



November 5, 2021

Dear HPS Families and Staff,

It's November – time for parent/teacher conferences. As a parent, I remember the fun of seeing my kids' artwork in the halls and their eagerness to show us around the classroom. I encourage you to make the most of this opportunity to visit face-to-face with your child's teacher and become a closer team.

It's also Fall Back weekend. In addition to the extra hour of sleep, I look forward to a bit more dawn in my morning commute. But the mornings will get darker soon enough, making it more difficult to see kids walking or biking to school. Please drive carefully and do a refresher with your kids on pedestrian safety – look both ways when crossing the street, use the marked crosswalk, and stay on the sidewalk whenever possible. Favor light-colored clothing and reflective items for winter wear to make your kiddos more visible.

As the days get shorter, we can all stand to add a little spark to our lives. Our community partner, the [Helena Education Foundation](#), is doing just that by sparking Great Conversations – its annual community education event. More than 350 people a year take advantage of this opportunity to enjoy an evening of presentations and conversation on topics as diverse as early American history, cybersecurity, exploring the backroads of Montana, and bouncing back from childhood trauma. You can participate in this year's conversations from the comfort of your own couch. **To register, visit [hefmt.org](#) by November 11** to choose your topic/s. The Great Conversations event is the evening of Wednesday, November 17, from 6-7:30 p.m.

Inside the classroom, the Helena Education Foundation (HEF) is a tremendous partner in our mission to help our students and educators realize their full potential. Yesterday, I was honored to join HEF Executive Director Lisa Cordingley and other Foundation leaders as they presented [Spark](#) and [Great Ideas](#) grants to teachers across the district. These competitive grants help teachers go a step beyond budgeted activities to bring innovative ideas, projects, and experiences to our students. We are tremendously grateful to the Foundation and its supporters for their long history of enriching the lives of our students, educators, and community.

There are many ways to get involved in our educational community. As I've noted in previous letters, our school district is struggling to staff positions because of a labor shortage that is affecting schools across the state and the nation. If you want to share your time and talents to serve our young people, I

encourage you to consider a paid position as a paraprofessional, substitute teacher, bus driver, or maintenance staff. Please visit our HPS [Recruitment and Hiring](#) page to learn more.

I would also like to remind families who rely on bus service of the schedule and bus assignment changes that will take effect on Monday, November 15. If you haven't already, please visit our [HPS Transportation](#) page to ensure a smooth transition for your student and family as we introduce rolling route suspensions. I recognize that this change is difficult for working families and deeply appreciate your support of our district and your student during this challenging time. The alternative was canceling some routes altogether for the remainder of the year, which would have been terribly unfair to those families. We will keep you updated as we work toward long-term solutions to the driver shortage.

Finally, I would like to thank our partners with Lewis and Clark Public Health (LCPH) and the East Helena School District as we prepare to host [vaccination clinics](#) for kids ages 5-11 later this month. I strongly encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity to protect our community and get our kids back to school without the disruptions of sick days and quarantines. I've been asked recently when we will lift the mask requirement for grades 5-11, now that vaccines will soon be available for this age group. The mask protocols are based on community transmission rates, which remain at the "[High](#)" level in Lewis and Clark County. However, I am hopeful that the increased availability of vaccines for children and boosters for adults will lessen transmission and allow us to re-evaluate.

In the meantime, I remain deeply grateful for all that our families and community are doing to help us keep our kids in school this fall. I wish you a fun and restful weekend with your family.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rex Weltz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Rex Weltz
Superintendent, Helena Public Schools