

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD  
OF THE MONTANA HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATION**

Helena Public Schools Administration Building

November 20, 2023

**ATTENDANCE**

Steve Thennis, Helena  
Krystal Zentner, Bridger  
John Fitzgerald, Red Lodge  
Jim Patelis, Billings  
Aric Harris, Whitefish  
Kara Triplett, Lambert  
Joe McElroy, Missoula  
Brian Michelotti, Helena  
Kip Ryan, Helena  
Scott Wilson, Helena  
Greta Buehler, Helena  
Jenise Cockhill, Helena  
Ryan Richards, Helena

*Delegations:*

*Melissa Sanders, Savage*  
*Dan Mills, Bozeman (Zoom)*  
*Mary Beth Pummel, Bozeman (Zoom)*  
*Jennifer Kintz, Bozeman (Zoom)*  
*Bethany Snow, Busby (Zoom)*  
*Nancy Bighawk, Lame Deer (Zoom)*  
*Ernest Littlebird, Lame Deer (Zoom)*  
*Student: KMC, Lame Deer (Zoom)*  
*Mike White, Shelby*  
*Chris Hess, Forsyth*  
*Jessica Nagy, Superior*  
*Jesse Allan, Saint Regis*  
*Chad Peterson, Butte (Zoom)*  
*Zack Stajcar, Butte (Zoom)*  
*Amanda Stajcar, Butte (Zoom)*  
*Cameron McCormick, Pryor (Zoom)*  
*Tony Wagner, Browning (Zoom)*  
*Sienna Speicher, Browning (Zoom)*  
*Student: TW, Browning (Zoom)*

**CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Thennis at 8:30 a.m. 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 INPUT STATEMENT**

Mr. Thennis read the public input statement to the delegation.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mr. Wilson introduced Melissa Sanders, Activities Director at Savage High School to the Executive Board. Ms. Sanders suggested that there should be a change to the State C Golf season to start later. She has sent out a survey to Class C schools and there is a 60% response wanting to change, the remaining 40% responded saying they wanted more information. Mr. Michelotti stated that the only issue with this is multiple sport athletes and possible conflicts. He also requested that she bring formal numbers from the schools and put together information to give to the Board.

Ms. Sanders also suggested All Class State Volleyball separate the classes to be an individual event for each class. Her reasons for this were the environment on center courts, food accessibility in the community, hotel costs and other events, such as MSU Football and John Deere days were going on. Mr. Michelotti requested she send an email to him, so he can take to the Tournament Committee in Bozeman.

## **APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES**

Mr. Patelis motioned to approve the regular meeting minutes for September 11, 2023, and October 24, 2023. Ms. Zentner seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

## **DELEGATIONS/APPEALS**

### **ACADEMIC ELIGIBILITY APPEAL— BOZEMAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT EF**

Mr. Wilson introduced Mr. Mills, Ms. Pummel and Ms. Kintz to the board via Zoom. The MHSA Executive Board introduced themselves to the delegation. Mr. Thennis gave the option for an open or closed meeting, Ms. Kintz chose to continue with an open meeting. Mr. Mills and Ms. Pummel both spoke in support of the appeal. They have been supporting the student with accommodations to his IEP by determining his eligibility prior to each week of competition. Prior semester academics, current academics, attendance, and possible behavioral issues were discussed. This plan potentially could be continued into his senior year of high school if necessary. Mr. Thennis read the requirements to waive the academic eligibility rule from the MHSA Handbook. Mr. McElroy motioned to retroactively waive the academic eligibility rule; Mr. Patelis seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

### **SEMESTER RULE APPEAL – NORTHERN CHEYENNE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT KMC**

Mr. Wilson introduced Ms. Snow and Ms. Bighawk to the board via Zoom. Mr. Littlebird and student KMC were also present via Zoom. The MHSA Executive Board introduced themselves to the delegation. Mr. Thennis gave the option of an open or closed meeting; Mr. Littlebird chose to continue with an open meeting. Mr. Littlebird explained home life details that have negatively affected their family, specifically the student, as well as the direction they are now going. Ms. Snow spoke in support of the student. Current academics and attendance were also discussed. Mr. Thennis read the requirements to waive the semester rule from the MHSA Handbook. Mr. McElroy motioned to waive the semester rule, Mr. Harris seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

