

## February 2026

### **EXECUTIVE CORNER**

The MHSAs Annual Meeting in Helena was an outstanding event, highlighted by strong attendance and productive meetings. It was a pleasure to connect in person with administrators from across the state. Over time, this gathering has become a valuable mid-year opportunity for administrators from all classifications, districts, and divisions to collaborate, plan, and engage in meaningful discussions about the future. We also extend our appreciation to the Delta Hotel Helena Colonial for hosting the conference, as well as to Visit Helena for organizing a well-received hospitality event.

The membership reviewed seven MHSAs By-Law proposals, with six approved for implementation next year. The conversations that took place during each classification's caucus were especially valuable, as they allowed members to share their thoughts on the proposals and other MHSAs-related topics. Hearing a variety of perspectives helped everyone better understand the reasoning behind both support for and opposition to the proposals and other initiatives. Overall, the level of cooperation, compromise, and mutual respect shown throughout the meeting was encouraging and appreciated.

During the MHSAs Annual Meeting in Helena, we truly appreciated everyone who took the time to stop by the open house of our new MHSAs office space. As we mentioned throughout the meeting, this is *your* space, and we hope you will feel welcome to use it—whether to schedule meetings, collaborate with colleagues, or simply stop in the next time you are in Helena.

In other action, Dustin Gordon, Superintendent at Fairfield Public Schools was appointed for a four-year term as the Class B Representative. During the meeting, the membership recognized deserving MHSAs award winners. These award winners were acknowledged for their selfless work on behalf of our high school student activity participants and because of their long-time dedication to MHSAs activities.

The 2026 State Speech and Drama Meets have been completed. Congratulations to all the Speech and Drama coaches and participants.

Postseason tournaments in basketball, swimming, and wrestling are about to begin, and as always, this is an exciting time for coaches, student-athletes, and fans. As participation and attendance increase, it is important to continue reinforcing expectations for positive sporting behavior at all high school events. Crowd control remains the responsibility of school administrators—not game officials—and the MHSAs Spectator Ejection Rule is now in place as an effective tool to address unruly behavior. Administrators are encouraged to proactively engage with challenging spectators by sitting next to them, allowing an opportunity to de-escalate, and issuing a clear warning that continued behavior may result in removal and a three-game

suspension. The suspension will go to 2 weeks next school year, as this was passed at the MHSAs Annual Meeting.

We appreciate your continued efforts to ensure that high school activities remain positive, respectful, and enjoyable for everyone involved. Thank you for the hard work you put into managing crowds throughout the regular season and especially during tournament time. We also encourage spectators to remember the message on our Stockman Bank-sponsored posters: *Spectators – Conduct Counts!* As always, fans are encouraged to Be Loud, Be Proud, and Be Positive, and to keep in mind our longtime reminder—*“Without Officials, It’s Just Recess.”*

Good luck during the coming postseason events, and if the MHSAs office can assist you in any way, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Brian Michelotti - Executive Director

### **ANNUAL MEETING**

#### **MIAAAA GOLD PASS AWARDS**

The MIAAAA uses the forum of the MHSAs Annual Meeting to present gold passes to deserving activities directors. Nominations and selections for the awards are processed through the MIAAAA.

Jim Daniels, Fergus, Chuck Merrifield, Butte, Tim McMahon, Helena, Mark Wahl, Billings, Mike Ryan, Billings Central, and Scott King, Malta are this year's MIAAAA Gold Pass Recipients.

