



# Ad Hoc Self-Evaluation Report Recommendations 1, 2, and 3

Helena College University of Montana

Helena, Montana

[www.helenacollege.edu](http://www.helenacollege.edu)

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## Introduction

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Following the Spring 2024 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (EIE) report and site visit, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) issued five recommendations. The Commission requested that Helena College prepare and submit an Ad Hoc Report with a Virtual Visit in Spring 2026 regarding Recommendations 1, 2, and 3. This document provides a narrative overview and supporting evidence of the college's ongoing response to these three recommendations. This is the first report regarding the specified recommendations, though Helena College also submitted an Ad Hoc Report without a Visit in Fall 2025 in response to Recommendation 5.

## Progress on Recommendation 1

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### Recommendation 1

Implement an institutional-level assessment process that informs operational planning, allowing for effective resource allocation to enhance student learning and achievement (2020 Standard(s) 1.B.1)

### Standard(s)

- **2020 Standard(s) 1.B.1** The institution demonstrates a continuous process to assess institutional effectiveness including student learning and achievement and support services. The institution uses an ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning process to inform and refine its effectiveness, assign resources, and improve student learning and achievement.

### Response to Recommendation 1

Work on response to this recommendation began in tandem with the College's work to clarify institutional decision-making structures in response to Recommendation 5, focusing on how the existing structures could be leveraged in support of assessment, planning, and resource allocation. In April 2025, the Dean's Cabinet convened for a half-day planning session focused on the strategic plan, key performance indicators, and assessment of institutional effectiveness. This session resulted in revised key performance indicators and a draft institutional assessment plan, which is being piloted during the 2025-26 academic year.

### Revised Key Performance Indicators

Inspired by [Complete College America's Metrics Tree model](#), the Dean's Cabinet decided to narrow the existing list of more than 20 key performance indicators (KPIs) to six essential indicators of success (these would remain as KPIs), each supported by leading indicators and, when possible, real-time metrics. For the time being, the targets for each of these remain unchanged:

- Enrollment (Annual Average Full Time Equivalent)
- Degrees & Certificates Awarded
- 150% Graduation Rates
- 150% Transfer Rates
- Transfer Success (GPA in first semester following transfer to another MUS institution)
- Employment Rates

The Institutional Development, Effectiveness, and Accreditation Council (IDEA) is currently working to identify the leading indicators and potential real-time metrics for each KPI. These six KPIs will be widely published, with the Director of Institutional Research & Effectiveness prioritizing dashboard development (including disaggregated data and peer comparisons) around them. This effort is discussed in greater detail in the “Progress on Recommendation 3” section.

### Annual Institutional Assessment Plan

While it was obvious that analysis of the KPIs would play an essential part of an institutional-level assessment process, the Dean’s Cabinet brainstormed additional information that would not only help the College evaluate its effectiveness, but would also help with long-term planning and resource allocation in the pursuit of improvements in student learning and achievement. All of this information will be evaluated throughout the year, and again at an institutional assessment and planning day, held in late April each year. Following a robust discussion, the following information sources were identified:

- Progress on strategic goals
- Key performance indicators
- Student learning outcomes assessment results
- Progress on annual plan goals
- Program review recommendations and goals (academic and non-academic)
- Facility and IT needs
- Budget proposals, projections, and recommendations

Each of the items listed above would be reviewed by Cabinet and one other group prior to the assessment and planning day. IDEA Council will review strategic goal progress, key performance indicators, and annual plan goals. Program review recommendations and goals will be reviewed by their respective committees, as will student learning outcomes assessment results. Facilities, IT, and Fiscal services will all provide quarterly updates to both the Campus Coordinating Committee and the Dean’s Cabinet.

