



January 3, 2021

Dear HPS Families and Staff,

I hope you have had a peaceful winter break and enjoyed the extra time with your loved ones. As we prepare to welcome students and staff back to school tomorrow, I want to start with a couple January highlights.

Tomorrow will mark the opening of kindergarten registration for Fall 2022. If you have a child who will be five on or before September 10, I encourage you to register as soon as possible to begin receiving school communications for your child. Starting kindergarten is a major milestone – not to mention an emotional one – and our teachers will be reaching out to prepare new and returning families throughout the spring and summer. Our [Kindergarten Registration](#) page has full instructions on how to register, as well as tips on what to expect leading up to that exciting first day of school. Even if you don't have an incoming kindergartner, it's worth a visit to watch videos featuring some of our kindergarten teachers, all of whom perform little miracles in our classrooms every day.

As we begin the new year, I also encourage you to follow Helena Public Schools on our new Twitter channel: @SchoolsHelena. If you like to Tweet, this is a good way to catch district-related news and updates.

Of course, the biggest change as we head into the new year is the switch to mask-recommended status, beginning tomorrow. Those who are concerned or vulnerable to COVID-19 are encouraged to continue to send their children to school with a mask. Health experts advise wearing a paper surgical mask or KN95 mask for extra protection. The KN95 mask is the non-medical version of the N95 worn by medical professionals. The following companies have been recommended if you are interested in purchasing children's KN95s:

<https://www.armbrustusa.com/collections/usa-made-n95-masks-respirators/products/armbrust-usa-made-kids-kn95-mask?variant=39621719818373>

<https://shop.projectn95.org/children-s-sized-white-kn95-sm-respirator-mask-10-count-bona-fide-masks/p>

Each school site will make children-and adult-sized surgical and cloth masks available free-of charge. Please know that the district will continue to foster an environment of respect for individual and family decisions on whether or not to mask.

Most importantly, please keep your child home if they are sick. **To prepare for a safe return to school tomorrow, our school nurse team will host a special drive-through testing clinic this evening (see details below).** Testing will continue to play a significant role in keeping our schools open and students safe as we move into the second semester of this school year.

As we navigate the arrival of the Omicron variant, we will continue to assess and make decisions based upon our local variables here in Helena. Reinstating masks, short periods of remote schooling, or other mitigation factors remain options as we manage Omicron and future waves that will inevitably come our way.

We will continue to closely follow our other 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.

I'm incredibly grateful to our parents, students, and staff for making a full semester of in-person learning possible in 2021. Together, we will make 2022 a great year for our kids!

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.

Rex Weltz
Superintendent, Helena Public Schools

**Lincoln Center Covid Testing Clinic for Students and Staff
1325 Poplar – 4:00-6:00 p.m.**

At the request of some of our families we will be offering free COVID testing for students and staff this evening, January 3, 2022, from 4-6 p.m. at the Lincoln Center located at 1325 Poplar. This is an opportunity to ensure that any student or staff member who might test positive doesn't return to school tomorrow. If you are interested in being tested, please pull up in front of the building and remain in your vehicle. Someone will come out and meet you at your car. You will need to complete a brief consent form before the test is administered. Once the test is completed you may leave. You will receive a text message with the results of your test. If the test is positive, you will also receive a phone call indicating next steps.