#### **MIAAAA classification Activities Directors of the year:**

Class C - Ed Burke, Sheridan  
 Class B - Tim Kaczmarek, Huntley Project  
 Class A - Eli Field, Frenchtown  
 Class AA - Mark Sulser, Billings Public Schools  
 Overall - Mike Erickson, Glasgow

#### **MIAAAA Hall of Fame Inductees:**

Scott King, Malta  
 Don Paulson, Cut Bank  
 Pat Lynch, Manhattan  
 Kip Ryan, Big Timber  
 Shawn Holmes, Seeley-Swan

#### **NFHS Outstanding Music Educator Award**

Jeff Skogley – Cascade High School

#### **NFHS Speech and Debate Award (Section 8 Winner)**

Liz Schwartz– Laurel High School

#### **AIM HIGHER AWARD**

Billings Skyview High School

**AIM HIGHER CONTRIBUTOR AWARD**

Butte High School

**MHSA HEART OF THE ARTS AWARD**

Laura Brayco - Helena Capital High School

**MHSA SPIRIT OF THE SPORT AWARD**

Kyler Venable - Custer County High School

**MILDRED ADAMS AWARDS**

Butch & Pixie Zieske - Richey & Savage Schools

Ennis Geraghty - Columbus High School

Terri Bowen - Colstrip High School

Deb Gibson - Richey Schools

**SERVICE CITATION AWARDS**

Brandon Gondeiro - Highwood High School

Steve Yockim - Sidney Schools

Bill Melvin - Butte Civic Center

John O'Dell - Broadwater High School

Tim McMahon - Helena Public Schools

**JAMES C. HAUGEN MERITORIOUS SERVICE AWARD**

Mark Dennehy- Retired Glacier High School

**IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**WE HAVE MOVED!!! UPDATE YOUR RECORDS**

The MHSA has moved our offices to a new address:

631 N. Last Chance Gulch

Helena, MT 59601

All of our other contact information remains the same. We encourage you to stop by and see our new space if you are ever in Helena. Please update your records for mailing and with your business offices to reflect this change.

**ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AWARD PROGRAM**

In the near future, school contacts will receive the 2025-2026 school year's initial mailing concerning the Northwestern Energy Company's Academic Excellence Award. The competition was initiated in the 1988-89 school year.

Please review the materials when you receive them and make plans to enter your school's students in the 2025-2025 competition. The award is very prestigious, and we encourage schools to submit an application to recognize overall activity participants' academic achievement.

**REPORT SPECTATOR EJECTIONS**

The MHSA Executive Board approved that all spectators who are ejected or removed from one of our member school contests must be reported to the MHSA. In the past, we have required player and coach ejections to be reported, but please report spectators now as well.

Please refer to the MHSA Handbook or contact your school's administration for any questions regarding this policy or its enforcement. MHSA Handbook, Section (2) General Penalties, 2.8 Ejections, c., pg. 20

Any attendee ejected by mutual agreement of the Official and Administration from a regular season or MHSA tournament contest will incur a minimum three (3) game/event suspension from that team's games/events and all other MHSA games/events in the interim at any level of competition. If the ejection occurs with fewer than three (3) games/events remaining in the team's season, the suspension will carry over to the school's sports season which immediately follows. An attendee ejected for a second time during a school year shall be suspended for a minimum of one (1) calendar year from all MHSA regular and postseason events. MHSA member schools may increase these

minimum penalties at their discretion. Spectator Ejection information should be sent to Amy Bartels at the MHSA office at [abartels@mhsa.org](mailto:abartels@mhsa.org)

**BASEBALL**

MHSA sanctioned baseball will start with practices on March 16, 2026. The first date for competition is March 26, 2026. Baseball now has two (2) classifications: AA and ABC. Class AA is divided into two (2) conferences and class ABC is divided into four (4) conferences. In Class AA, the top two (2) teams in each conference automatically qualify for the AA state tournament. In Class ABC, the top team in each conference automatically qualifies for the state tournament. Play-in games will take place in both the AA classification and the ABC classifications with the winners of those games also qualifying for the state tournament. The AA state tournament will be in Butte and the ABC state tournament will be in Polson on May 28-30..

**MUSIC**

**MUSIC INFORMATION TO BE SENT TO DIRECTORS**

Music directors should be aware of the electronic mailings that will be sent in the next few weeks concerning music events.

First, information will be sent to each school concerning the coming All-State Band, Chorus and Orchestra Festival. The information includes details for the online audition process.

