



June 3, 2022

Dear Helena Public Schools Families and Staff,

It's time to celebrate our 2022 grads!

Our PAL and Access to Success graduates walked at commencement ceremonies today, and we're working around Mother Nature to make tomorrow's CHS and HHS commencements joyful *and* comfortable for everyone.

As our Trustee Luke Muszkiewicz posted, "Outdoor graduations in Montana mean constant monitoring, speculating, wishing, praying ... and often some schedule changes to avoid the lightning and rain."

With afternoon thunderstorms in tomorrow's forecast, we've moved up the times for the Helena High and Capital High graduations tomorrow as follows:

Helena High: 8 a.m., Nelson Stadium on the Carroll College campus, 1601 N. Benton Ave.

HHS Live Stream: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKclgFm6Y1E>

Capital High: 11 a.m., Nelson Stadium on the Carroll College campus, 1601 N. Benton Ave.

CHS Live Stream: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBY643V51JA>

Our trusted meteorologist at KTVH, Curtis Grevenitz, let us know that he expects a pleasant morning with increasing cloud cover and storms holding off until afternoon.

Over the past several weeks, I've shared the many outstanding accomplishments of the Class of 2022 in this Friday letter. These students were sophomores when the pandemic hit, and their achievements are testament to their resiliency. These young people have the fortitude to meet whatever life hands them, both the challenges and the opportunities. We can expect to see great things as our 2022 grads make their mark on the world.

I also would like to thank all of our Helena Public Schools families for your perseverance, cooperation, and can-do attitude as we navigated another year of challenges. With your support, we were able to offer our children the uninterrupted school year they deserved. Our students and staff made great strides in closing pandemic learning gaps and this work will continue next year. Assessment and reporting of student progress continues to be a foundation of this work. If you are the parent of an elementary student, your child will bring home their iReady assessment reports next week. All other reports will be shared by email this summer. Please take time to carefully read your student's progress reports so you can celebrate their accomplishments and continue to be a part of your child's academic support team in the coming school year.

In District business, I want to share a few health and safety updates.

As we continue to grapple with the tragic events that have rocked our country in recent weeks, compounded by a school threat and arrest here in Helena, our community is on edge. Keeping parents informed of safety issues with prompt and accurate communication continues to be a top priority.

This afternoon you will receive a text from School Messenger, the District's text and email notification vendor, providing a link to "opt-in" for District text alerts. If you are a parent or legal guardian and you are not receiving our text alerts, I strongly encourage you to opt-in. The opt-in text will be sent to you again on Monday in case you miss it. If you need assistance, please contact your school secretary.

If you are already receiving District text alerts, no action is required.

I've been asked why the District can't automatically send text alerts to all parents. While we are able to call parents and send emails, Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations prohibit us from automatically signing up parents for text alerts. We give parents the option to opt-in for texts when they enroll their student.

If you are not receiving text alerts, please click the School Messenger text you will receive this afternoon and take a few moments to opt-in to help us notify you quickly as possible in the event of an emergency. (This opt-in text you will receive is allowed under FCC regulations)

I also would like to update our community on the District's ongoing drinking water testing and remediation efforts under the new [Montana Lead in Schools Rule](#). Helena Public Schools has a long history of consistent compliance with water quality drinking standards.

Like many districts across the state, we are working closely with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to meet more stringent requirements for drinking water under the new rule.

As of May 10, HPS was among 61 percent of Montana schools that have submitted lead sampling results to DEQ under the new rule (363 schools out of 593 total), which took effect in January 2020. Of the districts that have submitted results, 73 percent (265 schools) have had at least one fixture that exceeded the action level of 5.0 micrograms per liter (parts per billion).

Water sampling under the new rule is now complete at every school in the District. With DEQ's guidance, our Facilities Department removed or replaced more than 100 fixtures districtwide; installed filtered water bottle filler stations or faucet-mounted filters where necessary; and provided 5-gallon water coolers at locations where bottle filler stations could not be easily installed.

The last schools to be mitigated are CHS and HHS, where work is underway. The vast majority of exceedances at the high schools were in bathroom faucets or lab sinks and, per DEQ's guidance, they are being taken out of service or labeled as not for drinking.

In keeping with requirements under the Lead in Schools Rule, HPS has already sent notifications of exceedances to families and staff at most affected schools, including a link to view [school-specific test results](#). A few additional notifications will be sent in the coming week.

The bottom line is that all Helena Public Schools students now have access to drinking water that meets the requirements of the new Lead in Schools Rule.

DEQ is covering all sampling costs for schools with federal funds and is providing districts with lead remediation reimbursement grants of \$1,000 per school. The grants are administered by the Office of Public Instruction.

Going forward, the District is examining how to most effectively meet the new drinking water standard over the long term, including the possibility of correcting the problem at its source by replacing old plumbing. This would eliminate the annual cost of providing filtration, treatment, or bottled water.

DEQ is developing a school lead remediation reimbursement program using federal funding to help Montana schools with ongoing costs, however this funding is not yet available. We will continue to keep our school communities informed of mitigation and remediation work and any exceedances, as well as our long term compliance plans.

HPS is grateful to DEQ for providing schools across the state with the technical assistance we need to meet the new drinking water standards and protect the health of Montana's children. We will continue to work together to ensure that our District's drinking water remains in compliance with current standards as they evolve.

That was a lot of information for one letter, but I know these issues are of great importance to families and staff and I appreciate you bearing with me. I will send a final year-end letter next week and periodic communications throughout the summer.

I wish you a wonderful weekend and hope you're able to catch some sunshine between storms.

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