

# 2021-22 MID-YEAR REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY



**7,600** students

**1,079** full- and part-time employees  
(including 49 athletic coaches)

**11** elementary schools

Ray Bjork Learning Center

**2** middle schools

**2** high schools

Project for Alternative Learning (PAL)

Access to Success (reengagement program)

Adult Basic Education





Leading Helena Public Schools through the past six months has been the most rewarding and the most challenging time of my career as a teacher and school administrator. And I wouldn't have it any other way.

The pandemic has brought into sharp focus the value of our public schools and the role we play as a community partner—as educators, as an employer, and as a provider of essential services for our families, such as before-and-after-school care, health services, and meals.

When adversity strikes, our public schools are at the forefront of our community response, right alongside our community partners including medical providers, law enforcement, emergency responders, mental health providers, churches, and the many other organizations that make our town tick. Even in “normal times,” we rely on our community partners to make the work of Helena Public Schools possible. To each of these organizations, and the people who support their missions, we are grateful.

While I'm optimistic looking forward to 2022, I know that whatever the next 12 months bring, Helena Public Schools will be part of a strong community that we can count on.

Another aspect of K-12 education brought into sharp focus by the pandemic is the profound value of in-person learning. The ability to be in the classroom with teachers and peers plays a distinct and irreplaceable role in students' academic and socio-emotional success.

In Fall 2021, Helena Public Schools made the safe return to the classroom a top priority and—with the cooperation of our families, staff, and community—we completed a full first semester without the disruptions of school closures and class cancellations seen elsewhere.

As Omicron creates new challenges, our response remains focused on keeping kids in the classroom. But as the following pages will make clear, striving to provide full-time, in-person learning is just a starting point. Helena Public Schools is committed to a philosophy of academic excellence and continuous improvement.



**Rex Weltz**  
Superintendent

This report provides an overview of our focus areas and how we're working to move our district forward academically and operationally. This includes carefully directing resources toward academic programming and staffing to support students, especially those who experienced learning gaps during the pandemic. In every area, whether we're looking at teaching, technology, or staff retention, the beneficiaries are our students and our community.

While this report focuses on recent progress, we recognize the district has opportunities for improvement. To that end, the district is launching a series of program reviews, beginning with our Special Education Department. These reviews will inform program adjustments going forward. And it's not a one-way process.

Communication and building strong relationships with our families and community are top priorities for our HPS Board of Trustees and leadership team. We will continue to look to our Helena Public Schools families and broader community to help us learn where we can improve and to find and implement solutions.

In that spirit of keeping you informed, involved, and engaged, we share this mid-year report to the community.

I am grateful for the opportunity to lead Helena Public Schools—your public schools—and look forward to working with you to make 2022 a year of growth for our kids, our public schools, and our Helena community!

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rex M. Weltz". The signature is stylized and fluid, with a large loop at the end.

Rex M. Weltz  
*Helena Public Schools*

Providing extra support when a child is struggling with certain skills or concepts has long been part of the district’s approach to student success. But pandemic-caused learning disruptions have necessitated a more robust and targeted approach to help students who fell behind.

Over the past six months, the district has taken a multi-pronged approach to identifying and closing pandemic-related learning gaps while enhancing instructional delivery for all. Following is an overview of new and existing strategies Helena Public Schools is using to support student success, from instructional coaches to credit-recovery courses for high school students.

#### **Instructional Coaches**

At the heart of this year’s initiatives to close learning gaps is the addition of 11 instructional coaches, for a total of 19. The district now has a coach in every school.

Instructional coaches are certified teachers who have additional training and expertise in the areas of curriculum and instructional delivery. They do for classroom teachers what sports coaches do for athletes; working side-by-side to identify areas that need extra focus and to provide actionable feedback. Coaches are in our schools every day to support targeted instruction tailored to individual student needs and to assist teachers with planning and curriculum development.

There are 12 instructional coaches assigned to PreK-5 schools; one for each middle school; and five for the high school level, including the Program for Alternative Learning (PAL). The new instructional coach positions were paid for through the federally funded Montana Comprehensive Literacy Plan Grant, federal Title I funds to support low-income students, and federal COVID relief funds.