## **8 PLAYER FOOTBALL REALIGNMENT**

Mr. Wilson introduced Mr. White, Mr. Hess, and Ms. Nagy to the board. The MHSA Executive Board introduced themselves. Mr. White explained that they have historically had a five-division format and are hoping to move to four divisions for the 2024-25 season. Rationale for this was discussed. Previously, a vote went to member schools and 74% agree with a move to four divisions. It was discussed that the division presidents would potentially look at realignment every two years. Mr. Michelotti stated that the playoff brackets would need to be aligned by the April meeting. Mr. Patelis motioned to approve the move to four divisions for the 2024-25 school year. Mr. Fitzgerald seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

## **CO-OP REQUEST – SAINT REGIS HIGH SCHOOL/MULLAN, ID**

Mr. Wilson introduced Mr. Allan to the board. The MHSA Executive Board introduced themselves. Mr. Allan stated the rationale for a cooperative sponsorship with Mullan, ID. Historically, both communities have supported each other when there are low numbers on either side. Mr. Michelotti commended the hard work and consistency of Mr. Allan regarding the football program in Saint Regis. Ms. Zentner motioned for the approval of an out-of-state cooperative with Mullan, ID. Ms. Triplett seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Ms. Zentner moved to officially place this cooperative in the West Division. Mr. Fitzgerald seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

## **12C/13C/14C CHANGES – VOLLEYBALL, BASKETBALL AND TRACK**

Mr. Allan stated the rationale for combining 13C and 14C into one district (13C) to balance out the division. There will be a rotation for divisional competition where 5 from 13C and 3 from 12C would go one year, and 4 and 4 would come from each district the next year. Ms. Zentner made a motion to approve the consolidation of 14C into 13C. Mr. McElroy seconded this motion and it passed unanimously.

## **SEMESTER RULE APPEAL—BUTTE CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT CS**

Mr. Wilson introduced Mr. Petersen, Mr. Stajcar, and Ms. Stajcar to the board via Zoom. The MHSA Executive Board introduced themselves. Mr. Thennis gave the option of an open or closed meeting; Ms. Stajcar chose to continue with an open meeting. Mr. Petersen summarized the appeal details and spoke in support of the student and the choice to pursue the appeal. Ms. Stajcar explained the rationale for potentially holding the student back repeating his 8<sup>th</sup> grade year. Ms. Zentner motioned to waive the semester rule and allow the student to become eligible for the spring semester of 2024-25 school year while not being able to participate the remainder of the 2023-24 school year. Mr. Patelis seconded the motion and the motion passed with one dissenting vote from Mr. McElroy.

## **ACADEMIC ELIGIBILITY AND TRANSFER RULE APPEAL—PLENTY COUPS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT TH**

Mr. Wilson introduced Mr. McCormick via Zoom to the board. The MHSA Executive Board introduced themselves. Mr. Thennis gave the option of an open or closed meeting; Mr. McCormick chose to continue with an open meeting. Mr. McCormick summarized the circumstances regarding the reason for the appeal. Current academics and enrollment were discussed. Ms. Zentner motioned to waive the academic eligibility rule; Ms. Triplett seconded, and the motion failed unanimously. Mr. McElroy motioned to waive the transfer rule, Ms. Harris seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

## **ACADEMIC RULE APPEAL—PLENTY COUPS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT CBL**

Mr. Wilson introduced Mr. McCormick via Zoom to the Board. The MHSA Executive Board introduced themselves. Mr. Thennis gave the option of an open or closed meeting; Mr. McCormick chose to continue with an open meeting. Mr. McCormick summarized the circumstances regarding the reason for the appeal. Current academics and enrollment were discussed. Mr. Fitzgerald moved to approve

the waiver of the academic rule for student CBL. Mr. Patelis seconded the motion, and the motion failed unanimously.

#### **ACADEMIC ELIGIBILITY APPEAL— BROWNING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT TW**

Mr. Wilson introduced Mr. Wagner, Ms. Speicher, and student TW to the Board. The MHSA Executive Board introduced themselves. Mr. Thennis gave the option for an open or closed meeting; the student chose to continue with an open meeting. Mr. Wagner and Ms. Speicher summarized the personal issues of the student. The student detailed her familial relationships and family dynamics as well. The academic and counseling plan has been discussed to assist this student to get her academics in order. Mr. Thennis read the requirements to waive the academic eligibility rule from the MHSA Handbook. Mr. McElroy motioned to waive the academic eligibility rule, Mr. Fitzgerald seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

#### **FINANCES**

Mr. Michelotti discussed the bills paid September 1 – October 31, 2023. Mr. Fitzgerald motioned to approve the bills paid. Mr. Harris seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Michelotti reviewed the financial statement as of October 31, 2023. Mr. McElroy motioned to approve the financial statement. Mr. Patelis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

#### **GENERAL OFFICE REPORT**

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

##### Coming Events

The MOA Regional Directors will meet on December 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>. The NFHS Winter meeting will be January 3-6, 2024, in San Francisco, CA. The MHSA Annual Meeting will be January 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> in Bozeman, MT at the Best Western GranTree Inn.

