

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

631 N. Last Chance Gulch, Helena, MT 59601

JANUARY 17, 2026

ATTENDANCE

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

Delegations:

Annie Begger, Wibaux, Zoom
Colton Johns, Wibaux, Zoom
Brandon Gondeiro, Highwood, Zoom
Russell Kujala, Plains, Zoom
Stephanie Stephens, Harrison, Zoom
Ed Burke, Sheridan, Zoom
John Hannahs, Big Sky, Zoom
Josiah Mayfield, Roundup, Zoom
Joel Fuhrmann, Pablo
Doug McAlear, Missoula
Rico Dunn, Victor, Zoom

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 8:46 a.m. by Mr. Fitzgerald. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

REVISIONS/ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Mr. Michelotti gave a scheduled 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

Mr. Fitzgerald read the rules for public comments in an open meeting. There were no items for public comment presented.

APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES

Mr. Harris motioned to approve November 24, 2025, December 10, 2025, and January 8, 2026, meeting minutes, and Mr. Pretty On Top seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

DELEGATIONS/APPEALS

APPEAL TO GO DOWN TO 6-PLAYER FOOTBALL – WIBAUX HIGH SCHOOL

Mr. Wilson introduced Mr. Gondeiro, Ms. Begger and Mr. Johns to the Executive Board via Zoom. The Executive Board introduced themselves to the delegation. Ms. Begger spoke about her team's reaction to the previous decision that was made in November by the Executive Board. This additional request came primarily from the team as travel is a large issue for the students having to co-op with Glendive. Discussions were held on the complications that arise with placement of Wibaux in the 6 Player classification mid cycle. Mr. McElroy motioned to deny the request and maintain the current co-op with Dawson County. Mr. Patelis seconded the motion, and it failed 2-6. Wibaux High School is allowed to move to the 6-Player classification. Mr. Harris made a motion to place Wibaux in the South division and Ms. Triplett seconded. The motion passed unanimously and Wibaux will be placed in the South division.

APPEAL TO GO DOWN TO 6-PLAYER FOOTBALL – VICTOR HIGH SCHOOL

Mr. Wilson introduced Mr. Dunn to the Executive Board via Zoom. The Executive Board introduced themselves to the delegation. Mr. Dunn explained his decline in numbers for participation in football and the recent win-loss record for Victor. Mr. McElroy motioned to deny the request of Victor High School to move to 6-Player football. Mr. Patelis seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously. Victor High School will remain in the 8-Player football classification for the 2026-27 season.

REQUESTS

MOA REPORT

Ms. Bartels introduced Mr. Fuhrmann to the delegation. Mr. Fuhrmann reported that the biggest issue discussed at the Regional Directors meeting is coverage of events on traditional game days. He is proposing a set rotation for football contests to take place on non-traditional game days such as Thursdays for each classification. After discussion, the Executive Board decided that this proposal be presented to the classification caucuses at the Annual Meeting. Mr. Fuhrmann furthered that schools be amenable to move volleyball and soccer to accommodate football scheduling. Mr. Fuhrmann also requested that the Executive Director fine the schools that according to the Handbook rule do not pay the officials on time. He also reported on other key topics from the Regional Director meeting that was held in December.

VARSITY REQUESTS

Mr. Wilson introduced the following school representatives to the board via Zoom. The Executive Board made their introductions as well.

Highwood High School Girls Basketball

Mr. Gondeiro requested that Highwood High School be allowed to participate in Varsity Basketball for the 2026-27 season. Mr. Gondeiro summarized his participation numbers, current and future. Mr.

Patelis made a motion to approve Highwood High School competing in varsity girls' basketball for the 2025-26 season. Mr. McElroy seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Plains High School Football

Mr. Kujala requested a varsity schedule for football. Mr. Kujala summarized his participation numbers, current and future. Mr. Patelis made a motion to allow Plains football to compete at the varsity level next academic year 2026-27. Mr. Harris seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Harrison High School Boys Basketball

Ms. Stephens summarized her boys' basketball participation numbers, current and future. Ms. Triplett made a motion to approve the Harrison boys' basketball varsity schedule for the 2025-26 season; Mr. Harris seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Sheridan High School Volleyball

Mr. Burke summarized his participation numbers, current and future. Mr. McElroy made a motion to approve a varsity schedule for volleyball next academic year 2026-27. Mr. Patelis seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Lone Peak High School Volleyball

Mr. Hannahs summarized his participation numbers, current and future. Mr. Pretty On Top made a motion to approve a varsity schedule in volleyball for the next academic year of 2026-27. Mr. Harris seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Roundup High School Volleyball

Mr. Mayfield summarized his participation numbers, current and future. Mr. McElroy made a motion to approve a varsity schedule in volleyball for the 2026-27 season. Ms. Zentner seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

STATE A BASEBALL TOURNAMENT PLACEMENT

Mr. Wilson reported on the two current bids for State A Baseball being from Polson and Billings Central. Both facilities have limited seating, additionally Pirtz Field in Billings does not allow metal cleats. Polson has bid for this event two years in a row. Mr. Harris motioned granting the State ABC Baseball bid to Polson High School, and Mr. Patelis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

