



Phase II: Frequently Asked Questions

Below are several frequently asked questions pertaining to Phase II. Additional questions/answers will be added to this document as additional inquiries arise.

What is the Harvard Global Health Institute and why has their guidance been utilized by the Helena Public Schools? The Harvard Global Health Institute (HGHI) is associated with Harvard University and as an embedded partner, HGHI works to amplify the expertise of Harvard's graduate schools, hospitals, and their partners around the world to provide needed, evidence-based guidance. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, HGHI served as a partner within a multi-disciplinary group of experts including Harvard University, Brown University, Boston University, Tufts University, and the New America Institute. This partnership of health experts has provided guidance related to how schools/districts should function within this pandemic. While the Helena Public Schools have utilized several sources of guidance across the pandemic, we have found the guidance provided by this group to be well-informed and evidence-based (<https://ethics.harvard.edu/news/schools-and-path-zero>)

For more information on the Harvard Global Health Institute, please see their website at <https://globalhealth.harvard.edu/>

Based on the most recent guidance provided by the Harvard Global Health Institute (and partners) what mitigation strategies are needed in school to provide the recommended level of infection control? Based on the most recent guidance (provided in December 2020), the most important elements of infection control include:

- universal masking (including while speaking)
- hand and bathroom hygiene
- achieving 4-6 air changes per hour of 'clean' air through any combination of ventilation and filtration (or outdoor classrooms)
- 3 feet of social distancing for young learners at all levels of community spread
- 6 feet of social distancing for high schools when levels of community spread rise above 100/100,000 daily new cases; 3 feet of social distancing below that level
- robust quarantine policies and contact tracing practices
- and, where feasible, surveillance/screening testing, also discussed below under "testing"

I am interested in utilizing HSD Transportation in Phase II. How do I register or check my child's transportation status? Please utilize the below-linked website to register your child/children for bus transportation. For additional inquiries, please email transportation@helenaschools.org or call (406) 324-2100

Transportation Registration Webpage:

<https://helenaschools.org/departments/transportation/school-bus-registration/>

Are school-provided meals (breakfast and lunch) still available and free via the USDA Waiver? Yes, breakfast and lunch continue to be free to all children, ages 1 through 19. On March 9th, the USDA announced the nationwide extension of several waivers that allow all children to continue to receive these needed meals through the forthcoming summer (2021). These waivers were approved through September 30, 2021, ensuring that these opportunities remain available and free throughout the coming months.

What is the value of block schedules and are those types of schedules required for all grades 6 through 12? Block schedules limit the number of classes that students attend within a given day. For example, using a “double-block” schedule, what normally would be a six-period day is blocked to include three periods with classing meeting for twice/double the normal time. There are numerous positives and negatives associated with this type of a schedule. During a pandemic, one of the positive includes reduced cross-class exposure as students are attending half of their normal classes in a day. However, a double block does not always work well for every content area. As our district prepared for a transition to Phase II, school teams worked to consider the advantages/disadvantages of block schedules by level. Middle schools will use a three-period (double) block schedule ([link](#)). High Schools will utilize an eight-period day ([link](#)).

Are partitions in classrooms part of the most recent guidance provided by the Harvard Global Health Institute? Partitions, also referred to as sneeze guards, are not specifically listed in the most recent guidance by the Harvard Global Health Institute as a required precautionary element for infection control. Partitions were originally listed in COVID-related guidance by organizations including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). In their most recent update (3/19), the CDC updated their guidance and removed their recommendation for physical barriers ([link](#)). The Helena Public Schools will follow this recommendation by no longer requiring the use of these partitions within classrooms. However, modifications in this regard will be made on a classroom-by-classroom basis as many students and teachers have incorporated these partitions into their learning environment and may choose to continue using a modified version for non-health/safety purposes.

Are there any restrictions to attending spectators at spring high school athletics? At this time (3/26), there are no limitations on the number of spectators that choose to attend a spring athletics event/competition. Spring sports are largely held in outdoor venues that are less conducive to virus transmission. However, we do require the use of masks for all spectators that cannot physically distance and ask that mask use be adhered to when attending away events (as required by each, hosting school district). Student athletes are not required to wear masks while engaging in strenuous physical exercise.

Are plans for graduation being developed? Yes, graduation plans are being developed for each of our graduating high school classes. Developing plans include outdoor ceremonies at Carroll College for each of our graduating classes beginning Friday, June 4th for Access to Success (Helena College) and PAL and continuing Saturday, June 5th for Capital High (AM time) and Helena High (PM time). As details, including times, are finalized, information will be shared with our graduates and their families. While we anticipate that graduations for the Class of 2021 will look more normal than last spring, we do expect some health/safety protocols to be necessary including masking and general distancing.