



May 27, 2022

Dear Helena Public Schools Families and Staff,

On Wednesday evening, I had the pleasure of delivering opening comments at our annual Helena Public Schools Retirees Celebration, where we gave a warm send-off to our [retiring employees](#) – teachers, para educators, custodians, computer technicians, secretaries, and more.

I like to think of the remarkable number of lives each of them touched over the course of their careers. As I shared at Wednesday's event, my dad was a road engineer. When he retired, no one saw him on the street and said, "Hey, Bill was a good road engineer!" But as educators, we don't lose our identity when we retire.

Our retirees will always be known for their work in the district. Introductions to new people will often open with: "This was my teacher, my coach, my bus driver, my librarian, my school secretary ..."

To each of our retirees: Please know that as you start this new chapter in your life, your students will continue to view you as that respected and trusted adult they looked up to, long after their school years are over. Thank you for giving so much to our Helena community.

Next week, we will celebrate our 2022 graduates, who will make their own mark on our world as they aspire to become educators, lawmakers, medical professionals, military service members, masters of trade skills, and so many other callings in which they will serve their communities.

Commencement ceremonies are as follows:

Friday June 3

Access to Success: 11 a.m., Helena Middle School, 1025 N. Rodney St.

Project for Alternative Learning (PAL): 1 pm, Myrna Loy Center, 15 N. Ewing St.

Saturday, June 4

Helena High: 9 a.m., Nelson Stadium, 1601 N. Benton Ave.

Capital High: 1 p.m., Nelson Stadium, 1601 N. Benton Ave.

Saturday, June 4, is the night of the traditional Senior All Night Party at the Helena Civic Center, which is organized and hosted by parent volunteers. The organizing committee is still [seeking volunteers](#) if you would like to help give our graduates a fun and safe sendoff!

Meanwhile, our classrooms remain busy with end-of-year art shows, read-a-thons, and, of course, academics.

Congratulations to Ms. Herbolich's fourth grade class at Rossiter Elementary, which took up their teacher's challenge to read 1 million words each this school year. I was honored to join the seven determined bookworms who hit the mark at an [elegant Millionaires Luncheon](#) yesterday afternoon in the Rossiter gym. Way to go, Royals!

And kudos to the 40 Capital High Honors Biology 1 students who traveled to the University of Montana last week to present air quality research projects. Eleven schools with 220 students from around the state attended the [REACH Symposium](#) in Missoula, where students either presented a PowerPoint or a Poster. CHS Freshman Jordan McRae took second place for her poster and received a \$75 cash award. Way to go student scientists!

On the topic of science, I encourage you to check out the [STARBASE Montana spring newsletter](#). Based at Fort Harrison, STARBASE gives fifth-grade students hands-on experience in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) activities. Fifth-grade classes spend five days at STARBASE, where they are encouraged to think like scientists to solve real-world problems. Funded by the U.S. Department of Defense, the program also offers STARBASE 2.0 for middle school students.

I also would like to congratulate Helena High welding teachers Cindy Galbavy and Jake Spearson and their students on hosting their [17th Annual Metal Sculpting Show](#) this week. Their work is topflight, combining stunning artistry with competitive career skills. The HHS welding shop, which was transformed into an art gallery for the evening, is home to a new, state-of-the-art plasma cutting table, purchased with a Great Ideas Grant from the Helena Education Foundation as well as funding from other grant sources and community supporters.

In other student recognitions, I would like to introduce Loreley Drees, of Helena High, and Keiran Boyle, of Capital High, who have been selected as the 2022-23 Student Representatives to the HPS Board of Trustees.

Loreley is captain of the HHS Speech and Debate Team and a member of Mock Trial, Science Olympiad/Bowl, Key Club, National Honor Society, and Girls Thrive. She participated in a two-week Montana Conservation Corp work event in Yellowstone Park last summer and has earned more than 150 volunteer hours at the Lewis and Clark Public Library. She will volunteer at ExplorationWorks this summer, and also teaches, performs, and volunteers for Grandstreet Theatre.