With all of this information, Cabinet plans to identify strengths and successes from the current year, and identify priorities for improvement in the next academic year, to be presented at the semi-annual State of the College presentation in May. These priorities should inform annual plans and program reviews, as well as spending and decision-making practices across campus. Cabinet also hopes to use all of the information listed above to develop or update longer-range plans around fiscal stability, building,

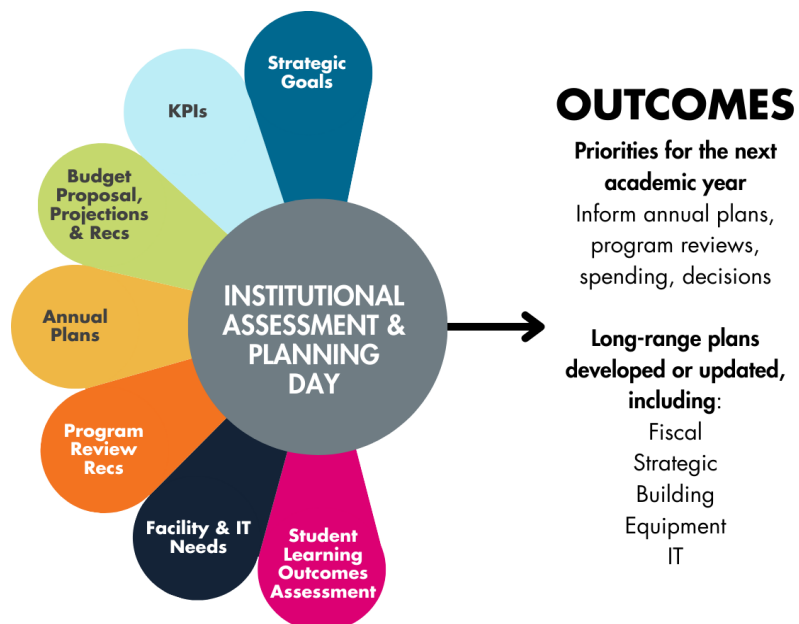


Figure 1. Inputs and Outcomes of Institutional Assessment & Planning Day

equipment, or technology needs, and the overall strategic direction of the college. A graphic illustrating this plan is shown in Figure 1.

The Dean's Cabinet scheduled the institutional assessment activities out for the entire academic year (Appendix A), working around the academic calendar and budgetary deadlines. Time was set aside at the beginning of most weekly Cabinet meetings for discussion of the scheduled topic, and other groups worked deadlines into their meeting schedules as well. Although adjustments have been made to accommodate absences or data availability, the calendar has proven to be a useful tool for ensuring each topic is discussed in a timely manner.

To support the assessment and planning day in April, the Budget Council has developed three-year budget templates to encourage all areas to begin thinking more long-term about their financial resources (Appendix B). Until this year, the annual budget process has been focused on only the upcoming fiscal year, with items too big for the budget being relegated to an informal "maybe next year" or "we should save up for this" list. Over the last few years, the Executive Director of Fiscal Services (Chair of the Budget Council) has been working with individual departments to develop long-term replacement plans or strategies for saving up for expensive needs, but the bigger picture of the college's financial strategies has often lived only with that position and the Dean/CEO. These three-year budget templates will be used to develop a long-term financial strategy for the College, which will ensure we are able to support our students and community with the best available resources. The Budget Council hopes to have three-year budget requests and projections ready for review by Cabinet at the assessment and planning day.

The agenda for the assessment and planning day is still in development, but the general plan includes:

- 1) Establish goals/outcomes for the session
- 2) Review data and budget requests/projections
- 3) Identify institutional-level successes, strengths, challenges, gaps, concerns, risks, and/or opportunities
- 4) Select top 5-7 institutional issues
- 5) Discuss impacts of and needs for addressing each issue
- 6) Develop actions/priorities for next academic year and draft long-range plans.

Once the outcomes from the assessment and planning day are shared with the full campus – in a written summary and a presentation – the Dean's Cabinet will discuss strategies for moving from prioritization and planning to action, making sure to utilize our established governance structures for broad campus-wide involvement. Early in the summer, the Cabinet will also evaluate the effectiveness of this new institutional assessment process and begin planning out the next year of the cycle, making changes where necessary. This first planning day will likely also serve as a springboard for updating the strategic plan, as the current one is set to wrap up in 2027.

