

MINGUS UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

1801 East Fir, Cottonwood, AZ 86326

GOVERNING BOARD MINUTES OF MEETING

Mingus Union High School Library

Thursday, January 22, 2026, 5:00 PM

**Governing Board:**

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

**Also Present:**

Superintendent Melody Herne  
Board Secretary Tari Garrison

Start time: 5:00

**I. OPENING**

**1. Call to Order**

**2. Roll Call**

President Bell – Here  
Vice President Nevarez- Here  
Member Babcock - Here  
Member David – Here

**3. Pledge of Allegiance**

**4. Moment of Silence**

**5. Adoption of Agenda**

**Motion to adopt the agenda as presented by Member Babcock, and seconded by Vice President Nevarez**

President Bell – Aye  
Vice President Nevarez- Aye  
Member Babcock - Yes  
Member David – Yes

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## II. BOARD MEETING MINUTES NOT PREVIOUSLY APPROVED

**Motion to approve minutes as presented by Member Babcock, and seconded by Vice President Bell**

II.1. Minutes-- January 8, 2026 Regular Meeting

President Bell – Aye

Vice President Nevarez- Aye

Member Babcock - Yes

Member David – Yes

Vote Passes 4-0

## III. 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).**

### Mr. Steve King

Thanked the Board and congratulated them on the approval of the Local Occupational Program (LOP). He shared that his daughters attended Mingus Union High School and recognized Mr. Teague as an influential teacher. Superintendent King shared that he worked in Cottonwood for over 10 years and expressed that “your kids are my kids.” He discussed the process of filling the vacant Board seat, noting his responsibility to either appoint a candidate, to not, or call for a vote. He expressed a desire to appoint a hardworking, prepared, and collegial individual and emphasized the importance of the District’s Strategic Plan as a guiding document. And additionally addressed false statements regarding claims that he appointed a friend to the Board, clarifying the information was untrue. He reported there are 3 applicants for the vacant position and that interviews scheduled for January 26, 2026, would be postponed due to a family emergency, with rescheduling to follow. He thanked the Board and Superintendent Herne for their time and service.

## IV. ACTION ITEMS – CONSENT

IV.1. Donation — Pole Vault Equipment

**Attachments:** (1)

IV.2. Donation — The Academy at Mingus

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**Attachments:** (1)

### IV.3. HR Reports

HR Report

PA-1

PA-2

PA-3

**Attachments:** (4)

### IV.4. Vouchers

Voucher 1024

Voucher 1025

## **Motion to Approve Consent Agenda as presented by Member Babcock, and seconded by Vice President Nevarez**

President Bell – Aye

Vice President Nevarez- Aye

Member Babcock - Yes

Member David – Yes

Vote Passes 4-0

## **V. INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION ITEMS**

### **V.1. Mingus Union High School District Strategic Plan--ASBA will facilitate presenting the Strategic Plan; the Governing Board will give feedback on the plan. (Staff: Superintendent Herne and ASBA Facilitators).**

**Superintendent Herne** provided background on the Strategic Planning process, noting that Phase 0 began with the Governing Board in March 2025. She explained that the Board provided input on the formation of the Core Team, which engaged a broad range of stakeholders and experienced strong participation. The Core Team met regularly and later established multiple Project Teams. Superintendent Herne thanked all participants and stated that the Strategic Plan will guide the District for the next three years.

**Julie Bacon and Sarah James** from the Arizona School Boards Association addressed the Board and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to work with the District. They described ASBA's role as facilitators and emphasized the collaborative nature of the planning process. They noted that the Strategic Plan presented was a draft and intentionally not finalized to incorporate Board input. They further explained that ASBA will support the final document through its communications and graphic design team.

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**Ms. Bacon and Ms. James** stated that the plan reflects the voices of students, parents, staff, and community members and encouraged candid Board feedback.

### **Ms. James**

Reviewed the Strategic Plan draft, including its goals, objectives, and tactics, and requested that questions be held until the conclusion of the presentation unless clarification was needed. She reviewed the mission draft statement, noting that it reflects the unique history and community of Mingus and incorporates feedback provided by the Governing Board. Explained that the Core Team also developed the Portrait of a Graduate characteristics and gathered feedback through surveys of students, staff, and community members. She reported that survey results showed strong agreement with the proposed characteristics. Concluded by reviewing the Areas of Focus, noting that Board recommendations were integrated throughout the plan. She stated that the Core Team identified six focus areas, including Student Achievement, Climate and Culture, Engagement and Partnerships, and Financial Responsibility.



3F6CBEFO.pdf

Please see attached Strategic Plan Presentation.

