

MCCALL-DONNELLY JT. SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 421
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Special Meeting Work Session Minutes

LOCATION: Heartland High School
DATE: Tuesday, August 18, 2026
TIME: 8:30 AM

Strategic Plan Work Session

Call to Order @ 8:03am

Board Attendance: Trustee Wright, Trustee Zeydel, Trustee McGeorge
Trustee Miller arrived at 8:20am, Trustee Blocker was absent.

Other Attendance: Kim Arrasmith, David Pickard, Superintendent Thomas, Director of Finance Penny Lancaster, Sarah Porter, Jacob Olson, Kevin Skidmore, Bianca Imel, Jason Clay, BJ Sorensen, Val Berg, Alisha Fletcher, Jared Hopkins, Anna Kinney, Grahm Pinard,

Purpose: Determine what remains important, what needs additional focus, and what items may need to be added. Students first, evidence and experience, Disagree with ideas not people.

Review of mission, vision, belief statements and goals

Academic achievement
Communications and collaboration
School Climate
Continuous Improvement

Review of Current District Status

Staffing and Human Resources

- The district successfully hired nine certified staff members for the 2026-2027 school year to replace employees who departed the district.
- District employee housing is currently at capacity
- Newly hired teachers are utilizing the district's daycare benefit
- The district continues to experience high turnover among classified instruction and special education aide positions
- The district is operating within level 1 (safety) and level 2 (operations and feedback) of the high reliability schools framework and will begin implementation of level 3 (curriculum)

Academic Performance

- The district met high state benchmark expectations, resulting in earned autonomy status.
- Superintendent Thomas noted that McCall-Donnelly High School ranks first in Idaho for providing college and career readiness opportunities

- Ongoing discussions at the state level continue regarding civics education

Student Attendance

- Absentee rates remain high throughout the district's schools with the exception of McCall-Donnelly High School, which maintains strong attendance rates due to attendance requirements being tied to graduation credits.
- Chair Wright asked whether reasons for absences are tracked at the elementary and middle school levels. Administration confirmed that a reason is required when absences are entered into PowerSchool.
- Chair Wright asked whether adjusting travel schedules for out-of-district events could improve attendance. Administration indicated this is par of the district's plan to address attendance issues.

Strategic Planning and Enrollment

- McCall-Donnelly High School principal BJ Sorensen noted that recruitment effort are increasingly focused on students and families due to the expanding education options available outside traditional public school.
- Strategic planning continues to support proactive decision-making and helps reduce reactive responses to emerging issues.

Technology and Artificial Intelligence

- Trustee McGeorge asked how technology is being incorporated to improve student learning, noting that Ada school district has implemented policies limiting classroom screen time.
- Superintendent Thomas shared that Los Angeles Unified School District has adopted similar policies to minimize screen time in grades K-5
- Director of Information Technology Kevin Skidmore recommended further clarification on what "incorporating technology to improve learning" means within the districts strategic plan and establishing implementation plans to support district wide adoption.
- Superintendent Thomas noted that the district does not currently have an Artificial Intelligence (AI) policy and that the absence of updated technology policies presents challenges.

Funding and Budget Considerations

- The district anticipates supplemental levy support through FY27 and FY28
- Forst funds have been extended through FY28
- The district lost 2.5 support units in the general fund due to attendance-based funding calculations
- No increase in state general fund funding is anticipated for FY27
- No increase in stabilization funding is expected for FY27
- Future costs associated with the Idaho School District Insurance Benefit Pool remain uncertain

Insurance Pool Concerns

- Trustee McGeorge asked whether the state's increase for employee benefits failed to cover insurance premium increases. Director of Finance Penny Lancaster confirmed the increase did not cover the premiums.
- Director Lancaster noted that the district employs more staff than are funded by the state.
- After districts throughout the state had finalized budgets, the Idaho School District Insurance Benefit Pool announced it was operating at a deficit, requiring participating districts to contribute additional funds to cover premium costs.
- The State Superintendent is working with the insurance pool regarding the situation.
- Director Lancaster explained that leaving the pool carries significant risk because districts may become responsible for large claims during years with high claim activity.
- The district is evaluating alternative options, with assistance from Acrisure, to better understand future insurance strategies.

Fund Balance

- The FY27 budget is currently projected to be unbalanced due to the unexpected insurance payment unless the state provides assistance.
- Trustee McGeorge requested clarification regarding the district's operating reserves, noting that only one month of operating expenses had been available the previous year.
- Director Lancaster reported that the district's financial position has improved and the current fund balances are healthy in comparison.
- The Capital Construction Fund remains strong, with reserves equal to approximately three to four months of operating expenses.

Major Accomplishments

- Completion of the Payette Lakes Middle School expansion project is slated for Fall 2026.
- Bond task process is complete
- Re-establishment of the District Safety Committee
- Successful accreditation of both high schools
- Transition to a district-operated transportation service
- Completion of strategic plan updates
- Maintenance of current Title IX compliance systems
- Implementation of a professional development system

Safety

- The board discussed future goals of the Safety Committee and the importance of community partnerships
- The State of Idaho is scheduled to conduct an audit of district safety efforts in September 2026

Transportation Department

- Bringing transportation services in-house increased insurance related employment costs
- The district anticipates potential savings through transportation-related rebates expected from the state in February 2027.
- Administration noted that the first year of a new department typically includes significant startup expenses that are not expected to recur in future years.