## Progress on Recommendation 2

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### Recommendation 2

Expand assessment beyond the course level, to include program and institutional outcomes that evaluate and demonstrate the quality of learning and use the results to inform continuous improvement of student learning outcomes. (2020 Standard(s) 1.C.5;1.C.6,;1.C.7)

### Standards

- **2020 Standard 1.C.5** The institution engages in an effective system of assessment to evaluate the quality of learning in its programs. The institution recognizes the central role of faculty to establish curricula, assess student learning, and improve instructional programs.
- **2020 Standard 1.C.6** Consistent with its mission, the institution establishes and assesses, across all associate and bachelor programs or within a General Education curriculum, institutional learning outcomes and/or core competencies. Examples of such learning outcomes and competencies include, but are not limited to, effective communication skills, global awareness, cultural sensitivity, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and logical thinking, problem solving, and/or information literacy.
- **2020 Standard 1.C.7** The institution uses the results of its assessment efforts to inform academic and learning-support planning and practices to continuously improve student learning outcomes.

### Response to Recommendation 2

#### Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee

The [Student Learning Outcomes Assessment \(SLOA\) Committee](#) was formed in September 2024 to support development and monitoring of assessment of student learning at the course, program, and institution level. The committee is chaired by the Director of Institutional Research & Effectiveness, and is composed of three faculty (one each from a trades program, technical program, and general education), the Director of eLearning & Faculty Development, and one academic director.

In its first year, the committee spent time gaining an understanding of accreditation requirements and best practices in learning outcomes assessment, as well as discussing the current levels of assessment – and attitudes around it – across the institution. A few priorities emerged from the early meetings:

- Identifying a new platform for carrying out learning outcomes assessment
- Refining expectations around assessment of course learning outcomes (CLOs)
- Developing procedures and expectations around program learning outcomes (PLO) assessment
- Updating institutional learning outcomes (ILOs) prior to establishing a process for assessment at that level (more on this in the next sub-section)

#### New Assessment Platform

Since 2018, the college has utilized a locally-developed database for assessment and curriculum management. This database was created and is maintained by the college's lone full-time Information Technology & Programming instructor, with the Director of Institutional Research & Effectiveness and the Academic Standards & Curriculum Review Committee (ASCRC) providing input into functionality. The

database was instrumental in helping establish an integrated process for assessing learning at the course, program, and institutional level, but the college has struggled to effectively use the data that the database was designed to collect. Curriculum mapping stalled after initial efforts to complete the task, making it very difficult to evaluate student learning at the program and institutional level. Faculty experienced frustration with the need to enter information in multiple places, causing participation for many to be inconsistent.

As the college works to improve assessment practices, especially at the program and institutional level, the SLOA Committee began considering options to expand – and sustain – the college’s assessment capabilities by investing in a commercial platform. The committee’s work coincided with the Montana University System’s (MUS) efforts to secure a statewide contract with an assessment platform for all interested MUS institutions. The SLOA Committee opted to join the statewide contract with eLumen Insights for Canvas Outcomes. Insights is integrated with the college’s learning management system (LMS), which allows faculty to assess student learning outcomes directly in their courses, and access aggregated, longitudinal results by clicking a link in the Canvas navigation menu. The committee also liked the intuitive curriculum mapping interface and the prospect of working with colleagues across the state.

Implementation began in the summer of 2025. All full-time faculty have been tasked with ensuring their curriculum maps are up to date before they begin carrying out assessment within Canvas. Faculty will continue to map all course outcomes to program and institutional outcomes, so that SLO assessment results can be used to evaluate learning at the program and institutional level. These efforts are complimented by a division-wide effort to clean up the General Education curriculum within the database. The SLOA Committee is looking forward to having all curriculum maps completed by the end of the spring 2026 semester, which will be a notable step toward meaningful assessment at all levels. A sample curriculum map is in Appendix C.

The SLOA Committee has chosen to roll out the new assessment processes in phases. Once faculty members begin using Canvas and Insights for assessment, they are no longer expected to record their results in the Assessment Database. Seven faculty volunteered to pilot the work in the fall of 2025, and an additional seven joined them to expand the pilot in the spring 2026 semester. All full-time faculty will be asked to assess all CLOs in at least one course in the fall 2026 semester, and adjunct instructors may be included as early as spring 2027.

