



Great Falls Public Schools

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September 1, 2023

Cascade County Commissioners
Chairperson Rae Grulkowski
Commissioner Joe Briggs
Commissioner James Larsen

325 2nd Avenue North
Great Falls, MT 59401

Dear Cascade County Commissioners,

I hope this letter finds you well. We are writing on behalf of Great Falls Public Schools to formally request that the duties of the Cascade County Elections Office be transferred to the jurisdiction of the Cascade County Commissioners. This request is made due to the numerous issues and concerns that have arisen in recent elections, particularly the Great Falls Public Schools trustee election held in May of 2023.

The election process is a cornerstone of our democratic system, and it is imperative that it functions smoothly and transparently. However, during the school board election, several significant problems emerged that raised serious doubts about the competence and effectiveness of the current Elections Office management.

One of the most pressing issues was and continues to be the breakdown in communication between the Election Administrator, Sandra Merchant, and District personnel. Despite numerous attempts to initiate contact via email, we received little to no response or follow-up. This lack of communication hindered the District's ability to ensure a fair and efficient election process. Consequently, we were forced to involve legal counsel to address various matters including the certification of election results, leading to an unnecessary escalation of costs. These additional costs exceeded \$17,350.

Moreover, the Elections Office exhibited a complete lack of cooperation with the District's requests and needs. For instance, our proposal for a Mail Ballot Election was denied, citing prohibitive costs. It is important to note that the District bears the entire expense of the election. This denial not only disregarded the District's financial obligations, but also did not follow the request of the Trustees who support a Mail Ballot Election because it is cost efficient and allows the most voters the opportunity to receive a ballot and vote in the election. In 2008, the District was asked by the County to implement the Mail Ballot process to save money. School elections have been held via mail ballot since that date. The District believes in accessibility and participation in our school elections.

Additionally, the unresponsiveness continued as the District requested information about the election which would help clarify the questions the Board had as they certified the election results. This correspondence has been included for your convenience. The list of volunteers who assisted in the election process was a part of that request because it is important to the school district to thank the people who aided in the school election. Despite repeated inquiries, we have yet to receive any of this requested information other than the final bill which was received well after the election.

Furthermore, the logistics of the election itself were marred by significant problems. The absence of ballots at the polling site until well after the polls had opened raised concerns about the efficiency and organization of the Elections Office. Moreover, the alleged failure to send absentee ballots to all eligible voters undermined the integrity of the election and disenfranchised a portion of the electorate.

Given these multiple instances of mismanagement and inefficiency, Great Falls Public Schools believes that transferring the responsibilities of the Elections Office to the Cascade County Commissioners would ensure greater accountability, transparency, and competence in the administration of elections. We are confident that the County Commissioners would prioritize effective communication, collaboration, and fair practices, which are essential to a functioning democracy.

We request that you consider this proposal earnestly and initiate the necessary steps to evaluate the feasibility of such a transition. **Our community deserves an election process that reflects the values of fairness, openness, and accessibility, and we believe that this change would be a positive step toward achieving that goal.**

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We are hopeful that, with your support, we can create a more efficient and responsive election process that serves the best interests of all citizens in Cascade County.

Sincerely,

Gordon Johnson
Chairman, Board of Trustees

Tom Moore
District Superintendent

Brian Patrick
Director of Business Operations

CC: Sandra Merchant, Cascade County Elections Administrator