



August 31, 2021

Dear Helena Public Schools Families and Staff,

Today, the Governor's Office announced an emergency rule by the Department of Health & Human Services (DPHHS) regarding masking in schools.

Helena Public Schools has reviewed the emergency rule and the district reads the rule as permissive as it specifically provides that school districts "should consider" parental concerns and "should provide" an opt-out system for certain reasons. The district has taken into account all of those factors and implemented the least restrictive guidelines necessary to preserve the health and safety of our students and staff so that we can continue to keep our schools open five days per week.

Helena Public Schools will continue our PreK-8 masking protocols to ensure the safety and welfare of all students and staff.

The district has received hours of public comment and reviewed hundreds of emails from parents and others in the community on this issue, demonstrating its clear desire to take the wishes of parents into account. Furthermore, Helena Public Schools provides parents and students the ability to opt out of wearing a mask. However, should they opt out, they are opting into virtual learning. Helena Public Schools is prepared to provide assistance to parents looking to exercise that option. Parents seeking off-campus virtual learning should contact their school principal. When a student has a medical reason for being unable to follow mask guidelines, the district will continue its practice of meeting with parents to guide them through the medical exemption process and to determine what accommodations it can reasonably provide.

In closing, I want to thank our families, teachers and staff for giving our students a wonderful first week of school. We all share a deep love and concern for our kids and will navigate these challenging COVID times together.

Respectfully,

Rex Weltz
Superintendent, Helena Public Schools