



Parents, Staff, and Families of the Helena Public Schools,

As your incoming Superintendent, I would like to take this opportunity to briefly introduce myself and touch on our next steps as we prepare for the summer and the coming school year.

Having been in the District, I was able to hit the ground running in April in preparation for taking on the role and responsibilities as your Superintendent. I am thankful for this opportunity to lead amidst one of the most challenging years of our lives. I have been able to spend time with our staff, Board of Trustees, and district leaders as they work through the ever-changing twists and turns of this pandemic. I have also had opportunities to listen and deeply consider the varied views, hopes, and aspirations that exist across our community. This has been a great benefit to me as we plan and prepare for our future together.

As I transition, my focus has been on our future and how we prepare our schools for the summer and coming school year. I look forward to that opportunity and commit to you that we will work through many of the areas that have arisen including masking, distancing, as well as what we intend our classrooms and schools to look like next year. I intend to release a draft plan prior to our June Board of Trustees Meeting and while this will represent a mere first draft, I intend to seek your feedback as to what aspects address your needs and where our intentions may fall short of your expectations.

In advance of that plan, I want you to know that we are preparing for a school year that is as close to normal as possible. As has been cited routinely over the past few months, COVID-19 will continue to challenge us for years to come (likely longer). But as medical advances continue to battle the virus, there is an expected renewal of hope going forward. I anticipate that our schools next year will return to a normal five day a week, K-12 in-person learning schedule with traditional start/end times. Transportation schedules, classroom configurations, and athletics/activities would also return to a more normal format.

Masking considerations for the 2021-2022 school year will be a significant area of consideration as we move into the summer. Given the vastly different guidance from multiple organizations and agencies, we will assimilate good data to assist in making the best decision for our students, staff, and community. The CDC is expected to update guidance in relation to the 2021-2022 school year in the coming weeks. At this time, we do not have any indication of their exact timing or how their guidance in relation to K12 schools is expected to shift. Many believe that future guidance may be tied to the anticipated timing of vaccinations for children under the age of twelve but nothing official in that regard has been announced or confirmed.

As we have this year, we will need to continue to learn how to respond to cases and, as needed, quarantine throughout next year. A portion of our students will be vaccinated but vaccines are not expected to be mandated. Regardless, the virus is expected to continue to morph through variants that will need to be closely monitored.

While I expect our coming year to look normal, it will take some time for a normal feeling to return. Normal will need to be realigned with respect to the ongoing needs of our students, employees, and families. We are all different and have unique needs in this regard. While a return towards normal will not allow for the same options in relation to our Digital Learning Initiative (DLI), we are seeking options for how a limited number of students can continue to attend via a digital or blended learning environment without placing a dual teaching load on our educators.

Please continue to look for more communication in the coming weeks. It is my hope that through the collective understanding of our developing plans, you and your family will be able to better prepare over the coming months. Thank you again for this opportunity and for the honor of serving as your Superintendent. Together, I am confident that we will continue to become a stronger school district and community beyond this pandemic.

*Rex*

Rex M. Wertz  
Incoming Superintendent  
Helena Public Schools