##### Recent Events

Mr. Michelotti, Ms. Buehler, Ms. Bartels and Mr. Ryan attended the Helena premiere of *Native Ball: Legacy of a Trailblazer*. There was an informative panel discussion moderated by Donnie Wetzel, involving Malia Kipp and Simarron Schildt.

##### MHSA Corporate Sponsorships

Mr. Richards gave an update on PlayFly, and there is immense growth on social media with team of the month, athlete of the month, etc. Discussion was had about only current sponsors being allowed at the MHSA Annual Meeting.

##### Staff Update

Ms. Cockhill has assumed responsibilities of media passes, office manager, executive board preparation, correspondence, and other office duties as needed. Jane Ryan has been a huge help with tournament preparation as well. Rules interpreters for fall, winter and spring sports were discussed.

##### Road to 182

The social media campaign has been a success so far. We have reached 26 schools and counting. There has been good feedback from the member schools thus far.

##### MHSA Building

Mr. Michelotti has had a meeting with Scott Cromwell at Slate Architecture and a preliminary building mock-up has been designed based upon gathering information regarding individual staff needs. Mr. Michelotti has also met with Julie Heller at Century 21 to further discuss land or existing building options. A preliminary budget was also discussed.

##### Policy Manual Changes

Mr. Michelotti discussed bringing more Executive Board members to national and sectional meetings on a rotational basis. It was also discussed to have an MHSA staff rotation for conferences as well. MHSA

and Executive Board member spouse registration to events has never been covered. Mr. Michelotti would like to see a change to this specifically.

#### Frontier Conference Passes

It was discussed that the MHSА will distribute All Access Passes to each Montana Community College, Junior College and University to use at their discretion for their respective coaches to attend MHSА post-season activities and events to help recruit Montana students.

#### Technology

MHSА will work on forming a technology committee to help ensure membership, associations, sponsors, and staff get their needs covered when choosing different online platforms and ultimately a new website.

#### Other Issues

The unofficial and incomplete 2023-24 OPI fall enrollment numbers were handed out. The officiating at a Browning v. Columbia Falls Volleyball match were discussed. Ms. Buehler discussed the new smoke monitors and that a DEQ representative is planning on coming to the Annual Meeting to ensure cooperation and communication with active schools. NFHS Network fall numbers were discussed. The All-Class State Volleyball complaints from officials were noted. There was an update from Park High School Activities Director regarding independent participation. The High School Baseball MOU has been sent for signatures and the final copy has not yet been received. There were no further comments or questions from the Executive Board.

### **OFFICE ACTION**

Mr. Michelotti stated 47 hardship waivers have been submitted this year. Of those, 31 have been approved and 16 have been denied. Mr. Michelotti reported there have been no age rule waivers. Mr. Michelotti stated there have been 6 penalties imposed thus far, all of them being self-reported.

### **REPORTS**

#### 2023 State Fall Tournaments/Meets

Cross Country: Mr. Ryan reported that the All-Class State Cross Country Meet held in Kalispell at Rebecca Farms was a successful event. There was some discussion about possibly charging for this event in the future. Some classes would like to see qualifying times changed and this will be discussed as a caucus item in January at the Annual Meeting.

Golf: Mr. Wilson reported that the Class AA State Golf Tournament in Billings was well run. The weather was excellent. Ms. Triplett reported on the Class A State Golf Tournament in Sidney, stating everything went smoothly except for the wind. The GoFan digital ticketing was not communicated effectively by event coordinators. Golf Genius has been a nice addition to the state tournaments.

Football: Mr. Thennis reported that the State AA Championship in Bozeman was fantastic. Mr. Wilson echoed that the sportsmanship, competition, and atmosphere was great. Mr. Wilson also attended the State A Championship in Dillon and reported that this event was great as well. There were some NFHS Network issues at the State A game unfortunately. Mr. Michelotti stated that the State B Championship in Manhattan was attended by Pat Lynch, and he reported that there was one ejection documented. Ms. Zentner reported that the 8 Player Championship in Belt went well. Ms. Triplett attended the 6 Player Championship game in Medicine Lake and reported that it was well attended.