#### **Tutoring and Credit Recovery** *(high school and middle school)*

- ▶ Classes during school hours to support students with identified learning gaps in specific areas.
- ▶ After-school credit recovery courses to help seniors complete coursework needed for graduation. These courses were offered in spring 2021 and will be available again this year.
- ▶ After-school tutoring.



**Online learning opportunities**

**High School and Middle School** In fall 2021, Helena Public Schools introduced the Edgenuity online learning platform to provide distance-and remote-learning courses for credit recovery or regular credit toward graduation requirements. This service is funded with federal COVID recovery dollars. Edgenuity is also used for remote learning by a small number of elementary students.

**High School** The Montana Digital Academy offers distance/remote learning courses for credit recovery or original credit toward graduation requirements. This service is funded with federal COVID recovery dollars.

**WIN (What I Need)**

Among the district's new tools for academic interventions are daily WIN groups. WIN stands for What I Need. As the name implies, the groups give students time to focus on specific concepts in math, reading, or other areas where they need extra support or, conversely, would benefit from enrichment activities.

All elementary schools are in the process of implementing WIN sessions on reading and math. Students will work in small, staff-guided groups alongside peers with similar learning needs.

WIN groups began at Bryant and Central schools a few years ago. Based on their success, the district introduced the program to all elementary schools in fall 2021. WIN groups are at the heart of the district's strategy to support academic excellence and provide targeted instruction to meet individual student needs.

**Camp Ascension Summer Academic Support**

K-12 students from across the school district attended the new Camp Ascension summer school programs in June, July, and August.

At the elementary level, students received targeted, individualized instruction, including structured reading routines, exploratory learning, and math lessons focused on foundational math skills and number sense. Afternoon field trips that correlated to the morning's instruction helped the lessons "stick."

At the middle school level, the camps focused on academic support for students with identified learning gaps in reading, math, and social skills. Students also participated in afternoon field studies using STEM activities to foster personalized learning. High school camps focused on credit recovery to complete coursework required for graduation.

Camp Ascension was funded with federal COVID recovery dollars and will be offered again in summer 2022.





To successfully close the learning gaps associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, educators need the right tools to measure student progress and to provide academic support when and where it's needed.

Helena Public Schools uses multiple assessment tools and data sources to provide a complete picture of student progress, ranging from daily teacher assessments in the classroom to state and national testing.

Over the past 18 months, the district has added two powerful new tools to enhance measurement and reporting of student progress:

► **Standards-Based Reporting**

Helena Public Schools has introduced standards-based reporting for grades K-5 to better measure student progress and to establish more clearly defined learning targets based on statewide standards.

Instead of simply comparing students' performance with their peers, educators are moving to a standards-based reporting model to better assess how each student is progressing toward their grade-level learning targets. Grades are not based on an alphabetic, A through D system using cumulative test scores. Rather, parents can see how their student is progressing toward learning targets, with the report card indicating whether the student "Meets Standard," "Approaches Standard," or if "Support (is) Needed."

The transition to standards-based reporting has enabled the district to provide more meaningful re-

port cards and parent-teacher conferences. Parents can more clearly see what concepts their child has mastered and what learning remains to meet statewide grade-level targets by the end of the school year. The student and family can then work with their teacher to chart a clear pathway to success.

► **iReady**

Helena Public Schools has introduced the iReady online assessment and learning platform for reading and math at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

iReady uses powerful diagnostic tools to assess each student's learning level, determine which grade-level standards they have met, identify where learning gaps remain, and track growth. Students undergo iReady testing three times a year—in the fall, winter, and spring. Test results help provide a "Benchmark Assessment" to determine how students are progressing toward year-end learning goals and where additional focus may be needed.

In addition to student assessment, iReady provides lessons tailored to students' individual needs. Elementary students use iReady to focus on math and reading concepts where they need extra support and to explore enrichment materials in areas where they excel.



Supporting staff with high-quality, ongoing professional development opportunities is an essential part of fostering student academic growth and success. During the past six months, Helena Public Schools has focused on providing educators, para educators, and administrators with learning opportunities that focus on instructional strategies, effective instructional (academic) interventions, and meaningful assessment to determine what academic and social/emotional support students need to succeed.