### **President Bell:**

She thanked staff, teachers, administrators, and partners for the time and effort they put into creating the strategic plan and recognized the hard work involved. She stressed the importance of using meeting time wisely and making sure questions are directed at the right place.

### **Ms. James:**

Explained that much of the upcoming conversation will center on student achievement, which is central to the district's work. She clarified that specific tactics and operational strategies are not fully defined at this stage, as those will be developed later by district leadership and staff.

### **Superintendent Herne:**

Added that the strategic plan will return to the Board in February for approval. She encouraged Board members to ask broad and clarifying questions now, while noting that detailed operational questions will be addressed after approval through collaboration with administrators, leadership teams, and guiding coalitions. She explained that once approved, staff will develop specific implementation strategies.

### **Ms. James:**

Reiterated that a strategic plan should serve as a roadmap rather than a detailed list of every tactic. She explained that educators and professionals will determine the most effective strategies during implementation. These strategies will later be documented, tracked, and reviewed once the plan is approved and adopted.

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**President Bell:**

Invited Board members to begin the discussion and asked if any member would like to start.

**Member David:**

Deferred to other Board members to begin the discussion.

**Vice President Navarez:**

Referred to Focus Area One on student achievement. He noted the importance of understanding both formal data and the day-to-day data teachers collect in classrooms. He asked how classroom-level data and teacher effort are accounted for alongside benchmark and standardized assessments.

**Ms. James:**

Explained that classroom-level data is a key component of the plan, particularly through teacher collaboration and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). She stated that teachers use formative assessments to track progress and document instructional decisions. She emphasized that classroom data provides meaningful insight into student success beyond standardized test scores.

**Superintendent Herne:**

Expanded on the explanation, noting that while benchmark and summative data are reviewed multiple times per year, classroom data is continuously analyzed by teachers. She described how PLCs regularly review formative assessments, quizzes, and unit assessments to adjust instruction and support student growth. She emphasized that this ongoing data work strengthens overall student outcomes.

**Board Member Babcock:**

Asked whether each strategy or tactic would include measurable goals or evaluations to determine effectiveness.

**Ms. James:**

Responded that each tactic will include defined data points and tracking methods. She explained that updates will be provided to the Board showing progress, documentation, and growth related to each tactic.

**Superintendent Herne:**

Confirmed that the plan recognizes the importance of classroom-level data and that evaluation measures will be developed by the Superintendent Herne and staff during implementation.

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### **Ms. Bacon:**

Emphasized the importance of evaluation across all strategies, noting that each action should include a method to assess whether it is effective.

### **President Bell:**

Asked about the ongoing role of the consulting group after the plan is approved and what checkpoints or follow-up involvement might look like.

### **Ms. Bacon:**

Explained Stage Six/Stage Seven involve implementation and monitoring, which the district may choose to complete independently or with continued external support. She noted the value of outside accountability to help maintain focus during implementation.

### **President Bell:**

Asked whether there were recurring themes or priorities that emerged across the various focus groups during the planning process.

### **Ms. James:**

Shared that families, students, and community members strongly emphasized the importance of maintaining broad opportunities beyond academics, including programs such as CTE and the arts. She stated that while academic excellence remains a priority, stakeholders value the experiences that help students find engagement, purpose, and connection to school.

### **Superintendent Herne:**

Added that student voice played a significant role in the planning process. She shared that students advocated for internships, enrichment opportunities, life skills education, college and career readiness, and greater scheduling flexibility. She noted that student feedback directly influenced several priorities reflected in the strategic plan.

### **Ms. James**

Shared that the planning process was meaningful and led to useful strategies. She explained that a group of educators, staff, students, and community members worked together and provided helpful input, even though scheduling was difficult. She noted that the process took time, but the result is a plan created by people who care about the district. She added that the student focus group conversations were especially important and helped shape the plan.

**President bell turned it over to any one from the Core Team to speak.**

**Principal Beery**

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One theme that stood out to me was the strong desire to improve community outreach. Many people don't fully understand everything happening at our school. Often, community perception is limited to social media posts or athletic events, while the countless systems, programs, and opportunities supporting students go unseen. There is a clear desire to better communicate the full scope of the work being done for our students.

### **Ms. Hernandez**

Building on the community discussion, a recurring theme was service. Parents, students, and staff expressed a strong desire for our students to give back to the community. The goal is to prepare students not only academically, but as contributing members of the Verde Valley—students who can remain here, serve here, and enrich this community. That message came through consistently.

### **President Bell**

Looking ahead, this plan spans 2026–2029, but some initiatives may extend beyond that. Since this is our district's first strategic plan, what is typically seen in terms of revisiting or revising a plan? Do districts usually revise existing plans, or do they start fresh after a few years?