Keiran is president of the CHS HOSA (Future Health Professionals) Chapter, Vice-President of the Junior Class, Secretary of the CHS Key Club, a past member of the Montana Youth Action Board, and a member of the Math Club. He competes in track, plays the violin in Advanced Orchestra, and is an advocate for the arts.

Welcome Loreley and Keiran, and thank you for taking on this important leadership role on behalf of your peers.

In District business, I'd like to welcome our new Helena Public Schools Facilities Director Todd Verrill. Mr. Verrill brings 26 years of leadership, engineering, project management, and strategic planning experience to our District. He has an MA in Strategic Studies from the US Army War College, an MS in Engineering Management from Missouri University of Science and Technology, and a BS in Environmental Science from the US Military Academy at West Point. Currently, Mr. Verrill is the Construction and Facilities Management Officer for the Montana Army National Guard. He and his wife, Marty, have two children in the District. We're pleased to have Mr. Verrill join our administrative team to lead this critical component of our District operations.

Heading into Memorial Day weekend, our hearts remain heavy with the tragedy in Ulvade, Texas. As parents and educators, the safety of our own students is of utmost concern. Please know that our safety committees at both the school level and the district level actively review our safety measures and needs throughout the year and conduct routine drills for a variety of emergency scenarios.

In 2017, voters approved an Elementary Bond that funded the installation of secure, keyless entry systems for our elementary and middle schools. At our high schools, the public must now enter through a secure, single point of entry.

However, facilities remain one of our biggest safety challenges at this time of year, due to the age of our buildings and their HVAC systems. By early afternoon, as outside temperatures reach the 70s or 80s, classrooms in many of our buildings become miserably hot, which is not a good learning environment. The only relief is to open windows or prop open doors. Doors also are propped open as groups of students enter or exit buildings.

I have re-enforced to our principals and will continue to remind all staff of the importance of making sure that doors are never propped open without an adult actively stationed at the door. If there is not an adult available to *actively* monitor a doorway, *it must remain closed*.

Earlier this year, we initiated a facilities master planning process to ensure that future investments in our buildings are aligned with our rapidly changing education needs, including safety. The limitations of our HVAC systems will be included in this process.

As we continue to examine all aspects of our safety equipment and protocols, we must remember that one of our best defenses is identifying and addressing student mental health needs.

Our District uses a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), working together with families to provide students with timely and targeted emotional and behavioral health support. This process enables us to support students and families in need. We also collaborate with local mental health providers to assist students and families when appropriate.

This mental health support is most effective if we are all engaged, as parents and educators, in paying attention to our children and students' mental health and steering those who need support toward help. We encourage all students who need support, or know someone who does, to speak with a counselor, principal, teacher, parent, or other trusted adult immediately.

Over the course of this long weekend, we will continue to grapple with the events of this week. Below is the list of resources I shared in my message on Wednesday, so you have them at hand.

As we remember and honor loved ones and those who valiantly served our country this weekend, I hope you are able to be with your family and hold them close.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rex W. Jeltz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rex" and last name "Jeltz" clearly legible.

Superintendent
Helena Public Schools

- [Talking to Children About Violence: Tips for Parents and Teachers \(nasponline.org\)](https://www.nasponline.org)
- [How to talk to kids after 14 children, teacher killed in Texas school shooting - ABC News \(go.com\)](https://www.abcnews.com)
- [How to talk to children about shootings: An age-by-age guide \(today.com\)](https://www.today.com)
- [How to Talk to Kids About School Shootings | Common Sense Media](https://www.common-sense-media.com)
- [Guidelines-Talking-to-Kids-About-Attacks-Two-Sided-Onesheet-Format.pdf \(schoolcrisiscenter.org\)](https://www.schoolcrisiscenter.org)
- [Talking to Children about the Shooting | The National Child Traumatic Stress Network \(nctsn.org\)](https://www.nctsn.org)
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, please visit [Lifeline \(suicidepreventionlifeline.org\)](https://www.lifeline.org) ; call 1-800-273-TALK; or text MT to 741-741.