

District Reopening/Closure Planning and Recommendation

*Board of Trustees Work Session
April 28, 2020*



Reopening/Closure Planning



Commitment:
The safety of our students, employees, and families remains our absolute priority.

Reopening/Closure Planning

Decision Making Process →

Gather/Consider Guidance:

Gather and appropriately consider all national, state and local guidance pertaining to the safe opening of schools

Align Reopening Plan:

Create a plan based on gathered/considered guidance as a benchmark to inform reopening schools in a manner that minimizes risks and prioritizes students and employee safety

Benchmark for Safety:

Consider current decision to reopen schools by using the developed plan as a benchmark for keeping student and employee safety the priority.

Make an Aligned Recommendation:

Make a clear, aligned recommendation



Communicate final decision and anticipated next steps to all stakeholders

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Guiding Considerations

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Three Guiding Considerations:

- *I. Uphold Local, State and National Guidance:* Developed plans are purposefully aligned to the guidance of public leaders and health care officials
- *II. Establish a Safe “New-Norm” for Schools:* The development of a foundational, HSD-specific plan is vital as we consider reopening now and/or in the future
- *III. Properly Resourced and Staffed:* Schools must be optimally staffed and resourced in relation to the designated number of students served on a given day.

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Guiding Consideration I: Uphold Local, State and National Guidance

- Based on the White House/CDC Opening Up American Again guidelines, schools may open in Phase Two, specific to states/regions “with no evidence of a rebound and that satisfy the gating criteria a second time”



Phase Two	
<i>For States and Regions with no evidence of a rebound and that satisfy the gating criteria a second time</i>	
SPECIFIC TYPES OF EMPLOYERS	
SCHOOLS AND ORGANIZED YOUTH ACTIVITIES (e.g., daycare, camp) can reopen.	
VISITS TO SENIOR CARE FACILITIES AND HOSPITALS should be prohibited. Those who do interact with residents and patients must adhere to strict protocols regarding hygiene.	
LARGE VENUES (e.g., sit-down dining, movie theaters, sporting venues, places of worship) can operate under moderate physical distancing protocols.	
ELECTIVE SURGERIES can resume, as clinically appropriate, on an outpatient and in-patient basis at facilities that adhere to CMS guidelines.	
GYMS can remain open if they adhere to strict physical distancing and sanitation protocols.	
BARS may operate with diminished standing-room occupancy, where applicable and appropriate.	

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Guiding Consideration I: Uphold Local, State and National Guidance

- Based on the Montana's Reopening the Big Sky plan, reopening schools is not a phase-specific decision but rather the decision of each local Board of Trustees



MONTANA

REOPENING THE BIG SKY
PHASED APPROACH

Schools



- Beginning May 7, 2020 all schools have the option to return to in-classroom teaching delivery.
- The State recognizes that if reopened, schools will require the district to make adjustments and create plans, policies, and procedures.
- If schools plan to reopen they should consider:
 - Implementing an alternative educational delivery model that includes a mix of in-person and remote learning.
 - Providing focused individual education, especially for at-risk students.
 - How to reconnect and meet the educational needs of students who fall behind in a remote learning environment.
 - The importance of maintaining the connection between students, teachers, and parents.
 - The important role that schools play in the health of students, families, and communities.
 - Graduation environments that can meet the social distancing requirements.

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Guiding Consideration I: Uphold Local, State and National Guidance

- Guidance from local health officials and health care professionals cites clear concerns related to reopening schools this spring

In the absence of a vaccination to protect the public from COVID19 virus transmission, the best tool we have right now is physical distancing. This of course is extremely difficult in school settings, especially in larger districts. Even come Fall, school districts will have to consider new ways of doing business in order to protect students, staff, and the public.

Drenda Niemann, Health Officer
Lewis & Clark Public Health

One of MNA's top concerns is the potential to re-open our schools. Schools are not designed for social distancing. Many students have underlying health issues such as asthma and diabetes, not to mention poor hand hygiene that comes with just being young.

Montana Nurses Association Statement on Relaxing Stay-at-Home Restrictions
April 24, 2020

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Guiding Consideration I: Uphold Local, State and National Guidance

- Guidance from local health officials and health care professionals cites clear concerns related to reopening schools this spring

In collaboration with Lewis and Clark Public Health and with support from the Montana Nurses Association (MNA), it is our recommendation that students do not return to Helena Schools this spring. Through careful planning, preparation, and training we hope to provide a safe environment for the entire community in the fall.

