



February 11, 2022

Dear Helena Public Schools Families,

I shared with you in last Friday's letter that I expected to lift the K-12 mask requirement on Feb. 14 if COVID conditions continued to improve, and they have. All indicators suggest that we have seen the peak of this latest surge, which appears to be moving out as quickly as it swept in.

Two factors triggered the district's temporary return to masking status – keeping hospitalization rates down to preserve healthcare access and staff absentee rates, which determine whether or not we can keep our school doors open. This week has seen significant improvement in both areas. Meanwhile, county case numbers are down, district case numbers are down, and wastewater testing numbers – an early indicator of viral activity – have declined.

Effective Monday, the district will move to mask-recommended status for all grade levels.

As before, we will continue to respect family choice around masking. High-quality masks will continue to be provided free-of-charge, and school nurses are available to perform correct mask fittings for students and staff. We will continue to report district case numbers as well as absentee rates on the district website, so parents can stay apprised of health conditions.

The health and safety of all students is our top priority. Even as conditions improve on a daily basis, the district's other COVID safety protocols remain firmly in place, 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 system.

I've said it before, and I'll say again how grateful I am for our community's flexibility and support as we continue to pivot to meet COVID's challenges. We expected a near-normal return to school last fall, but COVID had other plans for us. As we approach the two-year mark of the pandemic, I'm optimistic that the relief we've been waiting for is in front of us.

In the meantime, we continue to support your student as they work toward their grade-level learning goals and to provide enrichment in areas where they excel. This week you received one or more student assessment reports. Please take time to review the results and share them with your child. The information provided empowers you to be a partner on your child's learning team. If your student is in grades K-5, your teacher will go over the results at your parent/teacher conference in March. More information on the district's student assessments and learning initiatives is available in our [Mid-Year Report to the Community](#).

It's been a full and productive week in our classrooms, and I'd like to close it out by recognizing just a few of the exciting accomplishments of students and staff.

- 7th-grader Timothy Cline won the 2022 Helena Middle School Spelling Bee Thursday, with the word “ziggurat.” (For folks like me who had to Google it, a ziggurat is a rectangular, stepped tower from the 3rd millennium.) Finalists who will go with Timothy to the Lewis and Clark County Spelling Bee are: Kumari Leland (7th), Oli Grotzke (7th), Emilie Woods-Spurlock (6th), Cody Dixon (8th), and Brady Lay (8th). Alternates are Jakob Criswell (8th grade), Cate Murray (7th grade), and Kelia Gomes (7th grade). Great job, everyone!
- Congratulations to Capital High School’s Laura Brayko, who was named “Montana Theater Teacher of the Year” at the Montana Thespian Festival Feb. 5-6 in Missoula.
- High fives to the Helena High DECA students who qualified at the recent state conference for DECA’s International Career Development Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, this spring: Christine Anderson, Bella Brewer, Zoe Taylor, Melaina Kloberdanz, Corbin Luce, Eva Santos, Hunter Pandis. In addition, Helena High’s Catty Shack food bar, was among 461 school-based enterprises achieving Gold Certification for the 21-22 school year. And congratulations to DECA Advisor Jessica Frazier!
- Kudos to C.R. Anderson Middle School Band Teacher Christopher Nevinski, who was named January Teacher of the Month by KMTX radio. Well done, Mr. Nevinski!

The days are getting longer and more warm weather is in store for the weekend. We can all look forward to brighter times ahead!

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rex Weltz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping flourish at the end of the name.

Rex Weltz
Superintendent, Helena Public Schools