Since June, the district has offered more than 325 professional development sessions, ranging from *Teaching Welding in the Virtual World* to *The Science of Reading*.

Additionally, content area curriculum is regularly reviewed and staff have received in-depth professional development in areas such as writing, reading, math, social studies, media literacy and information technology, and science.

Students are released early every Monday, allowing educators time to team up together to review student progress and make adjustments to meet student learning needs. These weekly

sessions focus on four questions:

1. What do we want all students to know and be able to do?
2. How will we know if they learn it?
3. How will we respond when some students do not learn?
4. How will we extend the learning for students who are already proficient?

This model provides more instructional support for academic and operational growth at each level.



Just as good nutrition prepares children’s minds and bodies for learning, good mental health is a foundation of student success. We know that students are receptive to learning when they feel safe and are confident that their teacher knows and cares about them.

We also know that today’s students face steeper mental health challenges than previous generations. In December, the U.S. Surgeon General issued a rare advisory on the urgent need to address the nation’s youth mental health crisis, citing pandemic disruptions as a recent contributor along with a wide range of pre-existing stressors. And in October, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the Children’s Hospital Association jointly declared the youth mental health crisis a national emergency.

Helena Public Schools is responding with an emphasis on new and existing tools and programs to support students, families, and staff. These include K-12 core programming to foster positive coping and social skills, suicide screening tools, and ongoing staff training. All are aimed at enabling students to fully learn, grow, and take advantage of all the opportunities their school years have to offer.

#### Core Programming

The Second Step Program teaches K-5 students skills for resolving conflicts, working with others, forming healthy relationships, and making good decisions – all designed to help students be more successful emotionally, socially, and academically.

At the middle and high school level, research-based screening tools are used to better under-

stand the social and emotional learning needs of each school’s student population. School counselors refer to the screening data as they develop core social-emotional programming for their campus. Lessons are designed to foster and support the school’s universal behavioral expectations such as safety, responsibility, and respect.

#### Mental health screening

Helena Public Schools uses a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), working together with families to provide students with timely and targeted emotional and behavioral health support, as well as academic support. The goal is to enable every student to fully engage in learning.

#### *(High school and middle school)*

Screening assessments are administered to students in grades 6-12 twice a year. When a student’s score indicates they may need specialized social or emotional intervention, their parents are contacted. The district uses two screening tools at the middle and high school level:

- ▶ **BASC-BESS** The BASC-BESS (Behavior and Emotional Screening System) is used for grades 6-12 support and focuses on both the academic and emotional strengths and behaviors of students.

- ▶ **GAIN** Working with parents, high schools and middle schools may also use the nationally recognized GAIN (Global Appraisal of Individual Needs) to screen students for indicators of mental health and behavioral issues. The GAIN screening tool is administered by the school’s outpatient therapist, who analyzes the results and recommends interventions.

These research-based screening tools strengthen the district’s efforts to provide support measures as early as possible when they can have the greatest impact.





*(Elementary school)*

At the K-5 level, educators refer students who may be at risk for behavioral or emotional problems to their administrator, school counselor, and assistance team.

**Mental health intervention**

When screening data, classroom behaviors, or other factors indicate that a student is struggling emotionally, their school’s assistance team—usually including the principal, school counselor, school nurse, teachers, and mental health partners—steps in to provide support, working in co-



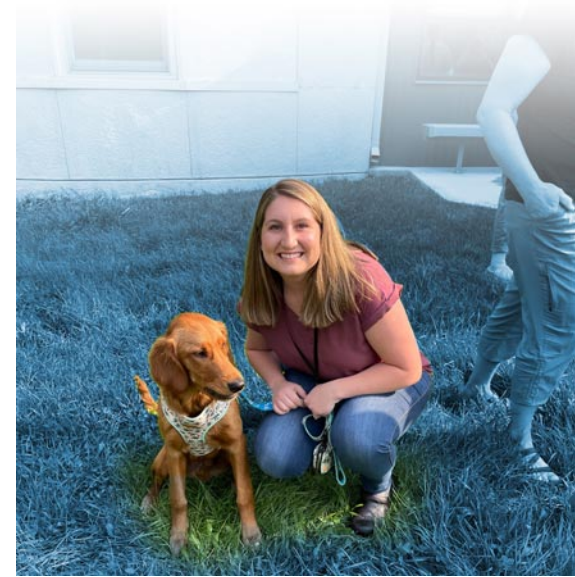
operation with the student’s family. The assistance team helps match the student with intervention strategies. These could include tools such as mentoring activities, social skills groups, and attendance intervention.

