

Emailed
Eleny B. a.
Eleny Jori Acosta
9.15.25

VARIANCES TO STANDARDS APPLICATION

Renewal Application (three years)

Purpose: ARM 10.55.604(4) "Following the second year of implementation of a variance to standards, the school district shall provide evidence to the Superintendent of Public Instruction that the methods selected by the district implement, meet, or exceed results that could have been achieved under established standards."

DUE DATE:

Second Monday in October

COUNTY: Missoula

DISTRICT: Hellgate Elementary School District

LIST EACH SCHOOL THAT IS REQUESTING THE VARIANCE:

Hellgate Lower grades (0573), Hellgate Primary grades (0863), Hellgate Intermediate(0859)

1. Standard(s) for which a variance is requested, e.g., 10.55.709. If there is a program delivery standard, be sure to list it as well, e.g., 10.55.1801.
10.55.709 (Library Media Services K-12)

2. Attach Board of Trustee meeting minutes that show the Board of Trustees adopted the application for a variance at an official, properly noticed meeting that provides evidence that local school community stakeholders were involved in the consideration and development of the proposed variance to an assurance standard or a section of assurance standards.
(Stakeholder groups include trustees, administrators, teachers, classified school staff, families, community members, and students as applicable.)



3. Describe the renewal variance requested.

Hellgate Elementary is respectfully requesting that the Montana Office of Public Instruction and the Montana Board of Public Education grant the school district a variance to standard 10.55.709 (Library Media Services K-12).

Currently, the school district, for its 1,496 K-8 students, has two certified librarians on staff, both who have their master's degrees, as well as one library paraprofessional who holds a current teaching license and has been providing library services for three years.

Hellgate Elementary does understand that, when looking at the face of standard 10.55.709, our current library staffing arrangement is not what the standard states. However, the school district also believes that Hellgate Elementary is unique compared to other Montana school districts and other school building configurations. Currently, all four educational buildings that house students are located on a 43 acre campus, with most of the campus area being devoted to green space. All four buildings that house children for educational purposes are separated by no more than 100 to 150 yards. Theoretically, if the buildings were connected by a walkway, a breeze way, brick and mortar, Hellgate Elementary would no doubt be in compliance with the Standard 10.55.709.

4. Describe how and why the proposed variance would be:

a. Workable.

Currently, the school district, for its 1,496 K-8 students, has two certified librarians on staff, both who have their master's degrees, as well as one library paraprofessional who holds a current teaching license and has been providing library services for three years.

Hellgate Elementary does understand that, when looking at the face of standard 10.55.709, our current library staffing arrangement is not what the standard states. However, the school district also believes that Hellgate Elementary is unique compared to other Montana school districts and other school building configurations. Currently, all four educational buildings that house students are located on a 43 acre campus, with most of the campus area being devoted to green space. All four buildings that house children for educational purposes are separated by no more than 100 to 150 yards. Theoretically, if the buildings were connected by a walkway, a breeze way, brick and mortar, Hellgate Elementary would no doubt be in compliance with the Standard 10.55.709.

b. Educationally sound.

Hellgate Elementary believes that its current library specialist staffing configuration is educationally sound for those students in grades K through 3rd, which are the grades most impacted by the staffing pattern.

As previously stated, Hellgate Elementary will use quantitative data gathered from a variety of assessments in order to document progress toward meeting measurable objectives in terms of student academic achievement. Assessments such as the Smarter Balanced Assessment and our local assessments such as the NWEA “Measurement of Academic Progress”, DIBELS, MobyMax, Fast Forward program assessments, and the Montana Digital Academy “EdReady” program assessments provide a significant amount of data. In addition, authentic classroom assessments will be utilized to gather the necessary documentation to indicate whether or not the school district is meeting its district measureable goals. In addition, on the qualitative side, the school district will gather necessary data from the administration of the school district’s “Student School Community Perception” survey which will seek to measure student feelings, perceptions, and comfort levels as a student in the school community.

c. Designed to meet or exceed results under established standards.

This variance is designed to meet and exceed the intent of Standard 10.55.709 by ensuring that every Hellgate Elementary student continues to have equitable and meaningful access to high-quality library services, despite the unique campus configuration. With two certified librarians, both holding master’s degrees, and a library paraprofessional with a teaching license, our district is staffed by highly qualified professionals whose combined expertise exceeds the minimum expectations of the standard.

Because all four instructional buildings are located within close proximity on a single 43-acre campus, the library staff is able to operate collaboratively, efficiently, and as a unified team, much like a single building model. This allows for consistent library instruction, individualized student support, and coordinated programming across grade levels. Students not only receive scheduled weekly library access, but also benefit from enriched programming such as book clubs, reading challenges, classroom collaborations, and community outreach.

