



## 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."

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**DUE DATE:**

Second Monday in October

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**COUNTY:** Gallatin

**DISTRICT:** Three Forks

**LIST EACH SCHOOL THAT IS REQUESTING THE VARIANCE:**

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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.

MCA 10.55.709

(1) The school library shall be housed in a central location, and each school shall have a licensed and endorsed library media specialist at the following ratio:

- (a) .5 FTE for schools with 126-250 students
- (b) 1 FTE for schools with 251-500 students
- (c) 1.5 FTE for schools with 501-1000 students
- (d) 2 FTE for schools with 1001-1500 students
- (e) 2.5 FTE for schools with 1501-2000 students
- (f) 3 FTE for schools with 2001 or more students

(2) Schools of fewer than 126 students shall employ or contract with a licensed and endorsed school library media specialist.

Three Forks Schools consists of an elementary and a high school district, all housed within one campus facility.

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.**

Our enrollment is as follows:

Elementary 354  
Middle School 169  
High School 240  
Total enrollment: 763

Our campus contains two physical libraries:

One library serves 354 elementary students with 1 FTE  
The second library serves a total of 409 middle and high school students, grades 6-12 with an additional 1 FTE

We would like to be allowed our current 2 FTE Library Media Specialists to serve our students. With only two libraries, our 2 FTE are able to adequately staff our programs and serve students. We simply would not have placement or need for another librarian.

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

**a. Workable.**

Our schedule is designed so that both libraries are open the entire day with librarians available for student instruction and support.



**b. Educationally sound.**

The Three Forks Schools have two librarians currently under contract. One librarian has recently passed the praxis for library endorsement. Our elementary librarian held an emergency certificate last year along with multiple years of library experience in another state before coming to Three Forks. The district continued to advertise for a certified library media specialist but has extended another year offer with emergency certification as the elementary librarian is enrolled in coursework to pursue certification.

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

MCA 10.55.709 (c) 1 FTE for schools with 251-500 students  
Our elementary has an enrollment of 354 with 1 FTE  
Our middle / high has an enrollment of 409 with 1 FTE

We do not separate our middle and high school for purposes of staffing and library access.



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

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).

The district only has two physical libraries - one for elementary and one for middle / high. We were able to meet all needs for students with two full-time staff members and plan to continue for the 2025-26 school year.



**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.**

The district only has two physical libraries - one for elementary and one for middle / high. We were able to meet all needs for students with two full-time staff members and plan to continue for the 2025-26 school year.

**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).**

All students had on-going access to the libraries. Both librarians were able to meet all student needs throughout the year with both regularly scheduled sessions and availability for individual support.



**Required school district signatures:**

Board Chair Name: Emily Kennedy

Board Chair Signature: Emily Kennedy Date: 9/16/2025

Superintendent Name: Rhonda Uthlaut

Superintendent Signature: Rhonda Uthlaut Date 9/16/25

**Email the signed form to:**

[OPIAccred@mt.gov](mailto:OPIAccred@mt.gov)

Three Forks Schools  
School Board Meeting  
Tuesday, September 16, 2025  
6:30 pm  
TFS Conference Room  
TFS Website Live Feed  
<https://www.tfschools.com/>

Trustees present: Emily Kennedy, Leana Eastty, Lori Sayers, and Josh Beckett.

Trustees absent: Brooke Pestel.

Staff members participating via remote connection: Rhonda Uthlaut

Staff members present: Steve Fanning, Greg Heys, Bobby Lauver, Alisa Meeks, and Lisa Malmquist.

Also present: Dani Jung, Kourtney Merritt, and Taylor Teske.

Board Chair Emily Kennedy called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

**Pledge**

I. Consent Agenda

- A. Approval of the Order of Business
- B. Approval of August 12, 2025 Regular, August 16, 2025 Special, and August 19, 2025 Regular Board Meeting Minutes

Trustee Josh Beckett made a motion to approve the order of business, moving the PAC update from Public Comment period to Program Updates, and approve the August 12, 2025 Regular, August 16, 2025 Special, and August 19, 2025 Regular Board Meeting Minutes.

Trustee Leana Eastty seconded the motion.