Professional Development

- Donnelly Elementary School Principal and Professional Development Coordinator David Pickard provided an overview of the district's professional development program.
- Principal Pickard explained how the HRS framework provides structure for ongoing improvement efforts
- Friday professional development days have been planned for the entire school year

Parent and Community Feedback

- The district reviewed factors that influence parent decisions to choose public schools including:
 - School Safety
 - Effective responses to bullying
 - Academic rigor and performance
 - Extracurricular programs and athletics
 - Elective course offerings
 - Personalized educational experiences
 - Positive relationships with teachers, counselors, and staff

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- High community support – Move to weakness or opportunity - wavering
- High school board support
- Teachers' association relationship
- Caring Administrators, Faculty & Staff
- Experienced & HQ administrators / staff
- Experienced and HQ faculty / staff
- Strong academic performance
- Student average attendance rate – Move to weakness
- High extracurricular participation
- Ability to Recruit and Retain – Move to weakness - Classified retention, housing full – tenants have 3 years before they have to leave employee housing which limits recruiting for next year and the year after unless someone voluntarily leaves,
- Outstanding Facilities w/ cost savings
- Technology infrastructure – Move to weakness
- Up to date district systems software
- Technology 1v1 – Move to weakness - too many devices

- Learning management system
- Highly Reliable Schools (HRS) processes
- Professional Development
- Budget stability
- Ability to be flexible and resourceful
- Graduation Rate - Added
- Transportation - Added
- Safety - Added
- Reviewing Strategic Plan Annually - Added
- Earned Autonomy - Added

Weaknesses

- Need an updated Strategic Plan – Removed
- Math scores lag English scores – move to opportunity because of the increase in scores, important to look at math standard changes. State says it is a strength for the district.
- ML program growth - Moved to opportunity
- Improve School Safety Plans –moved to strength
- District Transportation Services –moved to strength
- District Food Service Program
- Student social emotional learning
- Executive assistant turnover – moved to opportunity
- General executive staff turnover, system knowledge redundancy, cross training
- Classified/coaches/ advisors Training, support, and pay for retention - Added
- Communication/ Feedback – type of communications systems/points of contact communication, communication toward more than just currently enrolled or families because people without kids in the district also vote. A system that the district can drive not just star news articles - Added
- Social economic gap
- Land to expand – not enough fields to practice when you look at McCall-Donnelly School District programs and city programs. - Added
- Performance Arts building - Added
- Indoor athletic facility
- Technology 1v1 - Added
- Technology infrastructure - Added
- Ability to Recruit and Retain - Added
- Student average attendance rate - Added
- High community support - Added

Opportunities

- District operated Transportation Services – moved to strength
- Supplemental Levy value
- Budget - grants
- HRS Integration into Strategic Plan

- Feedback, communication
- Grow our own initiatives for administrators and teachers
- Career pathways
- Additional district housing units
- Bond payoff timeline
- Board member change overs - Added
- Community Strategic Plan Input - Added
- Executive assistant turnover - Added
- Dedicated HR employee – better experience onboarding, basic HR items that come up from personnel stand point that brings an opportunity to support our current employees better from an HR stand point. - Added
- Integrating MDCAP program at the high school - Added
- AI in Education – how does AI fit- Added
- Math scores lag English scores – take math out and focus on student academic growth instead of specifically continuous improvement in specific subjects. - Added
- Community Partnerships i.e. city – development partnerships to ensure the increased development is funding increased student body pressure. Example is the agreement with tamarack in previous years. - Added
- Student Growth – social emotional, attendance, in addition to academic – need a measurement using the state report card metrics. - Added
- School Safety - Added
- ML Program Growth - Added
- Technology Trainings - Added
- District Committees - Added

Threats

- Supplemental Levy failure/community support – listening to the community - Added
- Federal / State Funding
- Idaho / federal political climate
- State education policy changes
- Cost of land in district
- Insurance costs – health, liability, workers comp - Added
- Enrollment (+/-)
- Board member change overs – moved to opportunity
- Student Safety – moved to opportunities/strengths
- Meeting student behavioral needs – threat to teacher retention, parental satisfaction, student well being – added
- Retention / loss of HQ personnel
- Rural Education Challenges
- Housing policy 3 year limit / housing capacity - added
- Attendance - added
- Substitutes – lack of subs - added
- Paraprofessional classified aides - added
- Technological security breach – capacity issue - added
- AI Policy - added

- AI Direction - added

What matters most this year:

- AI Policy
- Technology infrastructure and security
- Attendance
- Classified Staff and Human Resources
- Communication as in reconnecting with families, community support – Trustee Miller mentioned social media presence because so many people rely on social media for local news and local communications. Director Skidmore noted current website features for automatically sharing the same information between the website and social media sites.
- Safety in general

Adjourn at 11:36am