Volleyball: Mr. Harris and Mr. McElroy were in attendance. Mr. Harris said it went well. Mr. McElroy commended Mr. Ryan for his organization and management of the event. Mr. Ryan reported that the All-Class State Volleyball Tournament was well-organized and successful in Bozeman. He broke down

the financials of the event. The largest expense was for officials pay and per diem as well as hotel rooms. An overall increased profit will be distributed to the schools. Mr. Ryan discussed the complaints lodged by the officials which were related to the hospitality room, parking, locker rooms and hotel costs. Mr. Michelotti stated there will be a meeting with MSU Facilities in December to discuss the possibilities of problem solving some of the complaints.

Soccer: Mr. Michelotti reported that the Class AA Soccer Championships in Bozeman went well. This was moved to the following Tuesday due to weather issues. Mr. Harris reported that Class A Championships in Whitefish and Billings went smoothly as well.

Music: Mr. McElroy attended the All-Class State Band, Orchestra, and Chorus Competition in Missoula at Hellgate High School and reported that things went smoothly.

General Discussion on State Event Forms: Mr. Michelotti stated that the evaluation forms that we historically have used are outdated and may no longer be applicable. It was decided that an email regarding the positives and negatives of an event that was attended will work in place of the form.

#### Ejections

Mr. Michelotti reported 47 ejections for this year so far. We are up from last year due mostly to boys' soccer.

#### AIM Higher

Mr. Wilson stated it was business as usual. Numbers are down a little bit thus far.

#### Class C Realignment

Ms. Triplett handed out the results of the realignment vote. There was no super majority with the vote, so this will be a continuing issue. She reported that the East Division is shrinking while others are growing. Mr. Fitzgerald made a motion to go back to the Class C schools and require continuity between basketball, volleyball and track & field for division representation. Ms. Zentner seconded; and the motion passed unanimously.

#### MOA Report

Mr. Michelotti summarized an official registration numbers report prepared by Ms. Bartels.

#### **LEGAL**

Mr. Michelotti reported on legal costs this fiscal year to October 31, 2023. He also brought attention to some possible upcoming litigation instances; Columbia Falls High School and Colstrip High School will both be going to court, and the MHSAA will need to defend the eligibility rules.

#### **REQUESTS**

##### **NFHS Network Contract Extension**

Mr. Michelotti and Mr. Wilson reported on a possible NFHS Network Agreement for 10 years, rather than the historical 5-year contracts. Some states are seeing legal action regarding streaming rights. The utilization of this extension can help counter that from a national perspective. Also, if the Network sells, the state associations with the extended contract can make a profit from the sale which then gets passed to member associations. Mr. McElroy motioned to approve the contract extension with NFHS Network Holdings. Mr. Patelis seconded; the motion passed unanimously.

### **2025-26 Calendar**

Mr. Wilson previewed the 2025-26 calendar. Changes will need to be made to the calendar based on Memorial Day weekend falling early. He gave two options for a calendar realignment. Option A would have spring sports start the week during the state basketball tournaments with the spring State tournaments being held the weekend of Memorial Day. Option B would have spring sports start the week after State basketball and the state tournaments for these sports being after Memorial Day weekend. Mr. McElroy motioned to approve adoption of Option B 2025-26 calendar, and Mr. Patelis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The revisions to the 2024-25 calendar would be made to mirror the 2025-26 calendar. Mr. Fitzgerald made a motion to approve the 2024-25 revision and Mr. McElroy seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Football Reclassification**

Mr. Wilson handed out a timeline for 2025 and 2026 and requests that the board review a reclassification process for football to be every two years. The schedule would be approved at the January meeting.

### **Student Leadership Advisory Committee**

Mr. Michelotti handed out a report prepared by Ms. Bartels.

### **Emergency Action Plan Implementation**

Ms. Buehler reviewed the Emergency Action Plan (EAP) template prepared by the Sports Medicine Advisory Committee. They are also asking the Executive Board to require an EAP for every venue. Ms. Zentner made a motion to require an EAP implementation for each school and venue to be verified by a July 15 deadline for the 2024-25 school year. Mr. Fitzgerald seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

### **Grass Range/Winnett/Fergus Co-op Dissolution for Football**

Mr. Wilson stated that Grass Range/Winnett wish to dissolve the cooperative sponsorship with Fergus High School. Grass Range/Winnett have enough participation to field their own 6-Player team. Mr. Fitzgerald motioned to approve the dissolution and approve the sole cooperative for Grass Range/Winnett. Mr. McElroy seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