HSD School Nurses

Health and Safety Recommendations Regarding the Reopening of School Buildings

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Guiding Consideration II: New-Norm Environment for Schools

- Nation and State guidance provides a glimpse of what schools/districts are facing as we work to rebuild systems and processes designed to minimize risk from the COVID-19 Coronavirus

The new landscape could include one-way hallways, kids and teachers in masks, and lunch inside the classrooms instead of cafeterias. Buses may run half empty, and students may have their temperatures read before entering the building. And in districts all over the country, officials are considering bringing half the students to school on certain days, with the rest learning from home. Then they would swap.

Under Pressure to Reopen This Fall, School Leaders Plot Unprecedented Changes
Washington Post, April 27, 2020

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Guiding Consideration II: New-Norm Environment for Schools

- Our New-Norm Framework provides an overview of precautionary practices that must be in place to minimize risks and effectively open/reopen schools.
- Sources include state-level guidance through the Reopening the Big Sky plan and local guidance from health officials and health care professionals including Lewis & Clark Public Health, HSD school nurses and local health care professionals.

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Guiding Consideration II: New-Norm Environment for Schools

- While iterative in nature, the current draft of our new-norm environment was utilized to assess the readiness of our schools to reopen
- Individual guidelines and practices were assessed based on the likelihood of successful “timely implementation”
- Timely implementation considers whether or not a designated practice can be successfully implemented in the next three weeks.

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Guiding Consideration II: New-Norm Environment for Schools

- Assessment outcomes were color-coded to align to the below determinations:
 - Green: Successful implementation is highly likely
 - Yellow: There are ongoing concerns pertaining to the successful, timely implementation of this practice
 - Red: Successful implementation is not likely in the next three weeks without significant external intervention

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Guiding Consideration II: New-Norm Environment for Schools

- Of the 21 identified guidelines and practices, 6 were determined to be green, 8 were determined to be yellow and 7 were determined to be red.

New-Norm School/Office Environment

Precautionary Environment Framework and 04/27 Assessment



Purpose: This new-norm structure incorporates national, state and local guidance into one, comprehensive framework. Stipulated structures and practices are outlined as thresholds for minimizing risk for our students, employees and families. To effectively open schools, each of the below areas must be satisfied through clear practices and protocols.

Sources: Several sources of guidance were considered in creating these New-Norm guidelines for schools and offices. Sources are cited according to the sources listed below:

- (SLG) State Guidance associated with the Reopening the Big Sky Plan
- (CDC) Guidance provided by the Centers for Disease Control ([Link](#))
- (LHC) Guidance provided by local health officials and health care professionals

04.27.20 Assessment: The below guidelines are color-coded to indicate the rigor and anticipated success of timely implementation. Timely implementation considers whether or not a designated practice can be successfully implemented in the next three weeks.

- Green: Successful implementation is highly likely
- Yellow: There are ongoing concerns pertaining to the successful implementation of this practice
- Red: Successful implementation is not likely in the next three weeks without significant external intervention

School-Specific Environment:

Cleaning and Sanitation:

- (SLG) Frequent disinfecting of door handles, student desks/tables, computers, student supplies, and other common spaces and items.
- (CDC) Wear disposable gloves and gowns for all tasks in the cleaning process, including handling trash
- (SLG) Require handwashing of all students in regular intervals
 - Numerous HSD classrooms do not have regular access to a sink thus requiring teachers to schedule regular washings or students to wash/return on their own following a cough, sneeze, etc.
- (SLG) Keep libraries, gyms, and playgrounds off limits unless they can be sanitized between groups
 - Given current custodian/school ratios, regular, between group sanitization of these spaces are highly unlikely especially in elementary schools
- (SLG) Provide hand sanitizer
 - Significant ordering/supply concerns exist as inventory is low and ordering processes are currently compromised. Given the likely frequency/demand, inventory does not meet the anticipated demand
- (CDC) Clean the soft surfaces (carpeted floor, rugs, and upholstered furniture) using soap and water or with cleaners appropriate for use on these surfaces
 - Given current custodian/school ratios, it is highly unlikely that soft surfaces can be cleaned/disinfected with expected regularity

Class-Size Limitations:

- (SLG) Consider breaking larger classes into smaller groups.
 - Staffing and space requirements are complicating factors as teachers are currently required to maintain a remote learning environment and cannot be expected to be in two places (digitally and physically) at once. Furthermore, given the capacity of most HSD schools, breakout spaces are minimal unless schools physically served less than half of their registered students on a daily basis.
- (SLG) Students may alternate school days or attend for half days.

