

MINGUS UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT
1801 East Fir, Cottonwood, AZ 86326

GOVERNING BOARD
MINUTES OF MEETING

Mingus Union High School Library
Thursday, March 12, 2026 6:00 PM

Governing Board:

Ms. Taylor Bell
Ms. Ashley Koepnick
Mr. Austin Babcock
Mr. Frank Nevarez
Mr. Will David

Also Present:

~~Mr. Melody Herne~~ - Superintendent
Kurt Steele – Acting Board Secretary

I. OPENING

1. Call to Order

Meeting called to order at: 6:01 PM

Roll Call

Ms. Taylor Bell - here
Mr. Matthew Chavez - here
Mr. Austin Babcock - here
Mr. Frank Nevarez - here
Mr. Will David – here
All members present

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Moment of Silence

Adoption of Agenda

Motion to adopt the agenda as presented by VP Nevarez and seconded by Member Chavez

Ms. Taylor Bell - Aye
Mr. Matthew Chavez - Yes
Mr. Austin Babcock - Yes
Mr. Frank Nevarez - Yes
Mr. Will David - Yes

Motion passes 5:0

II. STUDENT RECOGNITION

Principal Beery and Superintendent Herne presented the Student recognition awards and employee award

1. Student Recognition

Mingus Academics - Johnny Castro

English & Literature - Lilly Scott
Science - Gianna Hawley
Mathematics- Daniel Etzel
Social Studies - Ali-Jah Woodhouse Physical
Education - Mila Caldwell Foreign Language
- Paige Culver Performing & Visual Arts -
Nicholas Garcia
Career & Technical Education - Carter Lynn AVID -
Xavier Ayala Horton
Male Athlete - Ethan Baird Female
Athlete - McKenna Cook
Victory with Honors - Alijah Bernard
Pursuing Victory With Honors - Ella Little

Senior Spotlight

Isabel McKean

III. EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION

Jennifer Argaez - MUHS District Registrar

IV. REPORTS

The Superintendent and Board Member(s) reports will consist of brief summaries of current events. These reports will be without any discussion or feedback.

1. Superintendent 's Report

Note: The full Superintendent's Report is available on the District website.

RECOGNITIONS

> Marauder for a Day – Feb. 9-17

8th graders came from Cottonwood Community School, Oak Creek School, Mountain View Prep, Dr. Daniel Bright School, Beaver Creek, Clarkdale-Jerome and Homeschool

> Day at the Capital – Feb. 25 - Received AZ Senate recognition and met with Senator Finchem

> Spring Sports – Mar. 3 – four home games in basketball, tennis, softball and baseball. All teams won!

> Ms. Rynnie Scott's Classroom - Classroom-Students are supported in building communication, independence, and confidence while learning skills that can be applied at home, school, and in the community.

> Ms. Zapata's Class Fundraiser – Students worked to make and sell their own soap. Funds raised will help cover the costs of their Fair Day Field Trip.

> ACA Leadership Summit – Jan. 23-25 at GCU

> VACTE Teacher Training Program – Mar. 3-5 - Seven MUHS teacher where a mix of Gold, Silver and Bronze Medals

> Roving Counselor – Mar. 9 to 13. Ms. Garcia took to the Mingus Streets/Hallways to work with students on their 2026-2027 Schedule Planning

UPCOMING EVENTS:

> Spring Break – Mar. 16 to 20

> Baseball – Mar. 17. JV & Varsity vs. Bradshaw Mountain

> Softball – Mar. 23. Vs. Lee Williams

> Summative State and AP Testing including AzSci, ACT, ACTAspire and Advanced Placement

2. Board Member Report(s)

No Board Members reported

V. PRESENTATION AND INFORMATION

1. **Administration Information** --Discussion of Professional Learning Communities and teachers use of data to guide instruction (Staff: Principal Beery)

Principal Beery: Presented to the Board the definition of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) and discussed how it functioned at MUHS. These sessions are held during the late start on Wednesday mornings. By focusing on collective inquiry and action research, PLCs aim to improve teacher effectiveness and boost student achievement. These collaborative teams are at both the department and level. Teachers are looking at data and looking for trends and identifying patterns. They are trying to figure out what they need to change to help students learn better and to improve student outcomes. The four critical question of PLCs:

- > What do we want students to learn?
- > How will we know when each student has acquired the essential knowledge and skills?
- > How will we respond when some students do not learn?
- > How will we extend the learning for students who are already proficient?

