

Billings City Administrator Weekly Report

July 2, 2020

1. **Monday's COVID-19 Update** - Monday's update will be given by Steve Arveschoug the Economic/Recovery Branch Director. Please review the enclosed Draft Recovery Plan attached. Governor Bullock held a Press Call on COVID-19; please see the Governor's Press Release and attachments regarding the Governor's and OPI's plans to safely reopen schools.
 - Yellowstone County Economic Response & Recovery Draft Plan
 - Reopening Safe and Healthy Schools for Montana Press Release
 - Governor's School Guidance
 - OPI's School Guidance
2. **Library Re-Opening** – Day 1 was a success with approximately 350 patrons visiting the library throughout the day. We peaked at 162. Curbside pickup remains in place.
3. **Dehler Park** – Major League Baseball (MLB) announced this week that there will not be any minor league baseball throughout the US this year. We continue to work with the Mustang's owner to secure the return of MLB for the 2021 season and beyond. Last week I signed an agreement with the American Legion (AL) allowing AL to use Dehler Park during their 2020 season. Last week they hosted a tournament and they anticipate playing several games throughout this year's season at Dehler park.
4. **Transtech Business Center & 32nd Reconstruction** – Last week Steve Arveschoug and I met with the developers of Transtech Business Center to discuss development opportunities and the desire the property owners have to extend next year's reconstruction of 32nd south of the canal to Transtech Way. I am working with our Engineering Division to determine the additional costs and potential resources to fund the extension (our current budget includes the reconstruction of 32nd from King Ave south to the BBWA Canal).
5. **Landfill Tour** – Thanks to Vester Wilson, Bart Twitchell, Dave Mumford and Jennifer Duray for taking a group of Councilmembers and staff on a tour of the landfill last Thursday. The 2020 facility investments are moving forward as anticipated. The level of innovation taking place at the landfill is impressive. The landfill team has increased the compaction/density by 4 times over the past 20 years, greatly extending the life of our landfill cells and increasing gas output. As a reminder, the landfill generated over \$254,000 in FY 2020 from the sale of gas to help pay for General Fund expenditures.

Have a great weekend.

YELLOWSTONE COUNTY ECONOMIC RESPONSE & RECOVERY



DRAFT RECOVERY PLAN

YELLOWSTONE COUNTY ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN NARRATIVE

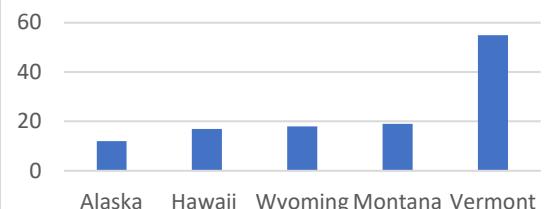
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INTRODUCTION

On March 28, Governor Steve Bullock, acting on the advice of public health officials, issued a Stay-At-Home order. This directive shut down large portions of our state's economy to contain the spread of COVID-19. As a public health measure, this effort has been a success – COVID-19 cases peaked early at a relatively low number, our hospitals have not been overburdened, and our state's death toll from this pandemic is among the lowest in the nation.

