



## Phase II Modifications & Spring Updates

Spring 2021

As we continue to modify our transition as a school district to Phase II, there are notable successes and opportunities that have come to light. Thankfully, COVID cases within our schools and community have remained relatively low while our on-campus practices remained successful due to the hard work and diligence of our students, families, educators, and support professionals. Additionally, the past few weeks have included increased opportunities for our employees to receive their first dose of the available COVID vaccines. Each opportunity in that regard provides an additional layer of protection for each of our educators and support professionals. As we turn to spring and the approaching fourth quarter of this school year, there are a few modifications that we are incorporating into our Phase II model including a schedule change for our elementary schools.

**Optional and Varied Use of Partitions:** Guidance, including updated guidance ([link](#)) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), continue to inform lessons learned and recommended best practices for schools. Guidance in this regard no longer calls for the use of partitions as a protective practice between students and/or within classrooms. Partitions were previously installed and utilized across our school district in an effort to provide an additional protective practice for students not able to remain physically distanced. Use of these partitions will not be continued for health/safety reasons but it may take time for us to remodel all of our classrooms in this regard. Additionally, many of our classes have begun utilizing these partitions for educational purposes and rather than eliminate all of these partitions, we would appreciate the opportunity to work with each educator to understand how they would like to structure their classroom moving forward.

**Masking:** The requirement of masking remains but as our weather continues to warm, we look forward to utilizing structured opportunities outdoors to provide more breaks in this regard. Guidance continues to suggest masking, especially when distancing cannot be achieved (indoors and outdoors). However, as distancing can be achieved, masks may be removed especially when engaged in strenuous activity. Aside from periods of inclement weather, the coming months should provide us with more opportunities in this regard.

**Wednesdays as In-Person Days of Learning:** As we considered transitioning from Phase I to Phase II, Wednesdays remained a remote C-Day in an effort to ensure that all of our students (remote and in-person) were able to keep pace. For many schools, Phase II has presented an opportunity to structure additional interventions and specific support services. That noted, the number of quarantined students has dropped significantly over the past month and with vaccines now available for our employees, the need for a remote, C-Day every Wednesday has been continually considered, especially at the elementary level.

As a result, we are adding Wednesdays as an in-person learning day for elementary schools and working to enhance our Opportunity Wednesdays at the middle and high school levels. Additional details for each level are included below.

Please note our updated fourth quarter calendar ([link](#)) for specifics pertaining to how weeks will be structured that include a non-school holiday and/or the week of May 3rd – 7th (Vigilante Day Parade).

**Elementary Schools:** Our elementary schools will add Wednesdays as an in-person learning day beginning the week of April 12-16. Wednesday, April 14th will be an in-person day instead of a remote (C-Day). We have been able to restructure remote blocks and needed teacher planning to provide a consistent bell schedule including Wednesdays. School start times (Monday through Friday) for in-person learning will remain 8:45am. End times (Monday through Friday) for in-person learning will remain 2:20pm. Remote learning blocks (remote check-ins, targeted instruction, interventions, etc.) will continue but may need to shift to allow for this consistent, five-day schedule. Please note that this schedule change may necessitate some instructional shifts this week (including tomorrow, 4/7) as our schools prepare for this added in-person day beginning next week.

**Middle Schools and High Schools:** Middle and high schools will continue with the remote, C-Day structure on Wednesdays but will work to increase the number of in-person, academic intervention opportunities for students. While instruction will remain remote on Wednesdays, designated students will have the opportunity to attend in-person and engage in needed intervention and/or credit recovery opportunities. Individual schools will continue to communicate opportunities in this regard.