### **Ms. James**

This plan provides a strong foundation. Over time, certain focus areas may no longer need to be elevated, while others may emerge as priorities. The governing board uses this plan as its "north star," monitoring progress and data throughout the cycle. Adjustments can be made, objectives refined, targets increased, or strategies modified—without rebuilding the entire plan. The mission and vision remain stable, allowing the work to evolve seamlessly into future cycles.

### **Superintendent Herne**

This is a living document. We will continuously review data and progress. In some cases, objectives may be completed early, allowing us to introduce new initiatives. In my experience, districts do not rebuild strategic plans entirely; they refine and adjust them. That refinement is often when external facilitators are brought back in to support the process.

### **President Bell**

I value the involvement of a third party for that reason. It's easy to become deeply focused on initiatives and lose perspective. I would also like to see the strategic plan referenced regularly on-board agendas clearly connecting agenda items to specific goals—so we stay aligned and track progress consistently.

### **Superintendent Herne**

Exactly. The strategic plan helps guide decisions and ensures that agenda items align with agreed-upon priorities. It provides clarity on whether proposals support the district's direction.

### **Member David**

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Regarding Focus Area One and college readiness, the plan references increasing ACT proficiency from 25–30%. Would it be clearer to set a single target rather than a range?

### **Superintendent Herne**

Currently, 18% of students meet ACT benchmarks. Based on historical data and growth trends, we set a target of 25–30% over the next three years. More importantly, we aim for 85% of students to demonstrate a year's worth of growth annually, as measured by percentile gains. This approach reflects both proficiency and growth across cohorts.

### **Board Member Babcock**

The goal is to move from 18% to the 25–30% range, correct?

### **Superintendent Herne**

Correct. By focusing on consistent growth, we anticipate long-term increases in overall proficiency.

### **Member David**

I prefer a single target rather than a range. A specific number provides clearer accountability and measurement.

### **Superintendent Herne**

I understand that perspective. However, ACT scores vary across subject areas, and students enter at different levels. Range allows us to reflect those differences while still holding ourselves accountable. Literacy scores tend to be stronger than math, which also factors into how benchmarks are met.

### **President Bell**

I would be open to a specific long-term target supported by tiered, year-by-year goals. That approach provides clarity while acknowledging progress over time.

### **Ms. James**

As we build out the dashboard, you will be able to see progress year by year, what we accomplish in the first year and how that grows over time. One of the strengths of having a strategic plan is alignment. As district goals are set, including the Superintendent Herne goals, everything should connect back to this plan.

### **Member David**

He shared that after reviewing strategic plans from other districts, he noticed a key difference. He felt that this district's plan seemed to stop at the tactics level, while other districts went a step further by translating their plans into additional layers such as teacher councils, assigned teams, and clear implementation structures. He explained that this missing next level was the source of many of his questions. He emphasized that these elements are essential and should be built into the dashboard to show

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growth over time, such as progress from one percentage level to another. which is why some numbers are not currently defined.

### **Superintendent Herne**

What specific number would you like to see reflected in the objective?

### **Ms. James**

We could clearly state a target of either 25% or 30%.

### **Member David**

Exactly. I'm less concerned about which number it is and more concerned that it's specific and measurable.

### **Ms. James**

The current targets align with the Superintendent Herne goals of approximately 6% growth annually, leading toward that 25–30% range. Another option would be to disaggregate the data—for example, targeting 25% growth in ELA and 30% in math—allowing us to track progress more precisely.

### **Member David**

I would be comfortable with that approach. It allows us to analyze the data and clearly see where we're succeeding and where additional support may be needed.

### **Superintendent Herne**

Just remember that when the state reports ACT results, it combines reading, writing, language, and math into a single proficiency score. Along the way, we will bring you detailed, disaggregated data through the dashboard. The single summative score will come later through A–F reporting.

### **Member David**

That makes sense. I've seen dashboards structured this way in other districts. Understanding how the data is compiled helps explain why patience is needed as this rolls out. I'm comfortable with that approach.

### **Ms. Bacon**

Tiered goals are already embedded within the Superintendent Herne's goals, and you'll see the intersection of those goals with the strategic plan. If desired, we could further clarify year-by-year percentage targets, though that can limit flexibility. We may want to clarify the language to reflect that these practices are being refined and institutionalized rather than started from scratch.

### **Member David**

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That's important. This document is also a strategic messaging tool. It should reflect the work already happening and give credit where it's due. The language should communicate that we are building on existing systems, not starting over.

### **Board Member Babcock**

I had a question about Objective 1.1.9. Why does the incentive program not begin until 2028?