The motion carried, 4-0.

II. Visitors and Patrons

NA

III. Communications and Petitions

NA

IV. Public Comment period (Non agenda items and non personnel related items)

Trustee Josh Beckett spoke about recognizing and thanking all the staff who have been stepping up to do grounds maintenance and prep work on the football field prior to games.

V. Program Updates

A. PAC

Dani Jung gave an update for the Parent Action Council (PAC):

The PAC has been pursuing fundraising efforts to help support teacher requests and student needs. Efforts include outreach to local businesses for donations and upcoming activities such as a homecoming pint night at Sawdust & Steel, selling concessions with donated pulled pork from T-Rex BBQ, and potential youth apparel sales. The PAC has updated their website to be able to accept online contributions. They are planning to participate in the homecoming parade, have an information table at Trick or Treat on Main, host a movie night in October, and may partner with the cross-country team for a fun run. Their goals are to boost interest, increase parent communication, recruit more volunteers, and strengthen school-community connections. The PAC would still like to find a teacher liaison, if any teachers are interested please reach out.

B. FFA

Kourtney Merrit, president, and Taylor Teske, historian, gave an update for the Three Forks Schools FFA chapter:

Two FFA members recently attended a week-long district leadership school in Washington D.C. The FFA members have been busy with fundraising at the Gallatin and Broadwater Fairs, their officer

retreat, and hosting a welcome back BBQ. The Three Forks Schools FFA chapter is growing, they now have 35 active members, 10 of whom were just added, that include middle school and high school students. Upcoming activities include a leadership school in Belgrade this week and the Ruby Valley Invitational the following week.

## VI. Administrator Updates

### A. Superintendent Rhonda Uthlaut

Dr. Uthlaut's report included, but was not limited to, the following:

- Several staff members have stepped up and filled in for grounds and transportation duties as much as possible, which has been greatly appreciated.
- A planning meeting will be held with Build Montana Workforce regarding Three Forks Schools hosting an event in October where they will bring in construction equipment for students to get exposure. Students from other schools will be invited to participate.
- Federal funding for the Title and IDEA grants is available and applications have been submitted.
- The district is still in need of a part-time school psychologist and continuing to accept applications for substitute teachers.
- No bids have been received for a busing service contract. Jeramy Rice has been providing bus driver training at the school, and additional training may be arranged in the future. Matt Ward, the new transportation/grounds director, is completing school bus endorsement training with Mr. Rice. Another bus driver is available two days per week; between her availability and Mr. Ward's training, the district may be able to add another bus route before long.

### B. High School Principal Greg Heys

Mr. Heys' report included, but was not limited to, the following:

- High school student enrollment is holding steady at 240 students, but the numbers have decreased from last year and the senior class is the largest of the high school grade sections.
- Homecoming is scheduled for next week. Preparations are underway, including the election of class officers and homecoming royalty, as well as organizing parade logistics. Additional trailers are still needed to transport students and teams. The parade is scheduled to begin at 2:30 p.m. on Friday.
- The school offers many different classes (56 course sections) through MDTA (Montana Digital Academy) for high school students in subjects that otherwise are not available, such as criminology.
- Through a partnership with some of the Montana colleges/universities, some students are able to take dual enrollment classes and earn college credit.
- Mid-term for the 1st quarter is approaching soon.
- Billi Taylor conducted professional development for staff during the district-wide teacher in-service held on Friday.
- On Sept-18, Mr. Heys, Ms. Felz and Ms. Oehmcke will attend a CTE conference regarding Carl Perkins funding.
- The first fire drill of the school year was conducted successfully.

### C. Elementary Principal Steve Fanning

Mr. Fanning's report included, but was not limited to, the following:

- Math and reading benchmarking is progressing smoothly.
- The sidekick mentor program has been in place for many years at TFS. High school students are typically nominated by staff or they can sign up with approval and serve as "side-kicks" for elementary students. These students serve as mentors and role models, engaging with elementary students through academic support and activities. This semester, approximately 25 high school students are participating as sidekick mentors.
- Staff are actively preparing for the upcoming MAST assessments, including scheduling, coordinating student accommodations, and planning logistics. This is the program's second year, with testing occurring in the fall, winter, and spring. Letters will be sent to parents with information about the assessments and a link to access their student's scores.
- Elementary enrollment is down to 345 students (last Spring the count was 349 students).