- Staffing of such an environment remains an ongoing concern as class-loads alone are incongruent to this practice. Should instructional time be reduced to half-days, research suggests significant learning loss will occur as instructional time and academic outcomes are high correlated.

Social Distancing & Physical Precautions:

- (SLG) Consider use of face coverings by all staff and students
 - This practice would require approximately 8,000 masks per day. While students would be encouraged to bring their own to/from school for ongoing wear, schools would need a significant inventory of masks on-hand for students use.
 - Implementation at the elementary level is concerning as students would be required to wear their mask for a majority of the instructional day.
- (SLG) Keep students with the same group and in the same classroom, with teachers rotating when practical.
 - While possible at the elementary level, this structure will be difficult to implement at the middle and high school levels as there are wide variations of class schedules and academic needs. This challenge is compounded in larger schools where a self-contained class structure will limit class enrollment for students.
- (SLG) Consider students eating lunch in the classroom to help limit mixing of students.
 - While possible at the elementary level, this structure will be difficult to implement in any school that utilizes a common-lunch period (JHS and CHS). To effectively implement, students will need to be assigned a designated lunch period and lunch location assignment.
- (SLG) Cancel extracurricular activities.
- (SLG) Prevent any non-school staff, including parents, from entering school buildings.
 - This is currently possible at 14 of our 18 sites.
- (SLG) Consider reducing bus loads to allow for one student per seat.
 - While possible for the fall of the 2020/21 school year, a complete restructuring of our current transportation schedule to allow for differentiated pick-up/arrival times is highly unlikely without proper time to plan, problem-solve and implement

Sick Policies:

- (SLG) Implement temperature checks and/or symptom screening when practical.
 - Temperature checks are a necessary precaution.
 - Current school thermometers are completely inadequate for screening large groups of students. New thermometers must be implemented to ensure effective and efficient screening prior to students entering school buildings.
 - State assistance likely needed to ensure purchasing of new thermometers
- (SLG) Require anyone (students or staff) with COVID-19 symptoms to stay home.
 - Aside from asymptomatic carriers, daily temperature checks and symptom screenings will reduce risk to students, employee and families.
 - In order to ensure minimal exposure, temperature checks and symptom screenings must occur prior to admittance on buses or entry into schools.

Accommodations:

- (SLG) Schools that reopen will need to take into consideration that some teachers and staff will fall into the at-risk category because of their age or other health risks. These individuals should have additional accommodations including teaching classes remotely, utilizing a larger classroom where social distancing can be maintained, or given an option not to return until the risks are reduced.
 - Based on preliminary numbers, adequate substitute coverage is not possible in order to fill anticipated absences
 - Immediate implementation potentially creates a situation where student schedules and teacher assignments would need to be revised thus guaranteeing little consistency at the elementary level and a study-hall environment in middle and high school

- This structure will need to be incorporated when planning for the 2020/2021 school year as this is a likely reality for the next school year
- (SLG) Students who are high risk or who have family members who are high risk should not be penalized for failing to attend and should continue to receive remote support.
 - A dual environment is possible but clear expectations must be agreed to as teachers cannot be expected to simultaneously teach in an in-person and a remote environment
- (SLG) Accommodations should also be extended to students and staff who are required to quarantine due to exposure or potential exposure.