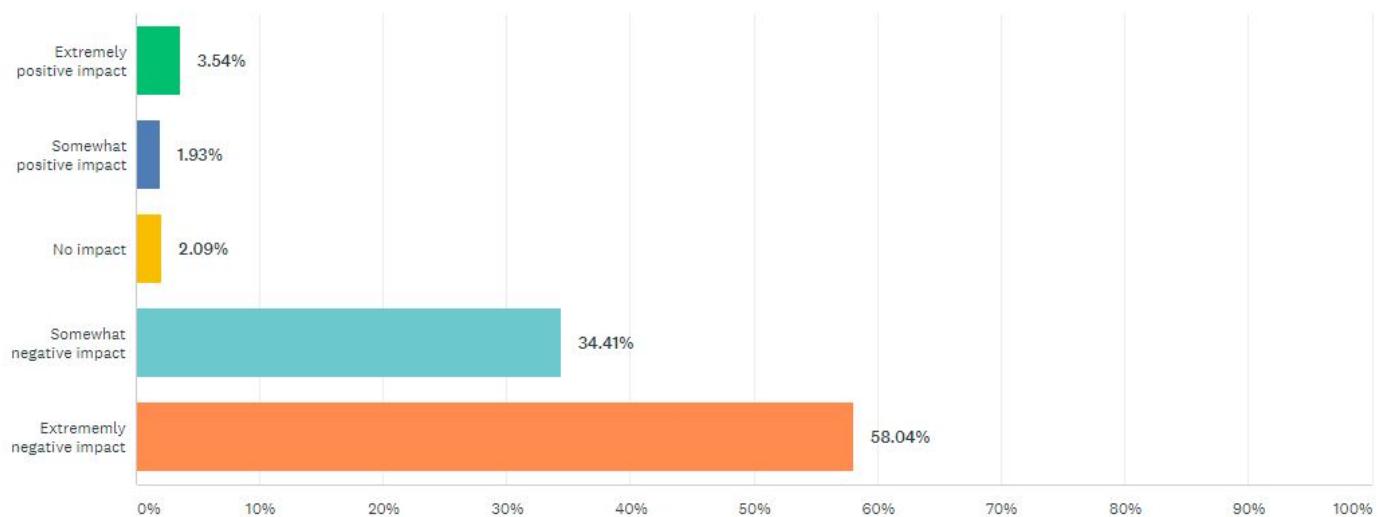
STATES WITH LOWEST NUMBER OF COVID-19 DEATHS



These steps to protect public health have taken a drastic toll on our economy. Our inability to gather, shop, and travel have caused a severe direct financial hit to many of our businesses, with ripple effects throughout the economy. Economic output is down sharply. In the Yellowstone County Economic Response and Recovery Survey conducted in late April, 92% of companies reported that COVID-19 had somewhat or extremely negative impacts on their business.

How severely has the COVID-19 virus impacted your normal business operations? (This may include supply chain interr...

Answered: 622 Skipped: 3



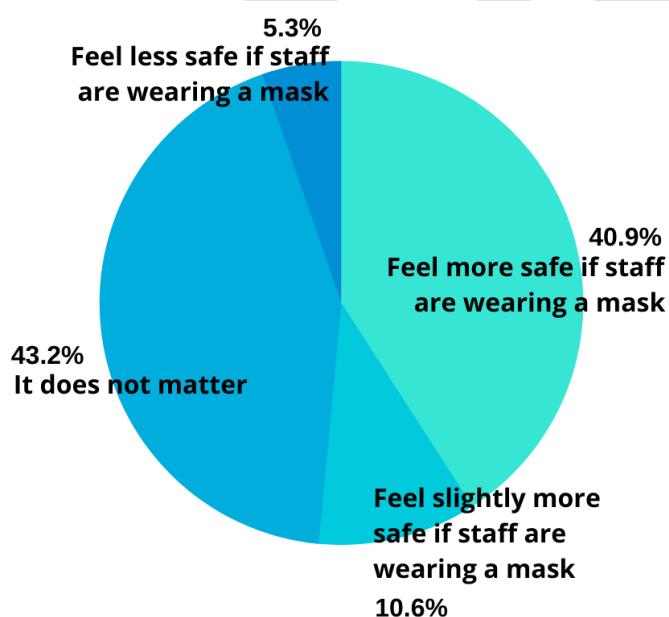
Employment numbers also took a dramatic hit. According to the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, April unemployment claims in Yellowstone County reached 8,824, resulting in an unemployment rate of 11.1%. This represents a 196% increase in unemployment compared to the previous month (March). Unemployment claims peaked on the week ending April 18, 2020 and have fallen consistently since. This decrease is at least in part attributed to the federal Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). Over twenty thousand Montana businesses received PPP.