The pilot group includes twelve full-time faculty and two adjunct instructors from three divisions. Feedback from the fall pilot group was generally positive, though a bit mixed. Many felt the workflow in Canvas and Insights was easier than in the current Assessment Database, while others felt the new platform requires more time. All appreciated the quick and easy access to assessment data. When asked what changes they would make for the future, one faculty indicated they would change some assignments to better capture outcome achievement, another is planning to be more intentional about the alignment of assignments to outcomes, and a third is creating more hands-on, practical projects for students. Four of the five faculty indicated they are willing to share their process in a future faculty training session, a sign they will likely be valuable champions of assessment going forward.

The learning outcome achievement data provided by Insights is currently only available within the platform, and only for people with specific roles, a source of frustration for many so far. The Director of Institutional Research & Effectiveness recently received access to the company’s data lake, and plans to explore options for creating more flexible, comprehensive, and publicly-available reports to supplement what exists within

the platform. Academic directors and the SLOA Committee hope to have information about the degree to which assessment is being carried out (to better identify instructors that may need support), and the ability to drill down from institutional or program outcomes to course outcomes. There is also a long-term plan to connect learning outcome achievement to student demographic data.

Discussions continue in the SLOA Committee regarding campus-wide expectations for CLO assessment and a formal process for assessing student learning at the program level. PLO assessment will include not just documentation of the degree to which students achieve the learning outcomes, but it will also ask faculty and academic directors to reflect on the results, identify areas for improvement and follow up on proposed changes. The committee is looking to identify an assessment process that is not only effective and flexible, but is also feasible within existing faculty and academic director responsibilities. Much of the conversations center around faculty roles versus academic director responsibilities, as well as how frequently assessment should be conducted, documented, and evaluated. The committee will evaluate feedback from faculty currently piloting the Insights platform to help make these decisions.

Once a process is established, the SLOA committee plans to roll it out gradually, beginning with two to three programs and adjusting as necessary. The SLOA Committee has identified a need to work more closely with the Academic Standards and Curriculum Review Committee to better integrate curriculum management and assessment procedures. For example, both groups have begun exploring the possibility of requiring curriculum mapping to be done prior to ASCRC approval. This would help ASCRC better understand proposed changes or additions to courses and programs, and would ensure curriculum maps remain up to date.

### Institutional Learning Outcomes Update

Helena College approved a set of institutional competencies in 2019. Faculty experienced challenges in mapping to the institutional competencies, indicating the competencies were often too narrow for the broader program outcomes to align to. The competencies also did not reflect the full scope of knowledge, skills, and abilities the college expects all graduates to demonstrate.

For these reasons, the SLOA Committee and the Dean's Cabinet convened a task force to update the institutional competencies/learning outcomes during the 2025-26 academic year. Chaired by the Director of Institutional Research & Effectiveness, membership includes one academic director, one non-academic director, one classified staff, and one faculty each from a general education, trades, and technical program. These faculty are also members of the Executive Council of Faculty Senate and ASCRC.

The ILO Task Force has carried out its charge with enthusiasm, efficiency, and thoughtful consideration of not only the college's mission and vision, but also of the diversity of programs offered at our institution. The group discussed the shortcomings of the existing institutional competencies, reviewed examples from other two-year colleges (both within the state of Montana and nationally), and brainstormed a list terms that could be included in a new set of ILOs. All faculty, staff, and directors were asked to select their top five priorities for graduating students. The most popular terms were easily grouped into four core concepts: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and competence. Each concept is accompanied by a description that fully articulates the learning that is central to the academic, professional, and personal success of all Helena College graduates.

The first draft was presented in an all-faculty meeting and later emailed to all employees, along with a survey to gauge approval and collect feedback. The response was overwhelmingly supportive of the draft outcomes. Twenty-two employees responded, representing staff and faculty from academics and student support services. The most relevant feedback was incorporated into the second draft, which was emailed to students, faculty, staff, and directors for final comments or questions. Receiving only a handful of emails in support of the second draft, the Institutional Learning Outcomes Task Force approved the new ILOs in mid-February, 2026.

