



March 11, 2022

Dear Helena Public Schools Families and Staff,

I look forward to one of my favorite weekends of the year – daylight savings time! As our mornings grow brighter and our days longer, you can almost feel the energy level rise in our hallways and classrooms.

It's the kind of positive energy that fueled our Capital High Bruins on their journey to the state AA Basketball Tournament in Billings. After winning yesterday's quarterfinals game against Gallatin High School (Bozeman), the team returns to the court tonight to play Billings Skyview in the semi-finals. Way to represent, Bruins! When an HPS team succeeds, they represent all of HPS and our community.

The Bruin basketball Team is not there alone. Our student athletes include our dazzling dance and cheer teams as well. In addition to keeping our school spirit alive, these teams put in long hours of training to perform feats the rest of us should not try at home. And I want them to know: We are proud of you all!

Nor could we have school spirit without our school bands. Through long hours of practice, our student musicians deliver the pep and pride that championship games are made of. The Bruins Band traveled to Billings to work their magic during yesterday's quarterfinals game, and the Lady Bruin Cheerleaders and CHS Cadets Dance Team will be there to cheer them on tonight!

Speaking of our student musicians, I'd like to congratulate all who participated in this week's AA Band Festival hosted here in Helena. More than 150 students from Capital High, Helena High, Skyview High (Billings), and Glacier High (Kalispell) worked over the course of two days with Guest Conductor Patrick Sweeten, former Director/Officer-in-Charge with the United States Naval Academy Band. If you weren't able to attend Tuesday evening's Gala Concert, you can [still catch it on YouTube](#).

Congratulations are also in order for the Helena High Mock Trial Team, which won a 3-peat state championship on Saturday, defeating Flathead High School (Kalispell). Our state champs will now compete at the [National High School Mock Trial Championship](#) to be held in May via Zoom. We know they are competitors to be reckoned with in this rigorous national competition, in which students demonstrate their knowledge of our legal system by playing the roles of attorneys, witnesses, and others involved in the workings of a trial.

Of course, each of these student successes was made possible by the support of teachers, coaches, club leaders, and adult volunteers. This week a special group of high school seniors took the opportunity to say thank you, with help from the Helena Education Foundation. These outstanding teens were recently named "Distinguished Students" by the Helena Education Foundation for significant accomplishments in a particular area – leadership, excellence in a field of study, or triumph over adversity.

The Distinguished Students were in turn asked to nominate public school educators who made the most significant impact on their experiences as students. Nominees include current and retired teachers at all levels, as well as counselors and coaches.

The 2022 Distinguished Teachers and Students will be recognized at the Helena Education Foundation's Celebration of Excellence May 9. I look forward to hearing the stories behind each of these remarkable students and the educators who inspired and supported them. [Please visit our website to see the complete list of awardees.](#)

As you can see, it's been a busy week across the district as we begin the sprint to the end of the school year. And with next year right around the corner, I'm happy to share the [HPS academic calendar](#) for the 2022/2023, which was approved by the HPS Board of Trustees at their regular meeting Tuesday evening.

I would also like to share some bittersweet news, which is the departure of three long-time district leaders at the end of the school year.

Walt Chancy, Assistant Principal at Capital High, is retiring at the end of the school year after 46 years with the district as both a teacher and an administrator. It would be impossible to summarize all of Mr. Chancy's tremendous contributions to the district in this letter. But I am compelled to note a fun fact: He must be the only AA coach in Montana who can boast a state football championship (1996) plus two state gymnastics championships (1983 and 1987-88).

Another long-time district leader, Kessler Elementary Principal Lisa Lowney, will also retire from the district at the end of the school year. Lisa has served the district for 26 years as a teacher and administrator. We know she will be dearly missed by our Kessler community.

At the middle school level, CR Anderson Principal Dave Thennis, has accepted a position as superintendent of the Stevensville School District starting next school year. It's gratifying to see Mr. Thennis take this exciting new step in his career and we wish him and his family much success.

While we are sad to see them go, we wish each of these veteran educators the best in their next chapters. We have some big shoes to fill. Mr. Chancy, Ms. Lowney, and Mr. Thennis have a combined 96 years of experience with Helena Public Schools. The district is conducting a rigorous recruitment process and we will continue to keep our community informed as finalists are vetted and announced.

Again, let's all send positive thoughts to our Capital High Boys in Billings. Go, Bru!

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rex M. Wertz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "W" at the end.

Rex M. Wertz
Superintendent, Helena Public Schools