	Loan Count	Net Dollars	Loan Dollars Per Capita
North Dakota	19,183	\$1,754,925,373	\$2,303
South Dakota	21,533	\$1,647,772,605	\$1,863
Colorado	99,807	\$10,234,368,111	\$1,777
Wyoming	12,895	\$1,021,036,842	\$1,764
Montana	22,399	\$1,746,953,456	\$1,634
Idaho	29,051	\$2,546,673,937	\$1,425

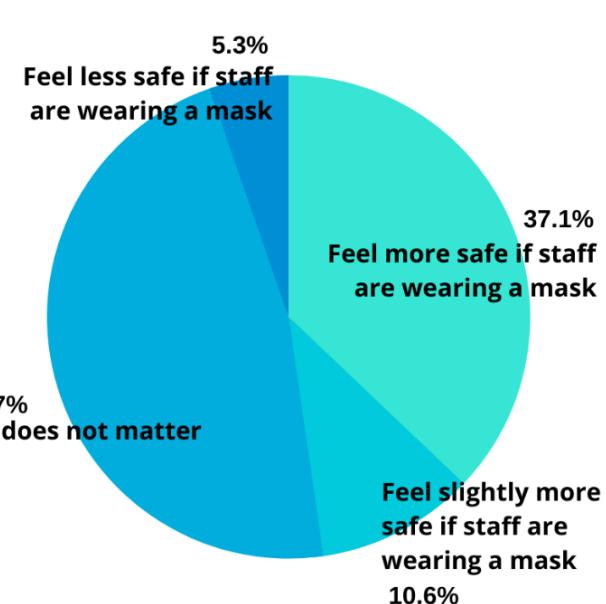
*Approved as of 6/12/2020

Phase II brings additional economic activity, but uncertainty remains high as businesses begin to open with limitations and precautions in place. Experimenting with modifications intended to protect health under circumstances that are not yet fully defined, businesses are searching for solutions to help them survive the immediate impacts of this pandemic, revive their businesses and consumer confidence, and thrive in the coming years by learning lessons and seizing available opportunities to build a more resilient business model.

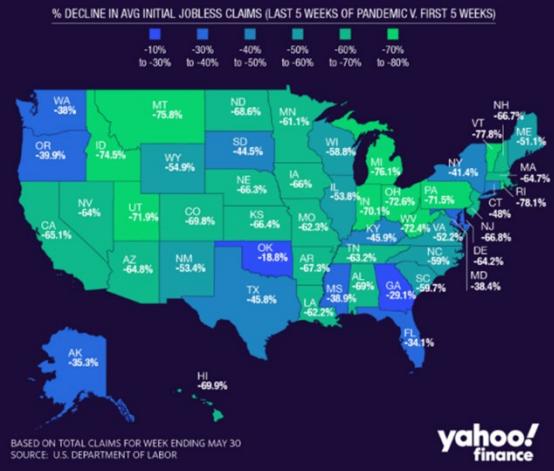
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U.S. STATES SHOWING EARLY SIGNS OF JOB MARKET RECOVERY



While there are still many unknowns when it comes to recovery, Montana appears to be performing better than many other states in the nation – as can be seen in the national comparison of change in joblessness. The questions will be, will this trend continue, and how can the business community be supported in a way that leads to recovery?

In addition to the change in joblessness, there are, as of June 16, 2020, 2,600 job postings in Yellowstone County with the top five positions hiring being; retail salespersons, registered nurses, first-line supervisors of retail sales workers, sales representatives, and first line supervisors of food preparations and serving workers.

YELLOWSTONE COUNTY ECONOMIC RESPONSE & RECOVERY TEAM

Yellowstone County's Economic Response and Recovery Team was formed at the beginning of this crisis with a mission **to coordinate responses to the immediate needs of our business community, identify and fill gaps in services and resources, guide the development of the community's near-term economic recovery plan, and help define objectives for a comprehensive economic development strategy designed to build the foundation for our future community and economic development growth.** This team consists of business owners, County and City elected leadership, health care experts, and community and economic developers.