The final version of the new institutional learning outcomes (Appendix D) was approved by the Academic Standards & Curriculum Review Committee in late February and by the Dean's Cabinet in early March. By mid-March, it is expected that Faculty Senate, Associated Students of Helena College, and the Campus Coordinating Committee will vote to endorse the ILOs, demonstrating broad campus support for these outcomes.

Over the summer, the Director of Institutional Research & Effectiveness will work with appropriate leaders to widely distribute the new institutional learning outcomes. They will be published on the college website and in the catalog. Faculty will map their course outcomes to the ILOs. In academic year 2026-27, the SLOA Committee will begin discussing expectations and strategies for programs to assess the new institutional learning outcomes within Canvas and Insights. Another long-term goal is to identify ways that student services and academic support units can contribute to student achievement of the institutional learning outcomes, and assess their effectiveness in doing so.

## Progress on Recommendation 3

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### Recommendation 3

Widely publish identified disaggregated indicators of student achievement and those of peer institutions, and demonstrate the use of the data to inform planning, decision-making and allocation of resources. (2020 Standard(s) 1.D.2;1.D.3)

### Standards

- **2020 Standard 1.D.2** Consistent with its mission and in the context of and in comparison with regional and national peer institutions, the institution establishes and shares widely a set of indicators for student achievement including, but not limited to, persistence, completion, retention, and postgraduation success. Such indicators of student achievement should be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, first generations college student, and any other institutionally meaningful categories that may help promote student achievement and close barriers to academic excellence and success (equity gaps).
- **2020 Standard 1.D.3** The institution's disaggregated indicators of student achievement should be widely published and available on the institution's website. Such disaggregated indicators should be aligned with meaningful, institutionally identified indicators benchmarked against indicators for peer institutions at the regional and national levels and used for continuous improvement to inform planning, decision making, and allocation of resources.

### Response to Recommendation 3

Progress on this recommendation has been tightly connected to progress on Recommendation 1. As discussed above, the college has developed an institutional assessment and planning cycle, with six key performance indicators (all related to student achievement) serving as one of the primary sources of data for the work. The Director of Institutional Research & Effectiveness has prioritized development of public-facing dashboards around these KPIs, each containing disaggregated data and peer comparisons, when available. Current performance on the six KPIs has been added to the [Strategic Planning page](#) of the Helena College website. Links to dashboards and additional data sources are now found on the [Institutional Research & Effectiveness](#) home page.

As part of the institutional assessment and planning cycle, both IDEA Council and the Dean's Cabinet explore the information in the dashboards to identify any relevant trends or opportunities for improvement, with a focus on identifying metrics below the target, equity gaps, notable differences from peer institutions. Discussions are recorded in the meeting minutes and will be compiled ahead of the assessment and planning day.

To date, dashboards have been developed for [census enrollment](#) and [annual degrees and certificates awarded](#) with plans to build dashboards focused on retention, graduation, and transfer in the spring. Because the dashboards are new, the discussions in IDEA and Dean's Cabinet have involved a significant amount of education about the data presented, as well as identifying improvements to make to the dashboards. Review of the fall census enrollment data prompted discussions about an increase in non-degree students, a decrease in Pell Grant recipients, changes in gender distribution, and the average credits per degree-seeking student dropping below 15 credits, the unofficial threshold for timely degree completion ([IDEA Council](#)

[minutes, October 13, 2025](#) and [Dean's Cabinet minutes, October 20, 2025](#)). The Dean's Cabinet and IDEA Council acknowledged that improvements in advising and processes in the Registrar's office that have led to an increase in degrees and certificates being awarded, with the hope that the upcoming implementation of DegreeWorks will further improve degree audit processes. The Dean's Cabinet also noted that many national peer institutions award a large number of short-term certificates, or micro-credentials, supporting recent trends around shortening the time it takes to enter the workforce. Recent changes at the Montana University System have made it easier for institutions to offer micro-credentials, and Helena College is in the early stages of developing a handful of credentials based largely on existing programs ([August 4, 2025 minutes](#)).

