yellowstone
Savage	Hobson-Moore	Sunburst	Valier	White Sulphur
Terry	Plenty Coups			Springs
	Roy-Winifred			

Mr. Harris made a motion to approve the proposed realignment for 6-Player football. Mr. Mills seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

### **6-PLAYER FOOTBALL FINANCIAL POLICY**

Mr. Gondeiro also reported that during the 6-Player football meeting, all schools voted to approve dispersing any excess funds from playoff football to the 16 teams that competed in the postseason. Mr. Harris made a motion to approve the disbursement of funds from the 2024-25 season to the qualifying 16 6-Player teams. Ms. Zentner seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

### **VARSITY REQUESTS**

#### **Highwood High School Volleyball**

Mr. Gondeiro requested that Highwood High School be allowed to participate in Varsity Volleyball for the 2025-26 season. They have relatively higher numbers of girls coming up that wish to participate and he feels they will be successful in fielding a competitive team. Ms. Zentner made a motion to approve Highwood High School competing in varsity volleyball. Mr. Harris seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

#### **Heart Butte High School Volleyball and Football**

Ms. Bartels introduced Jody Aimsback of Heart Butte High School. Mr. Aimsback requests a varsity schedule for volleyball and football. Last fall, Heart Butte had a school closure that forced temporary student transfer; subsequently volleyball and football could only field and compete at the junior varsity level. The school has reopened, and he foresees an increase in participation for both sports next year. Ms. Triplett made a motion to allow Heart Butte volleyball and football to compete at the varsity level. Mr. Harris seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

#### **Hardin High School Football**

Ms. Bartels introduced Mr. Krieger from Hardin High School. Mr. Krieger explained that last year they had decreased numbers due to injuries. For the next year, they foresee increased numbers and would also like to apply for a co-op with Lodge Grass High School for football. This would allow them to field both junior varsity and varsity football teams. Both Lodge Grass and Hardin school boards have approved a co-op for football. Ms. Zentner made a motion to approve the Hardin Varsity football schedule; Mr. McElroy seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

#### **Plenty Coups High School**

Ms. Bartels introduced David Turnsplenty from Plenty Coups High School. Mr. Turnsplenty explained they have had an increase in numbers for football and would like to request a varsity schedule for football for the next year. Mr. Mills made a motion to approve a varsity schedule for football. Ms. Zentner seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

#### **Other Requests**

Mr. Michelotti went over numbers submitted by Hays-Lodgepole High School and Park High School for football, as well as Powell County High School for Girls Basketball. All schools appear to have increased numbers coming in and would like the opportunity to be able to schedule for their respective varsity teams. Mr. McElroy made a motion to approve all there scho0ol requests, Mr. Mills seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

#### **NEXT EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING**

The next scheduled Executive Board meeting will be a Regular Meeting, April 28-29, 2025, at the Helena Public Schools Administration Building

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to discuss, Mr. Harris made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Ms. Zentner seconded, and the motion passed. Mr. Fitzgerald adjourned the meeting at 1:54 pm.