TEAM MEMBERS:

Steve Arveschoug, Big Sky Economic Development
John Brewer, Billings Chamber of Commerce
Katy Easton, Downtown Billings Partnership
Lilly Corning, (retail/commercial development) Corning Companies
Kris Carpenter (retail) Joy of Living/Sanctuary Spa and Salon
Mike Nelson (hospitality) Northern Hotel
Luke Kobold (healthcare) Billings Clinic
Ty Elkin (healthcare) St. Vincent Healthcare
Dr. David Graham (healthcare) St. Vincent Healthcare
John Felton (public health) Riverstone Clinic
Tom Schlotterback (healthcare) St Johns United
Taylor Brown (Ag) Northern Ag Network
Courtney Kibblewhite (Ag) Northern AG Network
Don Jones (County leadership/small business owner) County Commissioner
Shaun Brown (City leadership/ BSED Board) City Councilman
Mike Seppala (banking) Western Security Bank
Bill Coffee (banking) Stockman Bank
Brian Brown (banking) First Interstate Bank
Martin Dewitt – Small Business Administration
Steve Simonson (regional ED) Beartooth RC&D
Leonard Smith, Native American Development Corp.
Mary Walks Over Ice, Native American Development Corp.
Matt Robertson (commercial real estate) NAI Business Properties
Kim Jakub (natural resources) ExxonMobil
Bryan Wood (manufacturing) Wood's Powr-Grip
George Warmer (commercial real estate) Coldwell Banker Commercial
Brad Anderson (restaurants) Anderson Management Group
Matt Brosovich (restaurants and hospitality) Ciao Mumbo, Big Horn Resort
Alex Tyson (tourism) Visit Billings
Sean Lynch (event venues) Pub Station
Tim Goodridge (event venues) MetraPark
Shelli Mann (hospitality) Boothill Inn
Ken Lutton (IT) Technology by Design/Yellowstone Tech Sector Partnership
Cami Nelson, Laurel Chamber of Commerce
Eric Basye (Non-profits) Community Leadership & Development, Inc.

The Team is supported by a Technical Support Group in the following disciplines:

Economic Impact Analysis

Allison Corbyn – Big Sky Economic Development
Andy Zoeller – City of Billings

Planning

Wyeth Friday – City of Billings
Nick Altonaga – City of Laurel

Legislative Liaison

Daniel Brooks – Billings Chamber

Communications

Melanie Schwarz – Big Sky Economic Development
Kelly McCandless – Billings Chamber

Legal

Jeanna Lervick – Yellowstone County Attorney's Office

Project Management

Thom MacLean – Big Sky Economic Development

The Economic Response and Recovery Team has four project committees tasked with executing the unique aspects of our mission.

- **The Response Coordination and Communication** committee actively coordinates efforts to support the immediate needs of our business community, identifies gaps in services and support, and effectively informs businesses and the community about available resources through communication channels, including our website: yceconomicrecovery.org.
- **The Economic Impact Assessment** committee assesses and documents the economic impacts to our community, especially those sectors and organizations which have been hardest hit. They provide analysis to support funding requests and to inform our economic recovery planning process.
- **The Strategic Restart Partnership** developed a set of guidelines to support the reopening of our businesses in partnership with our Public Health Officer and the Governor's Coronavirus Task Force. They encourage a strategic approach to the reopening of our businesses that supports public health and business operations, protecting both staff and customers. The "Open and Safe" campaign, designed and implemented by this team, has been a huge success in Yellowstone County and has been copied by other communities throughout Montana.
- **The Recovery Planning** Committee will help develop and implement an economic recovery plan that serves to prioritize the projects and initiatives that best support our economic recovery for the near term and over the next three years.

YELLOWSTONE COUNTY – MONTANA'S ECONOMIC HUB

Yellowstone County is home to fifteen percent of Montana's population. Its economy is also the State's largest, accounting for 19 percent of Montana's GDP (2018) and 18% of all income tax paid in the State (2018). As the largest community in a 500-mile region, Yellowstone County is the regional business and healthcare hub.