**D. IT Director Bobby Lauver**

Mr. Lauver's report included, but was not limited to, the following:

- Yesterday's internet outage was due to damage to a line in Utah. The connection was restored late this morning.
- For security reasons, do not open emails from unknown sources.
- Chromebooks have been assigned to students.
- For any issues with the ROOMS communication platform, please contact the school. Parents and students can use their phone number to log in. Do not change the student email address from the school-assigned account, as this will prevent access. The ROOMS app must be installed on mobile devices to receive notifications.
- An update from the PaperCut software report, including copy and print totals for 2024–2025, was shared.

**E. Middle School Principal & Children's Services Lisa Malmquist**

Ms. Malmquist's report included, but was not limited to, the following:

- Middle school enrollment has been steady at 170 students, with two more students expected to enroll this week.
- Staff are aligning MAST standards with the curriculum and using assessment data for benchmarking for consistency with practices in the elementary school. STAR assessments are also being utilized. A key priority is improving middle school math scores.
- Middle School Counselor, April Waltee is the middle school staff member of the month.
- The middle school sports programs are doing well.

The cell phone policy, which requires middle school students to refrain from having phones in class, has so far been effective.

- The 2YK (two-year kindergarten) is again partnering with HeadStart. HeadStart does a comparison of the height & weight of each student, comparing their measurements from the start and end of the school year. The 2YK program and the school daycare will collaborate with the high school child development classes, providing high school students the opportunity to complete a work-based internship in the daycare.
- There is currently an opening in the daycare for a child aged 2–3 years. The infant spots that have been reserved will soon bring the daycare to full capacity.
- The before-school program is serving an average of 13 elementary students and 12 middle school students. A middle school group has also been added to the afterschool program.

**VII. Financial Report**

**A. Alisa Meeks**

Ms. Meeks' report included, but was not limited to, the following:

- A summary comparing budgeted funds to current expenditures was presented, along with a report of cash balances in each fund for July, reflecting the most recent data provided by the county treasurer.
- Applications have been submitted for 2025-26 Title IA, Title IIA, and IDEA B grants.
- The United Way/21st Century Grant payment for the second half of the Summer Enrichment Program is expected to be received soon.
- The award notices for the 2025-26 REAP awards have been received:
  - the 2025-26 REAP award for the Elementary District is \$34,690
  - the 2025-26 REAP award for the High School District is \$24,510
- The Montana Department of Revenue's Innovative Education Tax Credit program currently has \$84,750 in available tax credits for tax year 2025, due to the invalidation of some previously approved credits. The portal to reserve these credits will open on Tuesday, September 23. To date, two donations totaling \$30,800 have been received for Three Forks Schools through this program. The credits are reserved on a first-come, first-served basis, so claiming the donations is not guaranteed. The Innovative Education Tax Credit program offers several million dollars in tax credits each January.
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- Data collection for the school district's new auditor, Wipfli, LLP, is underway with a target due date of the end of October.

VIII. New Business

- A. Recommendation to approve hire of Matt Ward as Transportation & Grounds Director with salary on Transportation / Grounds Director pay matrix Step 15

Trustee Josh Beckett made a motion to approve hire of Matt Ward as Transportation & Grounds Director with salary on Transportation / Grounds Director pay matrix Step 15.

Trustee Lori Sayers seconded the motion.

The motion carried, 4-0.

- B. Recommendation to approve hire of Monica Sallee for bus route driver and / or activities driver with salary on bus driver pay matrix Step 2

Trustee Josh Beckett made a motion to approve hire of Monica Sallee for bus route driver and / or activities driver with salary on bus driver pay matrix Step 2.

Trustee Lori Sayers seconded the motion.

The motion carried, 4-0.

- C. Recommendation to approve hire of Keeana Dundas as Lead Daycare teacher with salary on Early Childhood Care & Education pay matrix Step 0

Trustee Josh Beckett made a motion to approve hire of Keeana Dundas as Lead Daycare teacher with salary on Early Childhood Care & Education pay matrix Step 0.