Qualifying students may be referred to an in-school counselor or social worker (LCPC or LCSW) through district partnerships with three local mental and behavioral health providers: Intermountain, Shodair Children’s Hospital, and AWARE.

**Building student resiliency**

Suicide-prevention tools look different at different grade levels:

- ▶ **Elementary** Helena Public Schools implemented the Good Behavior Game (PAX) program at elementary schools district-wide during the pandemic. In addition to teaching kids productivity, teamwork, and resiliency skills, PAX has been shown to help children develop coping skills to prevent problems such as mental illness and substance abuse. The PAX program is used in many schools throughout Montana.
- ▶ **Middle School** Students participate in the SOS Signs of Suicide program, a research-based prevention tool that is widely used in school settings.
- ▶ **High School** Students participate in the Youth Aware of Mental Health Program (YAM). Students learn to identify symptoms of depression and anxiety as well as risk factors for suicide. YAM programming also helps students to develop coping skills to construc-



tively manage stress and crisis. Teens learn from YAM-certified instructors as well as from each other through role-playing activities.

Meanwhile, teachers and staff are trained in strategies to recognize and respond to student mental health concerns, including suicide risk factors. This includes the “Question, Persuade, Refer” (QPR) suicide-prevention training program.

**Understanding trauma**

Teachers, administrators, and counselors have the opportunity to receive training, with the help of local mental health providers, to identify behaviors associated with childhood trauma and to implement research-based response techniques. The aim is to help students who have suffered adverse childhood experiences feel safe and supported so they can succeed in the classroom.

Another foundation of student social-emotional health is the ability to participate in sports, music, student clubs, and other extracurricular activities. In fall 2021, middle school and high school facilities reopened to community groups providing dance lessons, club activities, and other opportunities.

#### High School Activities

Helena High and Capital High resumed “near normal” club activity and sporting events in fall 2021. Music concerts and festivals were held, and drama students staged several performances. Student clubs once again met at the high schools, and sports teams resumed normal seasons. Overnight travel for all types of activities also resumed. Additionally, fan and audience limitations were lifted, allowing the community to watch students compete and perform.

#### Middle School Activities

Fall 2021 saw the return of intramural sports programs as well as middle school music performances. Middle school teams completed seasons in cross country, wrestling, volleyball, and basketball.



#### Driver Education

Driver Education resumed a more normal classroom structure this school year. With the recruitment of three new instructors, the district is able to offer more winter session classes.

Demand for driver education continues to grow, necessitating new ways to provide the course. This winter, the district is offering in-person instruction, an online class, and a class blending in-person and online instruction—all to best meet the needs of our students.





## Technology

Education technology has changed dramatically over the past decade. Today more than 9,000 students and staff rely on the district’s computer network for learning, teaching, and operations, with each of the team’s 14 IT technicians supporting more than 600 users.

The Educational Technology Department now supports thousands of laptops, Chromebooks, iPads, projectors, document cameras, and other hardware and software to meet the needs of today’s students and educators.

The Department is working toward its goal of 1:1 device access this school year, meaning that a laptop or tablet will be available to every student in the district. And throughout the pandemic, the technology team worked to provide every family with the equipment and access they needed to learn from home.

In addition to putting technology into the hands of students and staff, the Department works to keep the hands of cyber attackers out. Since the start of this school year, the technology team has prevented or minimized the impact of 926 attacks on the district’s computer network. Meanwhile, technicians play a critical role in physical school security, maintaining the district’s security cameras and door access system.

While great strides have been made in education technology over the past year, there is still much work ahead to adapt to today’s changing learning needs. Looking ahead, technology is a key focus area for the district.