However, Yellowstone County's position as a regional hub makes it more susceptible to the detrimental economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Chmura Analytics has rated Yellowstone County as the 322nd most vulnerable county out of 3,141 counties nationwide. Chmura's Vulnerability Index measures the negative impact that the coronavirus crisis can have on employment based on the region's mix of industries.

Community	Index	Rank
Boise	175.05	51
Rapid City	120.56	257
Bozeman	118.35	285
Billings	116.21	322
Missoula	110.29	450
Great Falls	110.01	460
Casper	105.93	626
Fort Collins	104.31	713
Bismarck	98.84	1059
Cheyenne	92.4	1544

Of the top ten most vulnerable industries, eight of them have a higher than national average concentration in Billings.

Industry Data, Latest Available				
Industry	NAICS	Location Quotient (Industry Concentration 1 being the US Average)		Employment
		72	1.18	10,049
Accommodation and Food Services	71	1.37	2,592	
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	81	1.09	4,601	
Other Services (except Public Administration)	48	1.12	4,822	
Transportation and Warehousing	44	1.19	11,567	Gravest Impact from COVID-19
Retail Trade	42	1.50	5,367	
Wholesale Trade	51	0.59	1,106	Impacted from COVID-19
Information	31	0.55	4,248	
Manufacturing	23	1.25	6,745	
Construction	21	3.95	1,637	
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction				
Exported on: Tuesday, June 16, 2020 5:20 PM				
Source: JobsEQ®				
Note: Figures may not sum due to rounding. Growth demand is based on 4-qtr moving avg employment from the latest available date.				
Data as of 2019				

The efforts of the Economic Response and Recovery Team are to respond to the immediate needs of our businesses and to forge a clear plan for the recovery of our economy and our community.

Montana Coronavirus Relief Fund Grant Programs

The state of Montana received 1.25 billion from the CARES Act to offset direct impacts/costs related to COVID-19. To date the state has deployed eleven grant programs and one loan deferment program utilizing these dollars:

- Montana Adaptation Program
- Montana Meat Processing Infrastructure Grant
- Montana Business Stabilization Program
- Montana Innovation Program
- Montana Food and Agriculture Adaptability Program
- Local Government Reimbursement Program
- Public Health Grants
- Stay Connected Grants for Seniors
- Social Services Non-profit Grants
- Food Bank and Food Pantry Assistance
- Telework Assistance Grants
- Montana Deferment Loan Program

Approximated 16,000 Montana businesses have made application for these funds. The YC RRT provided recommendations to the Governor's CRF task force with an emphasis on business stabilization and adaptation grants. The full set of recommendations are available at www.yceconomicrecovery.org

YELLOWSTONE COUNTY ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN

This Yellowstone County Economic Response & Recovery Plan is a guiding document developed by the Economic Response and Recovery Team. The plan is developed in three parts, based on the time frame.

Section One – Response and Stabilization – addresses the short-term challenges created by this pandemic. The immediate goal is to ensure that area businesses have the resources, information, and support they need to weather the COVID-19 disruption. The recovery team seeks to work with our businesses and in partnership with the Public Health department to safely and effectively restart our economy. This work began in anticipation of the Phase 1 reopening (April 26, 2020) with the development of the Open and Safe campaign. It focuses on businesses identifying themselves as maintaining a clean space with regard to CDC/health department recommendations and opens the dialogue with consumers about how they can provide an experience that meets expectations. This will be an ongoing effort as social distancing requirements and CDC recommendations evolve.

Section Two – Business Recovery – will sustain and build upon momentum achieved in our response and stabilization efforts. We will advocate for businesses to help them recover from the effects of the shutdown and build more resiliency. We expect the timeframe for this phase will be months three through twelve (July 2020 – April 2021).

Section Three – Building Economic and Community Resiliency – takes a mid to long-term view of our recovery, from October 2020 – April 2023. It concentrates on creating a thoughtful strategy to address the challenges caused by this pandemic and to discover and consider new opportunities to develop a stronger, more resilient, regional economy.