2. **Student Council Presentation** - Student Council members will be presenting current Student Body events and future activities. Items Include: Blood Drive, AZ State Conference, and Community in Bloom.

Lilly Scott: Presented the Student council report that included the MUHS Blood Drive that collected 65 units of blood that will impact 145 Arizona patients. They had 16 first-time donors. Next was their attendance at the Arizona Association of Student Councils (AASC) State Conference were they won the Council of Distinction Award for outstanding leadership and excellence. Lastly she talked about the upcoming Community in Bloom, being held March 30th. The event brings local food organizations, MUHS Clubs and businesses to showcase community resources for student and families with the goal of strengthening school-community partnerships.

VI. **Other Information for Reading**

1. **March MUHS Newsletter**

VII. BOARD MEETING MINUTES NOT PREVIOUSLY APPROVED

1. **Meetings**

Motion to accept the February 26, 2026 Work Session Minutes as presented by Member David, seconded by Member Chavez

Ms. Taylor Bell - Aye

Mr. Matthew Chavez - Yes

Mr. Austin Babcock - Yes

Mr. Frank Nevarez - Yes

Mr. Will David - Yes

Motion passed 5:0

VIII. PUBLIC COMMENTS

At the conclusion of the call to the public, Board members may respond to any criticism made by an individual who addressed the Board. Board members may also direct staff to review the concern or request the item be discussed at a future meeting. Board members may not discuss or take legal action on matters raised during this open call to the public. If you have submitted a Request to Speak form, the Board President will call upon you and ask that you **please identify yourself by clearly stating for the record your name and address**. Citizens are asked to restrict their comments to three (3) minutes. Groups wishing to speak should select a spokesperson to represent the view of the group. **(Board President may refrain from reciting this section if no RTS forms have been submitted).**

No Request to Speak forms were presented for this meeting.

IX. ACTION ITEMS - CONSENT

1. Approval of Routine Vouchers

1. Expense

2. Vouchers

Voucher 1031

Voucher 1032

Voucher 1033

Voucher 1034

3. Payroll

Voucher 23

Voucher 24

4. Bookstore Activity

Account Summary as of February 28, 2026

2. Personnel - HR Report

2026 Spring Sports

Stipends PA-1

PA-2

3. Hope Center Report -- 2/1 - 2/27/26

4. Policy Advisory Second Read-- Volume 38, Number 1 Policy Advisory No 960 Policy DIE and DIE-R.

5. Out of State Travel Approval —

1. Eric Banuelos has requested out of state travel to attend the North America International Livestock Exposition in Louisville, KY on November 14, 2026 to November 30, 2026.

2. Eric Banuelos has requested out of state travel to attend the National FFA Convention in Indianapolis, Indiana on October 19, 2026 to October 25, 2026

6. Approval of Certified and Administrative Employment Renewals-Attachments (2)

Contract List Administration FY2027

Contract List Certified Employees FY2027

Motion to approve the Consent agenda minus item 6 from the Consent Agenda by Member Chavez, seconded by President Bell

Ms. Taylor Bell - Aye

Mr. Matthew Chavez – Yes (after abstaining initially)

Mr. Austin Babcock - Yes

Mr. Frank Nevarez - Yes

Mr. Will David – Yes

Motion passes 5:0

Motion to approve the consent agenda item 6 by Member Chavez, and seconded by Member David

Ms. Taylor Bell - Aye

Mr. Matthew Chavez - Abstain

Mr. Austin Babcock - Yes

Mr. Frank Nevarez - Yes

Mr. Will David – Yes

Motion passes 4:1

X. INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. **FY2027 and Beyond** — Enrollment and fiscal forecasting for Mingus Union High School District #4 (Staff: Superintendent Herne).