Outside of the assessment and planning cycle, disaggregated and peer comparison data has been incorporated into a variety of projects across campus:

- A **program profile** dashboard presents indicators of student success disaggregated by academic program for use in academic program review, allowing faculty to see how their students are doing in comparison to similar programs on campus. Due to small population sizes, this data is only available to faculty and academic directors, though selected views from the database can be seen in Appendix E. Peer data is challenging to obtain at the program level, though faculty are becoming increasingly more interested in it. An Automotive Technology instructor spent the 2024-25 academic year visiting the other programs in the state and comparing enrollment and graduation numbers. While this occurred outside of the program review year, the time spent learning about other automotive programs in the state provided valuable perspectives regarding the program's strengths and how best to leverage or build on those. Other trades programs are planning similar visits in the near future.
- The K-12 Partnerships team requested a dashboard focused on **dual enrollment students**, which they are using to better understand the students they are serving and identify opportunities for growth or improvement. Information about participation rates at different schools has informed advising approaches, such as implementing group advising at appropriate schools, which helped streamline a heavy advising load. The data also helps the Director determine how best to connect high schools to various supports. This dashboard was developed for internal use, though a selection of views is available in Appendix F. A public-facing dashboard is currently in development.
- The Executive Director of Enrollment Services analyzed disaggregated **on-time graduation rates** for an institutional innovation project funded by the Office of Commissioner of Higher Education (see Appendix G). Students in online courses and programs in the General Education division were identified as a group needing additional support. The project will involve developing an orientation targeted to students taking online asynchronous classes, advisors reaching out to online students in the first week of class, and providing professional development for all instructors interested in earning a Certification in Effective Teaching from the Association of College and University Educators (ACUE), emphasizing strategies for online courses. Work on this project aligns with a renewed interest across campus in monitoring and improving online student achievement. The college hopes to add online students as a category for disaggregated data analysis in the next year.
- The college has contracted with Trivium to develop a **financial contribution dashboard**, which will help the Dean's Cabinet and Budget Council to understand how each academic program on campus is bringing in and spending funds. This information will inform the institutional assessment and planning efforts, as well as academic program review.

The Dean's Cabinet is looking forward to the opportunity to evaluate its indicators of student achievement in the context of long-term planning and resource allocation. Final versions of dashboards will be made available to all employees before the end of the semester, and public-facing data (with counts smaller than 10 suppressed) will be published in the spring or summer. Once the data is more widely available, the Director of Institutional Research & Effectiveness will educate the campus about the data and encourage employees to use it responsibly. Potential exists for disaggregated and benchmarked indicators of student success to be utilized more frequently in annual plans, program reviews, resource requests, grant applications, and decision-making at many levels.

## Conclusion

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Helena College has made substantial progress in responding to Recommendations 1, 2, and 3 from the Spring 2024 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness. The work underway has helped many on campus to see the value of institutional planning, systematic assessment practices, and the use of data to inform decision-making. Development of an institutional planning and assessment cycle is supporting long-term planning efforts by the Budget Council and those who have seen the dashboards are grateful to have so much information readily available. While a campus-wide process for assessing program and institutional learning outcomes is still in development, members of the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee have gained a valuable understanding of expectations around assessment, as well as the strengths and challenges of carrying out this work in each division. When a process is established, it will have been done with broad involvement from faculty and academic directors alike. Helena College remains committed to building on the momentum as systems are refined to support evidence-based decision-making and improve student learning and success.

## APPENDIX J: INSTITUTIONAL REPORT CERTIFICATION FORM

Please use this certification form for all institutional reports (Self-Evaluation, Annual, Mid-Cycle, PRFR, Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness, Candidacy, Ad-Hoc, or Special)



### Institutional Report Certification Form

On behalf of the Institution, I certify that:

- There was broad participation/review by the campus community in the preparation of this report.
- The Institution remains in compliance with NWCCU Eligibility Requirements.
- The Institution will continue to remain in compliance throughout the duration of the institution's cycle of accreditation.

I understand that information provided in this report may affect the continued Candidacy or Accreditation of my institution. I certify that the information and data provided in the report are true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

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(Name of Institution)

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(Name of Chief Executive Officer)

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(Signature of Chief Executive Officer)

(Date)

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