Section Details

Section One – Response and Stabilization

The sharp and sudden economic disruption caused by COVID-19 related closures that began on March 24th created a dramatic impact on businesses of all types. Especially affected were those that were not deemed “essential”. Many “non-essential” businesses that could not adequately adapt went from business as usual to zero revenue overnight. Those employed in non-essential businesses found themselves applying for unemployment. In response to this extraordinary event, local, state, and federal support programs were developed, trying to fill the gaps and support businesses to prevent them from closing indefinitely. While funding programs have been one element of response and stabilization, the support needed is multi-faceted.

Help businesses overcome the immediate challenges posed by this pandemic, focus on safely and effectively reopening our economy, assist businesses as they learn and adapt, and restore consumer confidence.

Time Frame: 0 – 3 months

Support the safe restart of Yellowstone County businesses, activate our workforce, and re-engage customers

- Collaborate to eliminate duplication of effort and provide easy access to solutions for business
- Provide direct support services (BSED loans, SBDC consultation services, industry-specific trainings, information sessions, etc.) and act as a conduit for businesses to access needed resources to survive the impact of COVID-19 and reopen (SBA tools, CRF grants, loans, etc.)
- Act on our Business/Public Health partnership to guide business reopening
- Initiate and sustain the Open and Safe campaign to assure safe reopening and build confidence
- Support and facilitate the Normal 2.0 supply needs of businesses (PPE, hand sanitizer, etc.)
- Focus time and resources on the hardest hit industries that will see impacts for months to come (hospitality, events-driven venues, tourism)
- Assist in the interpretation of guidelines as we move through the various phases – help guide businesses in a more organized fashion.

Measures of Success:

- Track participation in learning sessions and information forums provided by the Billings Chamber, BSED, SBDC, SBA, and other partners
- Track website usage data – clicks, page views, downloads, etc. – to monitor business and community engagement
- Gather regular feedback from a representative cohort of businesses, distinguished by Phases, to determine status and any needs or gaps
- Develop baseline data – including existing metrics (SBDC, PTAC, loan fundings, SBA) and periodic surveys – to evaluate progress
- Partner with the Public Health Officer to monitor public health data and consider responses

Section Two – Business Recovery

Following the initial reopening for all businesses and as federal programs such as the Paycheck Protection Program run out, there will be ongoing needs to reach out to businesses – to identify challenges, advocate for businesses, and continue to provide resources to support business growth, diversification, and resilience. Montana has one of the highest per capita rates for small business ownership. This means that business survival has a direct impact not only on the people it employs but also on the sole proprietor's ability to retain a source of income. Acknowledging that the need of each industry will vary, this effort will include a monthly pulse check on businesses within the most vulnerable industries.

Sustain response and stabilization momentum, advocate for businesses to increase demand for their goods and services and build business resiliency.

Time Frame: 3 – 12 months

Sustain our business restart, retain our businesses, and support business needs to adapt and grow beyond COVID-19

- Sustain Economic Response and Recovery Team structure. Identify a smaller Steering Committee to monitor and report back to the overall team.
- Provide ongoing resources for businesses during the adaptation phase (business planning, resource portal for EAP, resiliency/contingency planning, etc.)
- Earmark resources for the transition period – the next three to twelve months (loans, additional expertise, training, etc.)
- Facilitate learning-from-each-other as we collectively adapt procedures, practices, and business models that work.
- Continue to build consumer confidence
- Promote Buy Local/Click Local
- Support the discovery efforts and technology needs of businesses as they learn their Normal 2.0.
- Continue to assess business needs through real-time outreach and surveys to educate our work plans

- Determine workforce needs and the training and education alignment that is necessary to meet changing current and future needs (BillingsWorks' role)
- Using public health benchmarks, educate the community of its responsibility to help sustain our safe reopening and recovery and promote the importance of safe protocols to our progress

Measures of Success:

- Track the number of businesses engaged with on an ongoing basis to facilitate collection of quantitative data
- Develop benchmarks (e.g., # of businesses prior to COVID-19) to measure results (# of businesses retained, # of new businesses/business licenses)
- Maintain a sample group of impacted businesses and monitor their progress (employment base, sales, supply chain challenges, etc.)
- Evaluate our emergency response and recovery plan/progress through communication and comparison with our peer communities.