By leveraging the expertise of our credentialed staff and the cohesion afforded by our campus structure, this variance does not reduce services; instead, it strengthens them. The result is a library program that provides comprehensive, relevant, and innovative opportunities for all 1,496 students which meets the outcomes envisioned under the established standards.



d. Where applicable, aligned with program standards under ARM 10.55.1101 through 10.55.2101.

Separate from the variance request for standard 10.55.709, Hellgate Elementary is in compliance with all other Montana Office of Public Instruction and Montana Board of Public Education program accreditation standards under ARM 10.55.1101 through 10.55.2101. Moreover, the school district is committed to ensuring that its library specialist staffing configuration not diminish the non-negotiable core value that district curriculum be aligned with state content program standards and state content-specific grade level learning progressions.

5. Reflection upon initial variance:

a. Describe the specific measurable objectives that were listed in the initial variance application that demonstrated how the proposed variance was to meet or exceed the results under the current standard(s).

In the initial variance application, Hellgate Elementary identified objectives to demonstrate that its library staffing model would meet or exceed the current standards, including maintaining high academic performance on measures such as Smarter Balanced, NWEA MAP, DIBELS, and EdReady; supporting student engagement and social-emotional growth through the district's non-negotiable principles of equity, daily commitment to all children, and strong student-teacher connections; ensuring effective use of two licensed librarians and one paraprofessional working collaboratively across one campus; and leveraging robust technology to provide equitable access and individualized learning opportunities. Since implementation, these objectives have been met, as evidenced by consistently strong student achievement data, positive engagement and attendance indicators, staff and student feedback confirming the effectiveness of the collaborative staffing model, and continued integration of technology into instruction, all of which affirm that the variance has sustained and enhanced the intent of the accreditation standards.

b. Provide a summary of the evidence or data gathered to demonstrate that the initial variance meets or exceeds results that could have been achieved under the established standard.

Hellgate Elementary School District ensures equitable access to library services for all students. According to the master schedule, 100% of classrooms (K–8) participate in weekly library sessions, guaranteeing consistent instructional time. Circulation records confirm active use, with every grade level demonstrating regular book checkouts and returns. Teacher feedback surveys further validate that library instruction reinforces literacy and supports classroom curriculum. This data demonstrates that our program meets and exceeds established standards, which often provide only limited or optional access. By ensuring that every student receives scheduled library time and by tracking evidence of usage and impact, the district provides a level of service that meets the baseline expectation.

c. After reflection on the initial variance, describe any adjustments that need to be made to meet the specific needs of the students in the school(s).

After reflecting on the initial variance, no major adjustments are needed to ensure equitable access, as all students currently benefit from weekly library time. Moving forward, we will continue to guarantee library access for every student and will focus on enhancements that address evolving student needs. These include keeping our collection current and relevant by updating books regularly, expanding diverse titles to reflect student interests and backgrounds, and maintaining high circulation rates. In addition, our librarians will strengthen community connections through outreach activities, host student book clubs, and collaborate with teachers to align library resources with classroom instruction. Enrichment opportunities such as author visits, reading challenges, and family literacy events will also be expanded. Together, these efforts ensure that our library program not only sustains but grows as a vibrant, student-centered resource that meets the academic and social-emotional needs of all learners.

Required school district signatures:

Board Chair Name: Tom McLaughlin

Board Chair Signature: Tom McLaughlin Date: 9.8.25

Superintendent Name: Molly Blakely

Superintendent Signature: Molly Blakely Date 9.8.25

Email the signed form to:

OPIAccred@mt.gov

Hellgate Elementary Board of Trustees

Regular Meeting September 8, 2025
6:00 p.m.

OPENING

The Board of Trustees of Hellgate Elementary School District #4 met in regular session on Monday, September 8th, 2025. The meeting was held in-person. The meeting was called to order by Board Chairman, Tom McLaughlin. Trustees participating were: Tom McLaughlin, Rich Thornock, Beth Herron, Kallie Gatzemeier, Jacquelyn Ryan, Tom Cook and Scott Rouse. Molly Blakely and District Clerk Justine Reese were present for the meeting. District staff participating included, Erin Ellis (Curriculum Director), Brendan Brown (Special Services Director), Haley Patzner (Building 3 Teacher), Tiffany Hobbs (Principal Building 3), Brent Heist (Principal Building 1), Jamie Courville (Principal Building 4), Julie McCarthy-McLaverty (Principal Building 2), and Kristen Guidoni (HEEA rep. and Band Teacher). Community members in attendance included Austin Rouse (Student), Becky Mangun (Harlow's Transportation liaison), and Rose Kubler (Parent). There were up to 20 total guests/participants in the meeting, in-person.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Rose Kubler presented an appeal to the open enrollment decision after moving out of district this summer, not realizing she needed to complete the out-of-district process. Her child has only ever been a student at Hellgate Elementary, but now lives in the DeSmet boundaries. She questioned why her student would be denied and requested the Trustees allow them to stay at Hellgate. Tom McLaughlin noted the district is strict on out-of-district policy, and any appeals to the decision will need to be addressed by the County Superintendent, Erin Lipkind. Becky Mangun, Harlow's Transportation Liaison, was in attendance to show her support of the Hellgate Trustees and noted the beginning of the school year was going very well.