Next, schools will receive information concerning the State Solo & Ensemble Festivals which will be held May 1-2, 2026, in Billings (East) and Helena (West).

For information regarding your individual district festivals, please contact the appropriate festival chair. The list of chairs is posted on the music page of the MHSA website at [www.mhsa.org](http://www.mhsa.org).

**SPEECH AND DRAMA**

**SPEECH AND DRAMA MEETS COMPLETED**

Schools participating in speech and drama finalized their seasons in January. Thanks to the host communities and managers listed below, the events were successful culminations of this year's competition:

Class AA – Glacier High School

Class A – Corvallis High School

Class B/C - Broadwater Co (Townsend) High School

[2026 Postseason Results- Click Here](#)

[MHSA Speech and Debate Website - Click Here](#)

**TRACK AND FIELD**

**STARTING DATE FOR TRACK AND FIELD PRACTICE**

For the 2025-26 school year, the starting date for track and field practice will be Monday, March 16, and the first date for track and field competition will be Thursday, March 26. No individual shall compete in any Association track and field meet until he/she has a minimum of eight (8) days of track and field practice of a least one practice session per day on eight (8) different days (no practice is permitted on Sunday), prior to the date of the first allowable track and field meet.

### TEAM MEET LIMITATIONS:

No team shall participate in more than ten (10) meets excluding Association sponsored meets and excluding top ten or top eight meets. An athlete will only be allowed to compete in one top 10/8 track and field meet.

### INDIVIDUAL MEET LIMITATIONS:

No individual may participate in an out-of-state invitational only meet unless approved by the MHSAs Executive Director. Any out-of-state participation approved under these criteria will count toward the ten-meet limit for the particular student.

### POLE VAULTERS' WEIGHT VERIFICATION:

Enclosed is a copy of the pole vaulters' weight verification form that the MHSAs requires each school to complete and have on file in the Activities Director's office prior to a pole vaulter's first interscholastic competition (See the 2025-2026 MHSAs Handbook #16 on page 100 for a copy of the rule).

### TRACK AND FIELD RULES INTERPRETER (4th year)

MHSAs Rules Interpreter Liza Dennehy has again agreed to serve as the MHSAs rules interpreter for track & field. Liza has a long history with Montana track. She has been responsible for the finish line, FAT systems, and computers at Butte track and cross-country meets for 25+ years, and has worked as head FAT official at numerous USATF Montana, MSU, and U of M track & field meets. Liza is a USATF Certified Official and she has served as Referee at multiple Montana state and divisional track & field meets. Her experience and wisdom are a valuable asset. I am honored that she agreed to be the rules interpreter for MHSAs for a second year and look forward to working with her for another season.

If you have any questions about this information, please call Kip Ryan at the MHSAs office.

## **FOOTBALL**

### INVENTORY AND RECONDITIONED HELMETS

We trust you have checked your existing supply of football helmets and have determined which helmets must be reconditioned so they are completely safe. The MHSAs encourages each coach or athletic director, when considering reconditioning, to contact the manufacturer directly to determine its policies regarding reconditioning and warranties. Companies differ in their helmet policies, and it is wise to check them out carefully. Please feel free to contact the MHSAs office for any assistance you may need in contacting reconditioners. Due to time delays, schools should send their helmets for reconditioning as soon as possible.

## **SPIRIT**

### MAKING A GREAT SPIRIT PROGRAM

One of the greatest things an athletic director/administrator can do for the spirit program at their school is to offer positive assistance. If your coach is new or young, guide him/her just as you would any other coach.

Review details like the chain of command, academic policies, the school's policies, and eligibility rules if any. Share your expectations with your coach. Decide how you will work together to increase crowd involvement, improve sportsmanship, and maintain crowd control to promote a positive atmosphere at your school. Spirit coaches should be included with other athletic coaches at all coaches' meetings. When everyone (cheerleaders, dancers, parents, athletic director, and coaches) hear the same information at the same time, everyone is on the same page. Approve all spirit uniforms, accessories, and music compilations before they are ordered or used in your practices and events.