Section Three – Building Economic and Community Resiliency

“A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.” – Winston Churchill

Economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented challenge but focusing solely on recovery does not position our community for the future. By applying knowledge from past crises and seeking innovative approaches and solutions, we will develop new strategies to meet our goal of emerging with a stronger economy and more attractive community.

To do that there needs to be a common vision and common goals. Below are the essential themes of these goals:

- Incentivize and support entrepreneurship
- Employ new tactics and models to support small businesses
- Invest in critical infrastructure, specifically broadband
- Develop quality of place and talent attraction initiatives
- Support workforce re-skilling and re-employment efforts
- Create manageable goals and embrace incrementalism
- “Move to where the puck will be.” – Develop for what will be, not what was

Many of the emerging opportunities available to Yellowstone County in recovery from this pandemic are related to its location and its size. Many urbanites are seeking new homes with a better quality of life – because of the fear induced by COVID-19 in many urban hotspots; or because working remotely has become more comfortable, prevalent, and accepted; or both. People want a vibrant community that they can afford and that offers them opportunities.

Another opportunity based on Yellowstone County's location is expansion of its role as a center for distribution and manufacturing. Yellowstone County has long been the commercial center of Montana and the region by virtue of its strong and diverse economy,

its talented and determined workforce, and its strategic location midway between Minneapolis, Denver, Seattle, and Calgary. There are strong indications that businesses, learning lessons from this global pandemic, will seek to re-shore manufacturing and shorten supply lines. Both would bode well for the Billings area. As a prime crossroads with a strong commercial/industrial base and great access to road, rail, and air transportation networks, Yellowstone County could make an excellent location for manufacturing facilities, processing facilities, and distribution hubs.

Section Three of our Recovery Plan seeks to capitalize on these opportunities delivering on a stronger economy and more attractive community.

Understand the extent of the economic impacts and business trends that have affected our community and region and consider new opportunities and strategies to build a strong, resilient, and vibrant regional economy.

Time Frame: 6 months – 3 years

Position Yellowstone County for new opportunities that will strengthen our ability to grow and lead as a regional hub

- Seek a common vision for our community
 - Use Community Builders (or similar technical assistance) as a resource to create a common set of goals and strategies to develop community-wide consensus. Create a collective vision for all leadership on investing in and building our economy/community
 - Coordinate with local legislators to advocate for tools that support our economic recovery
- Build for economic resiliency
 - Provide ongoing best practices training for business resiliency
 - Strengthen our economic diversity by growing local businesses and supporting entrepreneurship
 - Lean in to the innovation of our regional healthcare delivery system
 - Develop Public Safety funding strategies to protect the gains businesses have worked so hard to restore
- Stay committed to Workforce Development
 - Immediate – get many back to work through an effective restart
 - Support the re-positioning of City College, MSUB, and RMC as they adapt and retool
 - Identify new and emerging workforce needs
 - Retrain/Re-educate our “future” workforce
- Commit to Strategic Community Infrastructure/Assets investment, examples include:
 - Downtown Redevelopment consistent with existing concepts and plans
 - Advocate and facilitate additional workforce housing
 - MetraPark Master Plan/EBURD potential development
 - Develop and prioritize a list of strategic shovel-ready projects for possible Federal stimulus, e.g., Billings Bypass, Inner Belt Loop

- Develop a broadband/fiber buildout strategy for both businesses and residences
- Develop strategic placemaking projects, e.g., Skyline Trail, Coulson Park, Castlerock Park, South Billings Aquatic and Recreation Center, etc.
- Capitalize on and support our position as a regional healthcare provider and seek business growth and education partnership opportunities in this sector (i.e., Discovery Center Concept evaluation with Mayo)
- Capture “small metro” advantages/opportunities
 - Update target-industry analysis to support and focus our business attraction and expansion efforts
 - Sustain and amplify our Better Off in Billings talent attraction initiative to promote Yellowstone County as a vibrant, affordable urban opportunity in beautiful Big Sky country.
- Embrace our responsibility as a regional hub and support the economic recovery of communities throughout our trade area
 - Strengthen communication and economic ties to our reservation communities
 - Foster greater connections/communications between civic and business leaders in our regional-partner communities

