

School Closure Update  
Wednesday, April 22, 2020

Dear Parents, Families and Colleagues,

This afternoon, Governor Bullock released a plan for a phased reopening of Montana including an expiration of the Stay at Home directive as of this Sunday, April 26. In relation to schools, the Governor announced that schools may reopen as soon as Thursday, May 7. That known, schools and school districts are not obligated to reopen as the Governor specifically noted that any/all reopening decisions will be made locally. For the Helena Public Schools, this announcement means that further school closures beyond the expiration of the Governor's school-related order will be a local, Helena-specific decision.

At this time, please know that the Helena Public Schools will remain closed, at minimum, through Friday, May 8. Furthermore, there is no predetermined date should our schools be able and appropriately prepared to open this spring. Today's announcement and released plan requires study and careful consideration. Our schools will remain closed and students will continue to utilize the current remote learning environment until a clear, defined local plan is in action and all known risks can be mitigated or resolved. As noted in Monday's update, we will approach any and all decisions related to our schools with appropriate care and caution, keeping to our priority of ensuring a safe and healthy environment for our students and employees.

While closing schools was a difficult decision, reopening involves infinitely more factors that must be considered. Effectively, schools and school districts must create a new-norm for our in-school environments that includes safe distancing, effective health related practices, and appropriate resources. The Governor's plan provides us with this opportunity and while we long to be back in-session with our students and colleagues, anything short of careful planning, preparation, training, and implementation could have a detrimental impact on our families and community. Therefore, we view this responsibility with the utmost sincerity and will not deviate from our priority of student and employee safety.

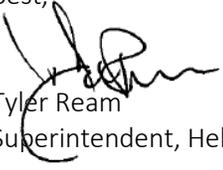
Given today's release of Montana's plan for reopening, I cannot provide a defined timeframe for any related reopening decision. I will work to make this decision as quickly as possible but will not do so in a manner than is hasty or irresponsible. Many of our students, employees, family members and neighbors are at risk of devastating complications as a result of the Coronavirus. I fully understand our collective responsibility to ensuring public health during this crisis and will work to ensure that every factor has been appropriately studied and considered as this decision is weighed.

If we reopen schools this spring, our plans, actions, and resources must transcend the known risks of virus transmission to our students, employees, and families. For the time being, please plan to continue remote learning as this environment affords our students, employees, and families with the opportunity to effectively distance in order to remain safe and healthy. We are actively working on what a new-norm school environment would entail but until we have effectively minimized every known risk, our schools must remain closed. I understand and accept the frustration this continued closure may cause but the devastating impacts of making an incorrect decision in this regard remain personally unacceptable to me your superintendent.

Thank you again for your time, understanding and continued support. While this crisis has been difficult on us all, your continued support and partnership has been sincerely appreciated by everyone at the Helena Public Schools.

Please take care, stay safe and stay connected.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tyler Ream', written over the printed name.

Tyler Ream

Superintendent, Helena Public Schools