### **Prime-Time Determination for Scheduling Basketball Games**

Mr. Michelotti explained that attorney Bea Kaleva opined that based on the Ridgeway Agreement, she believes that the Eastern C schools must alternate start times in an equitable manner to offer equal access to the Prime-Time game. Ms. Sanders requested that the MHSAA make a rule aligning when boys or girls play first ahead of time to make scheduling consistent across the board with all schools. Mr. Thennis requests more information from a legal perspective regarding switching start times every other year; as well as an opinion on if the home schedule is equitable, but the away schedule does not align with regard to equity. Mr. Michelotti suggested that once we obtain the additional legal information, the MHSAA send a letter out to member schools for next year. It will be left to member schools to figure out this year per school. This will allow feedback from member schools, and then the MHSAA will help in future seasons to refine the rules. Ms. Triplett motioned that once more information is obtained, the MHSAA will give more direction to schools for the 2024-25 school year. Mr. Fitzgerald seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

### **Southern C Track and Field Divisional Qualifying Standards**

Mr. Michelotti reported that the Southern C division would like to change the Track & Field qualifying standards to ensure top performers from the season qualify when weather is a limiting factor in meet participation. Mr. McElroy motioned to approve the changes. Ms. Triplett seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

### **RECLASSIFICATION/REALIGNMENT**

Mr. Wilson explained that football is on a two-year cycle for reclassification. There was a special request for Saint Regis and Mullan, ID to be in a cooperative sponsorship which was approved by the executive Board in the delegations. Mr. Wilson further stated that they would place this coop in the 8-Player Western division. Mr. Fitzgerald motioned to approve the placement in the West Division and Mr. Patelis seconded; the motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Wilson further explained that Twin Bridges has met the requirements to move up from 6-Player to 8-Player football, and they should be placed in the South Division. Mr. Patelis motioned to approve this change, Mr. Harris seconded; and the motion passed unanimously.

### **GENERAL**

#### **Final Action on September Items for Two Week Notice**

Mr. Michelotti reported that there have been no comments on the two week notice for approving music changes; 1) Ronan moving from District 2 to District 1, an additional committee member and increasing entrance fees as well as spectator admission, 2) the MHSA will remove names of schools participating in each sport from the handbook and 3) the MHSA removes inaccurate language regarding 8-player and 6-player football from the handbook. Mr. McElroy made a motion to approve items 1, 2 and 3. Mr. Fitzgerald seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

#### **MHSA Committee Appointments**

Mr. Ryan handed out and previewed the new committee appointments. Mr. Fitzgerald motioned to approve the proposed committee appointments, and Mr. Patelis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

### **ANNUAL MEETING**

Mr. Ryan handed out a proposed agenda and caucus items for the Annual Meeting. Additional caucus items of mandatory CPR/AED training for coaches and Marquee time (Prime-Time) implementation were discussed. Board functions were assigned and discussed, as well as Saturday dinner options. Committee reports and awards selections were also discussed.

### **PROPOSALS/ANNUAL MEETING**

#### **Schools Proposals to By-Laws**

Mr. Michelotti reported the following By-Law changes that will likely be submitted by the schools' at the Annual Meeting: 1) Addition of a new sport, flag football by Glacier High School, 2) addition of eSports by Sidney High School, 3) ejection rule change proposal by Mark Dennehy at Glacier High School, and 4) an exception to the two classes in the bricks and mortar rule by Billings West.

**MHSA Proposals to By-Laws**

Mr. Michelotti also stated the by-law change proposals that will be brought by the MHSA are: 1) Charter school rule language, 2) NFHS Network rule violations, 3) adding a new board member, 4) process for adding an emerging sport/activity language and 5) the appeal policy and language. Mr. Patelis motioned to approve submission of these proposals on behalf of the Executive Board, Mr. McElroy seconded; and the motion passed unanimously.

**PROPOSED BUDGET**

Mr. Michelotti handed out proposed budget material. Last year we proposed a 3% increase and the Executive Board adjusted to a 6% increase. It is proposed to increase this year again by 6% but there will be no additional costs to membership. Mr. Patelis moved to approve the proposed 6% budget increase. Mr. McElroy seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

**FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER**

There were no items to discuss.

**ADDITIONAL ITEMS**

There were no items to discuss.

**NEXT MEETING**

The next scheduled Executive Board meeting will be the Annual Meeting, January 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> at the Best Western GranTree in Bozeman, MT.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to discuss, Mr. Thennis adjourned the meeting at 4:38 pm.