HEEA

Kristen Guidoni provided a brief update on the beginning of the school year.

RECOGNITION OF STUDENTS AND STAFF

There was no recognition at the meeting.

BOARD CORRESPONDENCE

Trustees reviewed the monthly newsletter from OPI.

REVIEW OF THE MINUTES-REGULAR MEETING 8-11-2025

A motion was made by Scott Rouse to approve the minutes from the August 11th, 2025 regular meeting. There was no discussion on the topic. The motion was seconded by Beth Herron. Voting in favor of the motion were: Tom McLaughlin, Rich Thornock, Kallie Gatzemeier, Beth Herron, Tom Cook, Jacquelyn Ryan, and Scott Rouse. Voting against the motion were none. The motion carried unanimously.

REVIEW OF THE MINUTES-SPECIAL MEETING 8-21-2025

A motion was made by Rich Thornock to approve the minutes from the August 21st, 2025 regular meeting. There was no discussion on the topic. The motion was seconded by Scott Rouse. Voting in favor of the motion were: Tom McLaughlin, Rich Thornock, Kallie Gatzemeier, Beth Herron, Tom Cook, Jacquelyn Ryan, and Scott Rouse. Voting against the motion were none. The motion carried unanimously.

REVIEW OF THE WARRANTS-AUGUST 2025

A motion was made by Tom Cook to approve the August 2025 claims. There were clarifying questions from the Trustees. The motion was seconded by Jacquelyn Ryan. Voting in favor of the motion were Tom McLaughlin, Rich Thornock, Kallie Gatzemeier, Beth Herron, Jacquelyn Ryan, Tom Cook, and Scott Rouse. Voting against the motion were none. The motion carried unanimously.

REVIEW OF BUDGET REPORTS

Trustees reviewed the budget reports for August 2025.

REVIEW OF STUDENT ACTIVITIES

A motion was made by Rich Thornock to approve the August 2025 Student Activities Report. There was no discussion on the item. The motion was seconded by Kallie Gatzemeier. Voting in favor of the motion were: Tom McLaughlin, Rich Thornock, Jacquelyn Ryan, Kallie Gatzemeier, Beth Herron, Tom Cook, and Scott Rouse. Voting against the motion were none. The motion carried unanimously.

RESIGNATION OF CLASSIFIED STAFF CONSIDERATION:

A motion was made by Rich we need a motion to approve the resignation of: Ms. Kristen Matson, school nurse, effective October 15, 2025; Hollee Gossett, paraprofessional, effective August 11, 2025; Kala Rushing, paraprofessional, effective August 8, 2025; Duncan Nauts, custodian, effective August 15, 2025; Layla Mulholland, custodian, effective September 20, 2025 (letters available in official board packet). There were clarifying questions discussed. The motion was seconded by Jacquelyn Ryan. Voting in favor of the motion were: Tom McLaughlin, Rich Thornock, Jacquelyn Ryan, Kallie Gatzemeier, Beth Herron, Tom Cook, and Scott Rouse. Voting against the motion were none. The motion carried unanimously.

CLASSIFIED STAFF HIRING CONSIDERATIONS:

A motion was made by Kallie Gatzemeier to approve the hiring of the following: Ms. Kayla Kallas, school nurse, effective October 8, 2025. There was no discussion on the item. The motion was seconded by Beth Herron. Voting in favor of the motion were: Tom McLaughlin, Rich Thornock, Jacquelyn Ryan, Kallie Gatzemeier, Beth Herron, Tom Cook, and Scott Rouse. Voting against the motion were none. The motion carried unanimously.