**926**

Number of attempted cyber attacks stopped or mitigated by the HPS IT department since the start of the school year.

## Health and Safety

In November, Helena Public Schools began offering free COVID testing to all district students and employees as well as their immediate household members. The drive-through clinics greatly expanded access to testing in the community and enabled more accurate monitoring of transmission within the district.

The clinics were staffed by Helena Public Schools nurses with assistance from nursing students from Carroll College, MSU-Bozeman, and Montana Technological University. By early January, the team had administered well over 700 rapid COVID tests, helping keep the virus out of our schools and returning families and staff to work and school faster.

Due to a shortage of testing supplies, the district suspended the drive-through clinics in mid-January. The need for the clinics will be reevaluated pending the arrival of additional test supplies.

In another COVID-prevention initiative, the district partnered with multiple community organizations to hold kid-friendly COVID-19 vaccination clinics in October and November. Approximately 800 kids ages 5-11 received at least one vaccine dose at the clinics held at East Helena High School and Bryant Elementary.

Meanwhile, the district has directed federal emergency dollars to multiple initiatives to help keep students and staff healthy and in school. These include the addition of a school nurse position to assist with health and safety needs across the district.

In September, HPS reached an agreement with all union leadership teams to provide 80 hours (10 days) of paid emergency COVID leave to all district employees (union and non-union). The agreement was made retroactive to the beginning of the school year.

The district continues to follow multiple COVID-19 safety protocols, including social distancing when possible; a focus on cleaning; the use of outdoor space when possible; introducing fresh outside air into our learning spaces; the use of portable air filters; and regular cleaning and maintenance of air-handling systems.

**Helena Public Schools is grateful to our vaccination clinic partners:**

- Blue Cross Blue Shield
- East Helena High School
- Elkhorn Community Organizations Active in Disaster
- Lewis and Clark Public Health
- Local Boy Scouts
- Pureview Health Center
- St. Peter’s Health



## Talent recruitment and retention

Over the past year and a half, Helena Public Schools has adjusted the district's compensation structure for employee groups based on market analyses. In a tight hiring market, this allows HPS to competitively recruit and retain the talent and skill that our students and community deserve.

In Fall 2021, Trustees adopted in full the teacher pay matrix adjustment proposed by the Helena Education Association (teacher's union), which was based on comparables from AA districts across the state. Trustees also adjusted the pay matrix for district staff (non-teaching) and administrators using the same methodology.

The district will continue to routinely assess its compensation structure to ensure that compensation is competitive for all employee groups.

### Classroom Support

In addition to hiring instructional coaches, the district contracted with 13 teachers in fall 2021 to be available full-time to support short-and long-term absences. Ensuring consistent staffing provides students with the stability they need for academic growth. The district also hired some para educators earlier than usual last fall to provide additional support for classroom management and to support individual student needs. Meanwhile, Helena Public Schools raised substitute teacher wages to help address a shortage of substitutes and provide critical backup for teachers.

## Transportation solutions

### Swipe cards and updated cameras enhance safety

This school year, Helena Public Schools parents began using an app to monitor when and where their student gets on and off the bus, in real time. The app also can track the progress of their child's bus route.

These safety improvements were enabled by a new electronic swipe card system for school bus onboarding and offboarding. The new system replaces the paper check-in and check-out system, making the process easier for drivers and shortening stop times that delay traffic.

In addition, all district buses were outfitted this fall with eight new high-definition cameras with night vision. The upgrade includes bus stop arm cameras that enable transportation staff to identify drivers who fail to stop when the arms are extended and lights are flashing. Offenders are reported to the Montana Highway Patrol. So far this school year, the stop arm cameras have identified 37 violations in which drivers ran school bus stop arms.

### Response to bus driver shortage

In fall 2021, the Helena Public Schools Transportation Department found workable, temporary solutions to a shortage of bus drivers that is challenging districts across Montana and the nation. While many districts cancelled multiple routes for the entire school year, the HPS Transportation Department designed a new bus schedule with rolling route suspensions.

It's not a long-term solution; parents must provide transportation approximately one week per month. However, the rolling route suspensions have allowed the district to continue bus service to all areas, preventing the burden of the driver shortage from unfairly falling on any route, neighborhood, or school. Families are compensated for their transportation expenses through savings realized when scheduled routes aren't run.