### **Superintendent Herne**

We want to ensure we reach our ACT proficiency targets first using 30% as the benchmark. We have begun discussing incentives and engaging students, but 2028 is when the program would be fully launched, institutionalized, and communicated broadly. That's when it becomes a formal, district-wide initiative.

### **Member David**

From a dashboard perspective, I would want to see Objective 1.1.9 tracked over time, with notes indicating progress and trends. That way, when we reach 2028, we are not scrambling but already well-prepared.

### **Ms. Bacon**

That really highlights the importance of using precise, intentional verbs throughout the plan.

### **Ms. James**

She emphasized that one benefit of having a strategic plan is that district and Superintendent Herne's goals are aligned and connected to the plan. She noted that goals will not be arbitrary, but instead tied to specific focus areas, such as academic achievement. For example, measurable growth targets, such as ACT performance.

### **Member David**

He noted that many districts included a clearly defined next layer that translated the strategic plan into actionable components. He stated that this next layer is essential and should be nested within the district dashboard to demonstrate growth over time (e.g., increases from one percentage benchmark to another).

**Superintendent Herne** asked what specific numerical targets Member David would like to see included in the objectives.

**Ms. James** suggested that a target of 25% or 30% could be appropriate.

### **Board Member David**

Responded saying, having a clearly defined specific metric is important.

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### **Ms. James**

Explained that current goals were set at 6% growth per year toward a 90% target, which is why higher numbers were not previously emphasized. She noted that the plan could instead say a 25% or 30% increase in specific areas such as ELA, and that this approach aligns with the district's intended direction.

### **Member David**

Agreed, stating that separating the data by content area would allow for more effective data and help identify areas of strength or concern.

### **Superintendent Herne**

Reminded the Board that the state ultimately combines multiple indicators—ACT reading, writing, language, and math—into a single proficiency score. She noted that while the dashboard will present individual data points, a summative A–F rating will only be available later in the process.

### **Member David**

Stated that he has seen dashboards structured in this manner and expressed comfort with the approach, acknowledging that patience is required given how the data is compiled.

### **Ms. Bacon**

Noted that tiered supports are already incorporated into Superintendent Herne school goals and that intersections between those goals and the strategic plan could be made more explicit. She stated that while including annual percentage targets could limit flexibility, it is something staff could further discuss if the Board desired.

### **Member David**

Emphasized that the document serves not only as a strategic plan but also as a strategic messaging tool. He stated that current language may unintentionally suggest the district starts from the beginning, which does not reflect reality. He recommended stronger action verbs to accurately convey ongoing efforts and progress.

### **Member Babcock**

Asked why **Objective 1.1.9** indicates waiting until 2028 to create a student incentive program.

### **Superintendent Herne**

Explained that while planning and preliminary discussions around incentives are already underway, full implementation is tied to achieving the 30% goal. She stated that 2028 represents the point at which the program would be fully executed, formalized, and communicated broadly through district platforms.

### **Member David**

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Expressed concern about objectives dated several years out, noting the importance of showing progress and trends in the dashboard rather than appearing to delay action. He suggested that the dashboard reflects status, trend direction, and responsible staff, even for long-term objectives.

### **Ms. Bacon**

Agreed that verb choice is critical.

### **Superintendent Herne**

Agreed and suggested revising language to reflect execution of a comprehensive, schoolwide incentive plan by 2028, acknowledging that components will be built and refined over time.

### **Member David**

Shared an example from a prior district where long-term goals were misinterpreted as delayed action, reinforcing the importance of clarity to avoid public perception that progress is being deferred.

Further discussion emphasized the value of dashboard visuals (e.g., color indicators, progress gauges) to clearly communicate progress toward goals.

### **Superintendent Herne**

Stated that staff will review feedback and revise language accordingly. She encouraged Board members to submit specific concerns about wording and clarity so they can be addressed prior to the next review.

**The Board** discussed next steps and agreed that additional time is needed to review the document line by line. It was suggested that upcoming work sessions (2/12/2026) and a regular board meeting (2/26/2026) be used to focus on different sections of the plan.

**Consensus was reached** to continue gathering feedback, revise language for clarity and accuracy, and revisit the strategic plan in upcoming sessions with the goal of approval in March.

**Superintendent Herne** thanked the Board, core team, project teams, and administrators for their continued work and commitment to the strategic planning process, noting the significance of the plan as both a guiding and messaging document.

## **VI. REQUEST FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

None Offered

## **VII. ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion to approve adjournment as presented by President Bell and seconded by Vice President Nevarez**

President Bell – Aye

Vice President Nevarez- Aye

Member Babcock – yes

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Member David – yes

Vote Passes 4-0

End time: 6:54

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