MUSIC AT INDOOR EVENTS

Mr. Michelotti explained that an incident has allowed where schools are playing music during competition in wrestling. The Association is requesting a change to the Rules and Regulations to add language restricting music during live competitions for indoor and outdoor events. Ms. Triplett motioned to approve the language change, and Mr. Mills seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

FINANCES

Mr. Michelotti highlighted the bills paid. Ms. Zentner motioned to approve the bills paid from November 1-December 31, 2025, and Mr. Patelis 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, 2025, 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 3-6, 2026, in Newport Beach, CA. Mr. Michelotti reported on Montana representation on various other National Committees. Mr. Wilson attended the NFHS Football Rules Committee meeting in Indianapolis and Mr. Ryan attended the Volleyball Rules Committees. Mr. Michelotti and Mr. Wilson attended three different regional MASSP meetings as well. Mr. Michelotti will be attending the NFHS Legal Meeting in Indianapolis in April. Mr. Wilson summarized the AIM Higher schedule. Lastly, the AD Mentorship had a late Fall Zoom meeting due to weather, however a Spring meeting will be held in March.

Policy Manual Changes

Mr. Michelotti reported that at the NFHS Winter Meeting, there was discussion about developing a potential AI policy. Discussion was held pertaining to Association use of AI.

New Building

Mr. Michelotti reported on what has been accomplished regarding the new building and what is scheduled to happen later in the year. He also explained the finances involved with moving the Association to a new building.

Technology

Mr. Michelotti reported that there are ongoing bi-weekly Arbiter meetings to fine tune some areas of use for schools, officials and staff.

Miscellaneous

Mr. Michelotti provided positive feedback on two academic appeals that were passed by the executive Board earlier in the year.

CORPORATE SPONSORSHIPS

Mr. Richards reported on the relationships he is trying to build with new sponsors. He also covered championship merchandise sales compared to the 2024-25 fall season. Mr. Michelotti reported that the Association is looking into potential copyright of the new logo.

FALL TOURNAMENT FINANCES

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

OFFICE ACTION

Mr. Michelotti stated 71 hardship waivers have been submitted this year. Of those, 48 have been approved and 23 have been denied. Mr. Michelotti reported there have been no age rule waivers. Mr. Michelotti stated there have been 3 penalties imposed for the year thus far, all of them being self-reported. There were 10 fines and fees so far this year, including postseason ballot non-compliance, expedited appeal fees and late registration for state cross-country.

ACADEMIC APPEAL PROGRESS REPORT

Mr. Michelotti summarized the Academic Appeal Approval report. There were 11 academic hardship appeals that were approved. Of those, 4 students did not maintain the qualifying standard of zero F policy, and they were subsequently ineligible for the remainder of the first semester.

LEGAL

Mr. Michelotti reported on legal costs this fiscal year to December 31, 2025. There is one particular case that is still pending and has resulted in continuing costs.

REPORTS/MISCELLANEOUS

Mr. Michelotti gave a report on the winter rules clinics and that they are all available on Arbiter.

FROSH BASKETBALL JAMBOREE FEEDBACK

Ms. Buehler reported that the jamboree went very well. She expects there will be many of these jamborees next academic year once it becomes available as an accepted format.

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 the following from the November 24, 2025, Executive Board Meeting:

- 1) The Board approved the baseball alignment into two classes, AA and A-B-C along with new conferences for the 2026 baseball season.
- 2) The Board approved new language regarding Wrestling Walk-Up Music for this year.
- 3) The Board approved updated language for the MHSA Media Policy Requirements.
- 4) The Board approved updated policy language regarding safety precautions during MHSA events.
- 5) The Board approved updated language clarifying the MHSA Ejection Policy. Under these new interpretations, a coach or spectator who is ejected must leave the site immediately and should not be present on-site or within sight, sound, or communication for the remainder of that day of competition. A student who is ejected may be allowed to remain on the team bench if they do not create further disturbance. However, officials may require the student to leave, in which case they must be accompanied by an adult.
- 6) The Board approved an exception to the MHSA Practice Rule for fall sports. If a student returns from documented military basic training over the summer, the MHSA Executive Director can reduce the total number of initial practices (no more than half the number of required practices for that sport or activity) at their school. In football, the student athlete will still be required to have at least 3 days of practice with no pads and only helmets.
- 7) The Board approved a new format for sub-varsity basketball jamborees. Schools interested in piloting this format for the 2025–26 season may do so with permission from the MHSA Executive Director.

Mr. Patelis 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.

NEXT EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

The next scheduled Executive Board meeting will be a Regular Meeting, April 20-21, 2026, at the Association offices. The next Annual Meeting, January 18, 2027, will be held in Missoula at the Holiday Inn Downtown.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss, Mr. Patelis made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Mr. Mills seconded, and the motion passed. Mr. Fitzgerald adjourned the meeting at 2:18 pm.