CERTIFIED STAFF HIRING CONSIDERATIONS:

A motion was made by Jacquelyn Ryan to approve the hiring of the following: Ms. Shelley Hibbert, long-term maternity substitute teacher, effective October 20, 2025; Ms. Laura Young, long-term substitute, effective October 7, 2025. There was brief discussion on the topic including clarification on significant changes. The motion was seconded by Scott Rouse. Voting in favor of the motion were: Tom McLaughlin, Rich Thornock, Jacquelyn Ryan, Kallie Gatzemeier, Beth Herron, Tom Cook, and Scott Rouse. Voting against the motion were none. The motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL FOR LIBRARY VARIANCE CONSIDERATION:

A motion was made by Rich Thornock for Hellgate Elementary to submit a library variance request for building 2 (grades pre-k -1st), building 1 (grades 2-3), and building 3 (grades 4-6) to the Montana Office of Public Instruction regarding ARM 10.55.709 (Library Media Services K-12). While the district recognizes that its current staffing arrangement does not align exactly with the standard, the district believes that its unique campus structure and staffing plan provide sufficient and high-quality library services to all students. There were clarifying questions addressed. The motion was seconded by Kallie Gatzemeier. Voting in favor of the motion were: Tom McLaughlin, Rich Thornock, Jacquelyn Ryan, Kallie Gatzemeier, Beth Herron, Tom Cook, and Scott Rouse. Voting against the motion were none. The motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF MONTANA AG-CORE PROGRAM COORDINATOR:

A motion was made by Tom Cook to approve the hiring of an Ag-Core Program Coordinator. The Ag-Core Program Coordinator for Hellgate Elementary will support hands-on agricultural education by helping to manage the school garden, will coordinate student learning opportunities, and engage the community in sustainable growing practices. This role bridges classroom instruction with real-world application, fostering environmental stewardship, nutrition awareness, and teamwork among students. There was brief discussion and clarifying questions answered regarding the item. The motion was seconded by Jacquelyn Ryan. Voting in

favor of the motion were: Tom McLaughlin, Rich Thornock, Jacquelyn Ryan, Kallie Gatzemeier, Beth Herron, Tom Cook, and Scott Rouse. Voting against the motion were none. The motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF HIRING THE ATHLETIC DIRECTOR FOR THE 2025-2026 SCHOOL YEAR:

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APPROVAL OF HIRING THE ATHLETIC COACHES FOR FALL SPORTS:

A motion was made by Kallie Gatzemeier to approve the following individuals to be coaches for fall sports (table below). There was brief discussion related to the increased cost in activity fees. The motion was seconded by Rich Thornock. Voting in favor of the motion were: Tom McLaughlin, Rich Thornock, Jacquelyn Ryan, Kallie Gatzemeier, Beth Herron, Tom Cook, and Scott Rouse. Voting against the motion were none. The motion carried unanimously.

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APPROVAL OF EXTRA-CURRICULAR STIPENDS FOR THE 2025-2026 SCHOOL YEAR:

A motion was made by Beth Herron to approve stipends for extra-curricular activities for the 2025-2026 school year (full list available in official board packet). The motion was seconded by Rich Thornock. There was no discussion on the item. Voting in favor of tabling the motion were: Tom McLaughlin, Rich Thornock, Jacquelyn Ryan, Kallie Gatzemeier, Beth Herron, Tom Cook, and Scott Rouse. Voting against the motion were none. The motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF THE 2025-2026 SUBSTITUTE LIST:

A motion was made by Scott Rouse to approve the substitute list for the 2025-2026 school year (full list available in official board packet). The motion was seconded by Jacquelyn Ryan. There was no discussion on the item. Voting in favor of tabling the motion were: Tom McLaughlin, Rich Thornock, Jacquelyn Ryan, Kallie Gatzemeier, Beth Herron, Tom Cook, and Scott Rouse. Voting against the motion were none. The motion carried unanimously.

DISCUSSION ITEMS/ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Enrollment Update: There is a significant increase in 8th grade enrollment, currently the highest enrollment in the middle school Hellgate has seen since 2019/2020.

Reunification Drill: September 29, 2025 will be the Reunification drill. There will be a variety of items to successfully implement the drill, multiple school districts will be observing the drill along with other public entities.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

There were no committee reports at the meeting.

PRINCIPALS' REPORTS

Building 1: Staff are off to a strong start. The new paging system is in place and different sounds are being tested.

Building 2: Teachers report a great start, with positive feedback from Back to School Night the Monday before the start of school. A variety of testing is in process or will begin soon.

Building 3: Ms. Patzner is excited to be in the building, electives are thriving, and Campus Connect with Ms. Thornock has had a very successful beginning.

Building 4: Large class sizes are being managed smoothly, sports are underway, and grounds look excellent thanks to Zach and his team. The Roots and Resilience program is operating without disruption, and cellphone use has not been an issue.

Special Education: Partnering with Partnership Health to help address CSCT needs in the district.

Curriculum: DIBELS testing has begun (special thanks to Building 2), with MAP and MAST testing to follow soon. Thanks to Kelsey for handling rostering.

NEXT MEETING DATE:

The next regular meeting meeting of the Board will be October 13, 2025 at 6:00 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

There was no public comment at this time.

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 6:38 pm.

Tom McLaughlin, Board Chair

Justine Reese, Business Manager/Clerk

Hellgate Elementary Board of Trustees

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