The new schedule has also allowed the Transportation Department to return to its pre-pandemic pick up and drop off times, and to almost entirely eliminate the need for students to transfer buses.

Helena Public Schools is grateful to our community for supporting our Transportation Team through this difficult time as the district works on long-term transportation solutions.





Helena Public Schools manages 20 facility sites covering 1.3 million square feet of building space and 181 acres. With the average age of our facilities at 50 years, the Facilities Department focuses on doing the right maintenance at the right time to keep buildings and grounds cost-effective and functioning efficiently.

**Elementary Bond close out work**

To close out projects funded by the district’s last voter-approved Elementary Bond, which included the construction of three new elementary schools, the Facilities team finished work to update and enhance the safety, security, and functionality of elementary schools across Helena. These efforts have included providing state-of-the-art security for schools.

Every elementary school and middle school has benefited from the generosity and commitment of our voters and Helena Public Schools appreciates the community’s investment in our students.

**Ongoing maintenance**

The Facilities team recently finished roof updates at Capital High, Four Georgians, and May Butler, as well as roof maintenance throughout the district to maintain the integrity of the buildings. Other projects in 2021 include the renovation of two bathrooms at Kessler Elementary and the replacement of all drinking water and plumbing fixtures at Rossiter and Warren elementaries in a successful effort to mitigate lead exceedances discovered in the water this fall.

**Enhancing air quality**

To meet the indoor air quality needs necessitated by the pandemic, the Facilities Department en-

hanced air-handling systems, adding new cleaning protocols, filters, and other much-needed improvements throughout the district.

Work also included major improvements to the HVAC system at Jefferson Elementary—switching from steam to hot water and adding air conditioning, which makes the building more amenable to summer programming. The Facilities team also enhanced air flow and air conditioning for the interior offices at Capital High School.

**Repurposing Lincoln**

In November, the Facilities Department finished converting the Lincoln Center—the former Lincoln Elementary School at 1325 Poplar St.—to house the district’s Central Office services.

After serving as a temporary home for Central School during construction of Central’s new building, Lincoln served as a storage facility, which was not an optimal use of building space.

The Lincoln Center now houses the district administrative and IT offices, centralizing district services, reducing drive time, and adding much-needed space and opportunities for district trainings and board meetings. The former gym area will serve as a dedicated professional development training center.

The new facility also provides a more central

location for public-facing services such as bill paying, employment services, enrollment services, and, most recently, drive-through COVID testing.

Meanwhile, the former Central Office location—the May Butler Center at 55 S. Rodney St.—is the new home of the district’s team of physical and occupational therapists, brailleists, adaptive physical education staff, and other professionals who support students with motor, vision, and hearing needs. The district continues to examine long-term plans for the May Butler Center.



**Vigilante Stadium**

In October, crews hoisted an iron archway over the refurbished main entrance of Vigilante Stadium, marking the completion of a \$1 million stadium renovation project, including a new track surface, an LED lighting system, ADA seating, new retaining walls, and other needed improvements. This Helena landmark continues to offer the community a safe, well-lit place to walk and run while supporting our athletes across town.

### Solar panels

Students at Jim Darcy and Central elementary schools can now watch the sun power their buildings in real time, thanks to a coalition of public and private partners who funded the installation of 50-kilowatt solar panels at each school. The panels are expected to generate \$131,000 in energy cost savings for each school over a 30-year period. Digital monitors will enable students to track the level of energy production through the seasons and study the science behind renewable energy.

Helena Public Schools is grateful to our partnerships with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, NorthWestern Energy and its rate payers, Helena Vigilante Runners, and the Sleeping Giant Citizens Council, whose work made these earth friendly infrastructure improvements possible. The district is working to determine next steps to install solar panels at the new Bryant Elementary School.

### Master facilities planning

In 2022, Helena Public Schools is initiating a robust facilities master planning process. The goal is to develop a comprehensive plan that will enable more informed facilities decisions. The Master Facilities Plan will be a living document that is updated annually to ensure that our facilities meet today’s rapidly changing education needs, especially in areas such as instructional delivery and workforce training.