Superintendent Herne: Started her presentation by reviewing the data from Yavapai County Workforce Summit, the Arizona Department of Health and ABS data. She presented the Demographic Reality slide and showed that in Yavapai County we fall behind the state in some high school, but shoot ahead in the educational areas of “some college” and Associates Degree” and questioned the impact of dual enrollment on those numbers. Next she discussed the birth and death statistics for the County show that the K-12 population is dwindling. Looking at the population of Cottonwood, while the population numbers are increasing, the age group that is making the most difference is aged 65 and above. 10 – 19 year olds, the population that MUHS would be pulling from is about 1142 with Mingus getting approximately 571. Looking at Clarkdale, while its population is increasing the same holds true for the largest age growth at Cottonwood in the 65 and over category and Mingus would be pulling approximately 204 students, for a total of 775 students eligible to attend MUHS. When looking at the historical ADM data that showed enrollment declines. We are seeing a loss of 12% from ninth to tenth grade.

Next, she discussed the process of building the yearly budget. It all starts with the prediction of the Average Daily Membership (ADM). For 2027, we are basing the budget on an ADM of 1100 students and we are waiting on the Arizona State Legislature before we have solid fiscal numbers, which will be after the school year starts. We will be looking at the 10th day enrollment numbers that will give us the exact number of students that make up the ADM. As the school progresses we look at several areas that effect the numbers. These include Student Withdrawals and the reasons behind them. The top four include 10 day attendance drops, movement between brick and mortar schooling to Online/Remote learning (doesn't effect the ADM numbers), students moving out of the area and students having to withdraw to work or take care of family. She then reviewed the numbers in each category for FY 2025 and discussed some interventions to address these causes. And then showed the year to date numbers for FY 2026.

She then discussed what is really in our control to effect these numbers. Some areas are the Strategic Plan with a focus on Student Achievement, Climate and Culture, Engagement and Partnerships and Financial Responsibility. We are looking to increase our advanced placement enrollment, increasing dual enrollment, increasing CTE, along with all the professional development for both certified and classified staff. We are looking for ways to grow alternative education through the Academy and the Dropout Recovery Program. We are also looking for ways to highlight our areas of excellence through our dashboard, social media, newsletters and the ASBA Marketing Toolkit. We also need to market to students that may have never been in the public school system and highlight what we have to offer.

Other areas that we have no control over include changing demographics, the housing market, Yavapai County Workforce, but despite all of these, we are experiencing the same challenges of declining enrollment that districts across the state and the nation are facing. She mentioned some of the Arizona school closures and staffing reductions.

She opened the floor to discussion.

Member Babcock: Asked if the students in the Academy take the ACT. The answer is Yes. And Superintendent Herne elaborated the reason why some students have chosen the Academy over traditional learning and clarified that the Academy now includes all our alternative learning options. (remote, in-person, drop out recovery) and each category has a different calculation for ADM.

Member David: Discussed the impact on affordable housing on our demographics and posited that we cannot capture 100% of the eighth graders coming out of our feeder school and this will lead to the continued decline with the possibility of being below a thousand by 2030. He asked others how we might deal with this. Superintendent Herne replied that these were all relevant point. Camp Verde information was not put into the mix as it would have skewed the data as they are a growing community and affordable housing. Marketing may get some of the kids that never were in the public school system.

President Bell: What we are experiencing is not unique to us or our peer schools. The question of what do we do about it is very crucial. We need to be extremely innovative and focus on continued improvement. The marketing piece is going to be huge as we are a school that offers a great sports program, a world class theatre program and a vast array of extracurricular activities and clubs. These are our competitive edge and we need to make people

aware of it.

Member Navarez: Attended the BOLTS Conference and every school district he interacted asked about how can they become creative in attracting students. We need to promote the really good things that we offer and stay focused.