Nurse Offices and Symptomatic Student Protocols:

- (SLG) Collaborate with public health to ensure each school has a plan for reporting, contact tracing and both short-term or extended closures in the case of a positive COVID case related to the school or community.
- (SLG) Utilize CDC guidelines

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Guiding Consideration III: Properly Resourced and Staffed

- Aligned to our new-norm framework for schools, it is imperative that educators, administrators, custodians and others have adequate access to needed supplies and materials
- Staffing for reopening options must account for employees who cannot return to their physical location due to their age or other health risks
 - Per state-level guidance, these individuals should be provided additional accommodations including teaching classes remotely, utilizing a larger classroom where social distancing can be maintained, or provided the option of not returning until the risks are reduced

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Guiding Consideration III: Properly Resourced and Staffed

- *Difficult to match returning teachers and students*
If we reopen this spring, parents should be prepared for the possibility that their child will be taught by a different teacher or (elementary-specific) that their child will be enrolled in an entirely different class

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Phases and Gates for Reopening

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Phases and Gates for Reopening:

- **Phase I: Modified School/Office Operations**
 - Clear protocols for who, when and how employees may return to our facilities
- **Phase II: Reopening Preparations**
 - Deliverables, tied directly to our New Norm procedures that must be satisfied in order to properly reopen schools to students
- **Phase III: Training for Reopening**
 - Deliberate training phase for all employees
- **Phase IV: Reopen Schools in New-Norm Environment**
 - Students (in designated numbers) return physically to reopened schools

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Phase I: Modified School/Office Operations

- School/district offices brought back online utilizing strict adherence to precautionary employer guidelines and our internally-developed protocol

Guidelines for All Phases: Employers



Develop and implement appropriate policies, in accordance with Federal, State, and local regulations and guidance, and informed by industry best practices, regarding:

- Social distancing and protective equipment.
- Temperature checks and/or symptom screening.
- Collaborate with public health on testing, isolating, and contact tracing.
- Sanitation.
- Use and disinfection of common and high-traffic areas.

Monitor workforce for indicative symptoms. Do not allow people with symptoms of COVID-19 to work.

Collaborate with public health when implementing policies and procedures for workforce contact tracing following an employee COVID+ test.

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Phase II: Reopening Preparations

- School-based teams work to operationalize plans to successfully establish our new-norm guidelines on campuses
 - Clarify general student, staff and visitor expectations
 - Determine designated common area practices and patterns
 - Finalize school-specific processes for daily symptom/temperature assessment, mask checks, etc.
 - Establish processes for evaluating, isolating and caring for ill students
- Develop training plans designed to thoroughly prepare employees to successfully implement district-level new-norm guidelines and school-specific, situational practices

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Phase III: Training for Reopening

- Employees able to physically return report to their designated schools/offices
- Extensive training will be mandated for every employee to ensure understanding, alignment and compliance to the new-norm guidelines and school-specific practices
- Educators and administrators work to finalize plans for training/retraining students and communication to parents

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Phase IV: Reopen Schools in New-Norm Environment

- Students (in any number) physically return to campuses
 - Remote options continue for students/employees unable to return
- Symptom/temperature assessments, mask checks occur each morning prior to students entering buses/schools
- Training/retraining plans implemented
- New-norm practices/protocols upheld
- Heightened cleaning protocols operationalized

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Options and Recommendations

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Weighing the Known Risks v. Reopening

- While opinions abound, our process for considering reopening purposefully limits subjectivity by comparing our readiness to public guidance and expectations
- To date, few (if any) national school-specific norms exist to inform schools/districts in their efforts to plan for reopening
- As we work towards reopening, school districts will require abundant state-level support in terms of flexibility and prioritization in ordering/securing needed supplies

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Recommendation:

In weighing our current status of known risks to our students, employees and families, I recommend that the Helena Public Schools keep buildings and facilities physically closed for the remainder of the 2019/2020 school year.

- School will continue through remote learning until the scheduled end of this school year
- Remote services, including food services, will continue through June 30th

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Considering Options

- ***Designated small-group interventions:*** Efforts can be applied to the potential of bringing small-groups of students to schools to provide designated intervention services
- ***Sign-up shops and lab environments:*** Optional reopening of secondary school shops and labs for designated, sign-up specific opportunities
- ***Year-end conferences:*** Possible, year-end conferences at the elementary level may assist students, parents and educators collaboratively close the year and plan for the future

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Considering Options

- ***Summer Compensatory Options:*** Should conditions allow, summer compensatory options will be considered (remote, blended or otherwise)
- ***Summer School:*** Summer credit recovery options must continue (remote, blended or otherwise)
- ***Summer SACC Program:*** Should conditions allow, bring Summer SACC programs online in adherence to guidelines and expectations
- ***Summer and Jumpstart Opportunities:*** Should conditions allow, summer intervention opportunities could help address learning gaps and decrease summer learning losses



your
Helena Public Schools
...a great place to learn