Trustee Leana Eastty seconded the motion.

The motion carried, 4-0.

- D. Recommendation to approve Kate Althans as volunteer athletic trainer

Trustee Josh Beckett made a motion to approve Kate Althans as volunteer athletic trainer.

Trustee Lori Sayers seconded the motion.

The motion carried, 4-0.

- E. Recommendation to approve 3.5% increase to Concessions Management stipend

The base pay used for calculating extracurricular stipends listed in the CBA was increased 3.5% for the 2025-26 school year. The concessions manager stipend is not currently among the extracurricular stipends listed in the CBA.

Trustee Josh Beckett made a motion to approve a 3.5% increase to the Concessions Management stipend.

Trustee Lori Sayers seconded the motion.

The motion carried, 4-0.

- F. Recommendation to approve contract for special education OT services with Mariah Igo for school year 2025-26

Trustee Lori Sayers made a motion to approve the contract for special education OT services with Mariah Igo for school year 2025-26.

Trustee Josh Beckett seconded the motion.

The motion carried, 4-0.

- G. Recommendation to approve Coaches, Advisors, Student Employees, After School Staff, and Substitutes for 2025-26 Attachment A

Trustee Leana Eastty made a motion to approve Coaches, Advisors, Student Employees, After School Staff, and Substitutes for 2025-26 Attachment A.

Trustee Josh Beckett seconded the motion.

The motion carried, 4-0.

- H. Discussion & Recommendation to increase Activity Driver hourly pay

Dr. Uthlaut shared information regarding what some of the surrounding school districts offer for activity driver pay and recommended an increase of approximately \$20/hour flat rate. Activity driver pay comes from the general funds, athletic and activity budgets. Discussion occurred among trustees and school admin.

Trustee Lori Sayers made a motion to increase Activity Driver hourly pay to \$20.50.  
Trustee Leana Eastty seconded the motion.  
The motion carried, 4-0.

I. Recommendation to approve library variance for purposes of Accreditation  
Trustee Josh Beckett made a motion to approve the library variance for purposes of Accreditation.  
Trustee Leana Eastty seconded the motion.  
The motion carried, 4-0.

J. Recommendation to approve first reading of policies:

1. Policy 1009FE Recruitment and Retention
2. Policy 1015FE Personalized Learning Opportunities
3. Policy 2050 Innovative Student Instruction
4. Policy 2150 Suicide Awareness and Prevention
5. Policy 2158 Parent and Family Engagement and Educational Involvement
6. Policy 2334 Release Time for Religious Instruction
7. Policy 2335 Health Enhancement
8. Policy 2450 Indian Education for All
9. Policy 2600 Work Based Learning
10. Policy 3110 Entrance Placement and Transfer
11. Policy 3121 Enrollment and Attendance Records
12. Policy 3310 Student Discipline
13. Policy 3650 Montana Pupil Online Personal Information Protection
14. Policy 5255 Disciplinary Action

A short overview/synopsis of the policy changes was shared and discussed.

Trustee Leana Eastty made a motion to approve the first reading of policies 1009FE, 1015FE, 2050, 2150, 2158, 2334, 2335, 2450, 2600, 3110, 3121, 3310, 3650, and 5255.  
Trustee Lori Sayers seconded the motion.  
The motion carried, 4-0.

K. Recommendation to approve TF resident students attending out of district schools  
Trustee Josh Beckett made a motion to approve TF resident students attending out of district schools.  
Trustee Leana Eastty seconded the motion.  
The motion carried, 4-0.

IX. Approval of Claims  
A. Ratification of August Claims  
Trustee Lori Sayers made a motion to approve the ratification of the August Claims.  
Trustee Leana Eastty seconded the motion.  
The motion carried, 4-0.

X. Adjournment  
Trustee Lori Sayers made a motion to adjourn.  
Trustee Josh Beckett seconded the motion.  
The motion carried, 4-0.

The meeting adjourned at 7:46 pm.

Emily Kennedy  
Three Forks School District Board Chair

10/21/2025

Date

Maria Meek  
Three Forks School District Clerk

10/21/25

Date