Ask the spirit coach for his/her written rules or handbook and make certain your coach has access to the NFHS Spirit Rules Book and the [Spirit Section of the MHSAs Handbook - Click Here](#). An electronic code may be requested for the head coach by school administration to be emailed for the rules book when the coach completes and turns in all MHSAs requirements to administration. All MHSAs requirements are mandatory for a coach to attend any post season event.

For more Spirit information go to the Spirit section of the MHSAs webpage or MHSAs Handbook.

## **RULES CLINICS**

### SPRING RULES CLINIC ONLINE

The MHSAs/MOA rules clinics are presented in an online format for coaches and officials. **All coaches, including the head coach and all assistant coaches and all school-approved volunteer coaches, are required to view the sport-specific rules clinic(s).**

We have several major changes to our rules clinic process this year:

1. Rules Clinics must be viewed through the coach or officials Arbiter Account. Arbiter will track all compliance for administrators. For more information [Click on this link](#)
2. Each sport clinic now includes the following:
  - General MHSAs or MOA Rules Clinic
  - Sport-Specific Rules Clinic (MHSAs/NFHS updates)

There is good news for multi-sport coaches or officials. You only need to complete the General Rules Clinic once per year for MHSAs/MOA. However, you must complete a Sport-Specific Clinic for each season (Fall, Winter, Spring).

The baseball, golf, softball, tennis and track and field clinics will be posted on our main website at [www.mhsa.org](http://www.mhsa.org). The clinics will be launched on **March 1<sup>st</sup>**. Coaches and officials must view the clinics prior to **March 18<sup>th</sup> for golf and no later than March 26<sup>th</sup> for baseball, softball, tennis and track and field** to receive credit.

The information sheet is available on our website, [www.mhsa.org](http://www.mhsa.org), under the clinics tab. If you have any questions, please contact the MHSAs office.

## **SPORTS RECORD ARCHIVES**

### MONTANA HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS RECORD ARCHIVES

The MHSAs continues to gather information to update our Montana High School Sports Record Archives.

Please take a few minutes to review the sports records by clicking on the following link: [www.mhsa.org/more/records/](http://www.mhsa.org/more/records/)

If you have knowledge of a record that equals or exceeds the existing marks, list that record on the MHSAs sports record book application form, [Record Application](#). If you have any questions or concerns, please call Kip Ryan at 442-6010.

Here is the new timeline for record updates for the MHSAs:

- Fall Sport Records - Must be submitted before January 1<sup>st</sup>. The MHSAs will update the records and post on the website on January 15<sup>th</sup>.

- Winter Sports Records - Must be submitted before April 15th. The MHSА will update the records and post on the website on May 1st.
- Spring Sports Records - Must be submitted before July 1st. The MHSА will update the records and post on the website on July 15th.

All Records received after the deadlines listed above will be updated when time allows.

## **AIM HIGHER**

### **MHSА AIM HIGHER WORKSHOPS**

On January 28<sup>th</sup> a workshop was conducted in Billings at the Hampton Inn. Facilitators were George Warburton, Joliet High

School and Scott Wilson from the MHSА. There were 125 students/advisors present in Billings. The MHSА truly appreciates our member schools sending students to attend the workshop.

Billings was the last AIM Higher workshop for 2025-26. Thank you to all of the schools that participated this year and to the facilitators who helped make the workshops a positive experience.

### **ENCLOSURES**

[Pole Vaulters' Weight Verification Form #1](#)

[2025-26 Track & Field Rule Changes](#)

[2026 Baseball Rules Changes](#)

[2026 Softball Rules Changes](#)

#### Staff Members

Brian Michelotti, Executive Director  
 Kip Ryan, Senior Associate Director  
 Scott Wilson, Associate Director  
 Amy Bartels, Assistant Director  
 Greta Buehler, Assistant Director  
 Jenise Cockhill, Business Manager  
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 Aric Harris, Activities Director, Whitefish School (Vice President)  
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