Member David: If you entice more students to come here, then another school loses. It's a win-lose environment. There will come a time when the Board may have to make the hard decision to close the school to non-enrolled students so they can't accept ESA dollars and will be forced to come to Mingus to use our programs. Dr Herne mentioned that there has always been a gentlemen's agreement that we would not send our buses into Sedona, but we may want to revisit that.

2. MUHS Protocols for Attendance — absenteeism, tardiness, non-academic absences/early departures, etc.(Staff: MUHS Administration).

Principal Beery: In talks with other school principals, they are all worried about the ADM, students moving to online and being more flexible on how they allow their students to do their programs. Everyone is worried about attendance. So let's look at our protocols and procedures to address this issue. He started with reviewing some of the absentee data from 2017 to 2024. He then looked at Arizona trends that were worse than the national averages. He then looked at Mingus data and it showed that we are doing better than the national numbers and we are in line with last year's numbers.

To help deal and track these absents, we rely on our teachers to see a trend first. If the trend continues, we initiate Attendance Protocols that include parent communications, work make up protocols, application of the truancy laws for student under the age of 16, late to class notification, attendance letter mailed at 5 days, 8 days and loss of credit letters after 10 absences and attendance contract for excessive time missed. There is also an appeals process to allow students who have lost credits to submit an appeals form and a letter for consideration of credit restoration.

He then brought up the roots causes of attendance issues. He discussed barriers to attendance (health issues, logistical challenges, socioeconomic factors and family needs). He discussed aversion to school (mental health struggles, bullying & harassment and academic struggles). He also discussed disengagement from school (Lack of belonging and the perception of the value of school). Lastly, he brought up some of the misconception people have (underestimating the impact and how fast they add up and not understanding what makes up an excused absence).

Next he reviewed how Mingus is working to address absences. These include increasing engagement (clubs, athletics, field trips, the Hope Center, newsletters and Site Council). We depend on our relationships with students (future freshman events, open houses, community connections, AVID, parent conferences and counseling).

He then addressed the tardy protocols and went over the expectations and procedures on what make up a tardy. They are focusing on a continuous improvement process that blends key areas such as physical/emotional health & safety, adult/student well-being and emotional competence, belonging, connections & support and academic challenge & engagement. These all contribute to essential relations that lead to positive conditions for learning.

Member David: What do you feel is the number one cause of absenteeism and are we aligning our programs to address this? Principal Beery felt that education is not valued as it once was and we are working with our various programs to give the kids a reason to come but it is so individualized and that make it hard. We also try to show the financial benefits of graduating and going onto college. Superintendent Herne said that it is also relationship building and goal setting. Find something the student is passionate about and work with that. Member David talked about the importance of internship programs and community engagement. Dr Herne tied this into the Strategic Plan and the increase in partnerships and possibly create internships in the community. Member Davis asked what could this Board do and Superintendent Herne brought up the needs in Transportation and the possibility of a Bond to upgrade the aging fleet.

President Bell: Brought up the fact that we are one of the few districts in the area that is not on a four day school week and asked if we looked into these school and if there is a significant difference in their absenteeism. Principal Beery gave antidotal experience from another district he worked in and it really made no difference in that instance.

3. Merit Pay Rubric- presentation and review of the FY2027 DRAFT Merit Pay Rubric (Staff: Superintendent Herne and Merit Pay Focus Group).

Superintendent Herne: Gave some background on the development and creation of the draft Merit Pay rubric that was presented. This rubric was the result of the Board's decision to create a system to help equitably distribute a portion of the annual pay increase that was tied to specific goals. A focus group was formed. There are three key areas of focus: Academic Growth, Achievement & Evaluations and Professional Engagement. She cited the data presented at the beginning of the year and linked it to student proficiency and growth. Growth in this area will be used to determine the tier/points in the Academic Growth area. In the Achievement and Evaluation category, tiers will be directly tied to scores coming out of both the evaluations for both classified and certified staff. On the Engagement area, the focus group wanted to get everyone involved, not just those that participated in Professional Development. The group came up with an Appendix to include other areas and activities that all staff have the opportunity to be involved in and help them to contribute to the school's success. This is the first version of this and we know that it will see changes as we move along and goals change. Thanks to all the members of the focus group for their hard work to come up with this rubric.