**Why not add in-person Wednesdays at the middle and high school levels as well?** At this time, middle and high school teachers continue to support students attending both in-person and remotely, via the Digital Learning Initiative (DLI). Shifting in this regard would necessitate the immediate hire of credentialed educators for every class/course at both the middle and high school levels. As this need cannot be met, middle and high school teachers continue to blend both groups into their daily classroom instruction. In doing so, the remote C-Day structure provides needed opportunities to connect students online as a class while providing needed small-group or individualized support. The elementary DLI structure is different in this regard and includes designated elementary-credentialed teachers serving specially assigned elementary DLI students. The only non-DLI elementary-age students requiring remote learning are those that have been identified as close contacts and as such, must attend school remotely due to quarantine.

**How will these modifications impact plans for the 2021/2022 school year?** At this time, we are planning for a largely normal school year including the recently approved 2021/2022 school calendar ([link](#)). While vaccinations for children under the age of 16 remain in ongoing development, recent projections suggest that students may become eligible for approved COVID vaccinations as early as September. By this time, it is projected that a large percentage of the population over the age of 16 will be fully vaccinated, thus allowing for a relatively normal level of functionality within our schools and community. Plans for the 2021/2022 school year will be continually developed and communicated over the forthcoming summer but families should plan to be “Back to School” the week of August 30th. These plans do include continuing to provide a digital/remote option for students/families but the forthcoming structure will not blend remote and in-person students within the same classroom.

#### **Looking Forward (other related updates for the spring)**

While school remains far from a pre-pandemic normal, we believe that each of these modifications will provide our students, employees, and community with additional, needed consistency as we work to finish this year strong and turn our attention to the forthcoming summer and the 2021/2022 school year. In addition to the above Phase II modifications, please see the below, related notes specific to this spring and summer.



**Modified Vigilante Day Parade:** At this time, public parades with expected crowds in the thousands remain contrary to national guidance related to the ongoing pandemic. While cases locally have declined and remained relatively low across recent weeks, it is advised that we remain vigilant in our collective efforts to ensure health and safety across our community. As a result, this

year's Vigilante Day Parade will be a "reverse" parade with participating high school students setting up floats in designated locations on HSD school campuses for public viewing by car. Additional details are being confirmed but this year's (reverse) Parade is scheduled for Friday, May 7<sup>th</sup>. During that week, the above-noted Wednesday schedule for all schools would take place on Friday. This means that for Middle and High School students, Wednesday (5/5) is an in-person day and Friday (5/7) is a C-Day. Elementary students will be in-person on Friday (5/5) but will be dismissed at 12:00pm. This will allow the reverse parade to be available for viewing that

afternoon from 12:00pm to 2:00pm at both Helena High and Capital High. Additional information is forthcoming including details for high school students participating in this year's reverse parade.



**Expanded Summer Opportunities:** The Helena Public Schools will offer expanded summer academic opportunities across the forthcoming summer months of June, July, and August. For elementary students, "Camp Ascension" will provide a high-energy, camp-like atmosphere focusing on reading and math interventions along with extension opportunities through the arts and physical opportunities outside to enjoy our beautiful Montana summer. Middle and high school students will be provided similar academic interventions including expanded opportunities to complete course content from the 2020/2021 school year. Camp Ascension and other summer opportunities are need-based as opposed to open-enrollment. Schools will be working with families to consider student-by-student needs over the spring as we prepare for summer. For additional details, please see our Camp Ascension webpage ([link](#)).



**Springtime School Opportunities:** Spring is traditionally full of wonderful occasions for students including school events and other extracurricular opportunities. While many of these were canceled last spring, our schools and community are working together to consider how we can structure these opportunities this year in a manner that is safe, responsible, and fun for all involved. We are asking for the support of our parents, families, and community as we collectively consider how we can partner to structure everything from our traditional spring events to year-end field days. Your schools will be communicating details pertaining to upcoming events but please understand that these plans may be more tentative and flexible than in previous years.



**Graduation for the Class of 2021:** The Helena Public Schools are working closely with our partners to consider every detail needed for this year's high school graduation ceremonies. Developing plans include outdoor ceremonies for each of our graduating classes beginning Friday, June 4<sup>th</sup> with Access to Success and PAL and continuing Saturday, June 5<sup>th</sup> with Capital High and Helena High. 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.