The first step of the planning process was the completion of a District Deferred Maintenance Report, which was presented to the Board of Trustees in January and will help inform the updated Master Facilities Plan.

## Nutrition

Helena Public Schools has provided more than 1.6 million breakfasts and lunches to community children, free-of-charge, since March 2020, a service made possible by funding from the US Department of Agriculture.

Providing children with consistent, healthy meals is one of the most important community services our district provides. Over the course of the pandemic, meals have been served in classrooms, city parks, school parking lots, and out of busses and trucks to reach all in need. Staff also have delivered meals to families who weren’t able to make it to serving sites.

Children who are not enrolled or attending Helena Public Schools can pick up meals for the week on Wednesdays at Capital High School from 7-11 a.m. To access meals, call (406) 324-2570 or visit [helenaschools.org/departments/food-services/](https://helenaschools.org/departments/food-services/)



## Community Wellness

The Helena Public Schools Wellness Committee is comprised of teachers, school administrators, parents, community members, and Board of Trustees members who are dedicated to building a culture of wellness as a foundation for learning.

The Committee reviews nutritional and fitness best practices from across Montana and the nation that enhance student learning. The goal is to implement these practices locally to inspire students, families, and school employees to make healthy lifestyle choices.

The group’s Nutrition Subcommittee is working on a “Harvest of the Month” pilot program. In partnership with St. Peter’s Health, high school students visit fourth-grade classrooms each month to provide interactive nutrition lessons and host taste tests featuring Montana foods.

Meanwhile, the Physical Activity Subcommittee is exploring opportunities for students to participate in movement outside of the Physical Education classroom during their school day. The subcommittee also is looking at ways to provide families with resources to promote physical activity at home. The work is inspired by the proven benefits of regular movement for behavior and academics.





## Capturing efficiencies

The Helena Public Schools Business & Finance Department has realized significant cost savings already this school year by replacing paper-based systems with digital formats. These include conversions to electronic timecards and purchasing cards, as well as online payment systems for families.

Together with the Education Technology Department, the Business & Finance Office moved the district to a centralized print management system. The district also transitioned to an online system for annual updates of student contact information, a conversion that will yield significant annual savings of staff time and materials.

## Keeping you in the know

In August, the district brought on a communications officer to support the district's administrative team and schools with outreach to families, staff, and the broader community. The Communications Officer also supports relationships with the media in all its forms – online, TV, radio, and print.

Communication and outreach are top priorities for the Board of Trustees and district administration. Today's minute-by-minute news cycle, coupled with the ever-changing demands of COVID-19, have dramatically elevated the need for prompt and consistent communications. This includes weekly updates to district families and enhanced social media outreach. During the fourth quarter of 2021, the district's Facebook reach was up 82 percent compared with fourth quarter 2020, while new page visits were up 42 percent. And families can now find district news and information on Twitter, FaceBook, and Instagram.

Focus areas for the coming year include continued social media growth and development and improvements to the district's website.

As the district continues to move forward through initiatives such as academic progress monitoring, program reviews and adjustments, and master facilities planning, the Communications Officer will work to keep our families, staff, and community informed and involved.



As we enter the second half of the 2021-22 school year, Helena Public Schools will continue its focus on closing pandemic-related learning gaps through comprehensive student assessment and support, while moving the district forward in all of the academic and operational focus areas outlined in the preceding pages.

To recap, these include:

- ▶ Continued focus on closing learning gaps through targeted academic support.
- ▶ Assessment and analysis of student academic progress and robust progress reporting to families and the community.
- ▶ Commitment to recruitment and retention of high-quality educators.
- ▶ Expanded quality professional development opportunities for all employee groups.
- ▶ District-wide program reviews, beginning with the Special Education Department. These reviews will inform program adjustments going forward.




- ▶ Implementation of a comprehensive Facilities Master Planning Process to guide future facilities decisions.
- ▶ Development of long-term transportation solutions.
- ▶ Continued commitment to keeping our students, staff, families, and the broader community informed.

In all we do, Helena Public Schools is dedicated to our core principles of excellence and continuous improvement to serve our students, staff, and community.



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