Member David: Asked about how they planned to roll this out for the FY2027 year and Superintendent Herne replied that as the focus group was working, they took the information back to their respective groups and solicited feedback. Moving forward, this will go through the Meet & Confer process and we will determine the percentage for regular raise and the percentage of what will be allotted to merit pay.

President Bell: Thanked the focus group for their hard work and agreed with Member David that this will grow and change each and every year and hopefully become more rigorous.

XI. ACTION ITEMS - DISTRICT BUSINESS

Mingus Online Academy, Entity 91320-- The Governing Board will vote to "open" entity 91320 (Staff: Director Gee and Superintendent Herne).

Superintendent Herne: She gave a bit of history where the Board originally closed this entity as advised by the state. Now the state has changed and has suggest that this may be a better way to tract and account for attendance for our online program. We are now requesting that the Board to vote to reopen this entity and will be under the umbrella of the Academy and help us broaden our alternative learning options.

Member David: Asked about how this would affect our ADM. Superintendent Herne said that we do get ADM for these stud but they are counted differently, just like drop out recovery is weighted differently.

Member Babcock: Based on the previous history of close and trying to reopen an entity, are we going to get tied up in the bureaucracy with the state as happened before? Superintendent Herne replied that we will not get tied up this time because the entity is still sitting as open on ADE's books and this was their suggestion.

Motion to open entity 91320 by President Bell, seconded by Member David

Ms. Taylor Bell - Aye

Mr. Matthew Chavez - Yes

Mr. Austin Babcock - Yes

Mr. Frank Nevarez - Yes

Mr. Will David - Yes

Motion passed 5:0

1. **Federal Single Audit, USFR Compliance Questionnaire, and 2025 Comprehensive Financial Report-** Consideration and possible acceptance of the 2025 Single Audit, USFR Compliance Questionnaire, and Comprehensive Financial Report. (Finance Director Lynn Leonard)

For Information Only ---Auditor General High Risk Indicators and Food Service & Budget Updates.

Director Leonard: This is a vote to accept the audit findings and the 2025 Comprehensive Financial report. You are not approving it, but just accepting the reports. In the compliance questionnaire, there were five finding out of 175, which was less than 3% and none of the finding were material or significant. On the Federal grants and fundings audit, there we no deficiencies.

Member David: Asked her to speak about the deficiencies and she detailed them and they had a discussion about them.

After the vote to accept the USFR, Compliance Questionnaire and the Comprehensive Finance report, Director Leonard reviewed the Auditor General's High Risk Indicators and explained why these are not significant for MUHS. She detailed the changes in the budgets and how they effected the operating margin ratios and the fund balances. She then presented the Food Service and Budget updates. The revenues are up over last year, especially with the snack shop and added efficiencies in Food Service. Breakfast and lunch revenues are up slightly also.

Motion to accept the Federal Single Audit, USFR Compliance Questionnaire, and 2025 Comprehensive Financial Report as presented by Member Babcock, seconded by Member Chavez

Ms. Taylor Bell - Aye

Ms. Ashley Koepnick - Yes

Mr. Austin Babcock - Yes

Mr. Frank Nevarez - Yes

Mr. Will David - Yes

Motion passed 5:0

XII. REQUEST FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Member Babcock: Requested a presentation on how we are using the NWEA data on a daily basis. Superintendent Herne said she can email that information.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn the meeting by President Bell, seconded by Vice President Nevarez

Ms. Taylor Bell - Aye

Ms. Ashley Koepnick - Yes

Mr. Austin Babcock - Yes

Mr. Frank Nevarez - Yes

Mr. Will David - Yes

Motion passed 5:0

Meeting adjourned at: 8:21 PM

Board President

Vice President