Measures of Success:

- Community Visioning Document (Created through regional public process and supported by outside technical assistance)
- Capital Plan for Strategic Community assets
- Update regional targeted industry analysis
- Measurable economic growth for the Billings MSA

Seize regional economic growth opportunities that support the economic recovery of communities throughout our trade area

- Cultivate value-added agricultural opportunities that support regional economic growth (processing/packaging and distribution of key crops and meat packing, etc.)
- Support efforts to sustain critical access hospitals/services in our rural communities.
- Maintain our Coal Country Coalition
- Develop a regional Workforce Development strategy to reengage the workforce, improve worker retention, and boost employee versatility

Measures of Success:

- Measurable economic growth throughout the region over the next five years

Public Engagement

Implementation – Next Steps

- Adoption of Recovery Plan by Unified Command
- Sustain Economic Response and Recovery Team
 - Establish a Steering Committee
- Assign Recovery Plan elements to team members as appropriate
 - Establish quarterly reporting structure to monitor progress
- Gain commitment from City and County officials and key partners toward a structure and process to develop a common vision for Yellowstone County.

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

Steve Bullock
GOVERNOR



Mike Cooney
LT. GOVERNOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Thursday, July 2, 2020

CONTACTS:

Marissa Perry, Communications Director, Governor's Office, (406) 444-4514
Erin Loranger, Press Secretary, Governor's Office, (406) 444-9725

Governor Bullock, Lt. Governor Cooney Release Plan for Reopening Safe and Healthy Schools for Montana

HELENA – Governor Steve Bullock and Lt. Governor Mike Cooney today released the Governor's Plan for Reopening Safe and Healthy Schools for Montana to provide flexible guidance for public schools to prepare to offer in-person instruction in the fall.

“We are acutely aware of the role played by in-person teaching, not only in the students’ lives, but also in the lives of the entire family. Public education has shaped who we are today, and we want to make certain that our children have the same experience. This is why we’ve made the safe reopening of our public schools a top priority,” Governor Bullock and Lt. Gov. Cooney wrote in the plan. **“Noting the uniqueness of every school district in Montana, our goal for this document is not to be prescriptive, but to provide effective, flexible guidelines to all schools in hopes that we can safely resume in-person instruction in the fall.”**

“Keeping each person in our community safe as we re-open schools is a solemn responsibility. As a member of my own district’s back to school team, I appreciate the guidance given in this document, which will help frame our plans to return safely to school,” Sharon Carroll, a teacher in Ekalaka said. **“Engaging local public health authorities and local school district leadership teams while using the resources, procedures, and protocols shared in the Governor’s Plan will assist teams in developing a Health and Safety Plan unique to each district. As a teacher, a rancher, and a former chair of Montana’s Board of Public Education, I have often observed Montana grit. We’ve got this, Montana.”**

“MFPE appreciates the Governor’s inclusion of our members throughout this process. MFPE members will rely on this guidance as they continue planning to safely reopen schools in the fall,” MFPE President Amanda Curtis said.

Governor Bullock tasked Lt. Gov. Cooney with bringing together experts including superintendents, principals, teachers, union representatives, and public health officials to develop the plan based on insight and firsthand knowledge of challenges schools are facing. Governor Bullock has authority to close schools during the emergency and provided guidance reviewed by health experts to ensure schools have the tools they need to reopen as safely as possible this fall.

The plan acknowledges the critical role in-person instruction plays in the lives of students and their families. Schools provide students with structure and familiarity and offer socialization and connection. Many families rely on schools for nutritious meals, counseling, and childcare. Additionally, staff and teachers who spend in person time with students are able to identify signs of child abuse or neglect.

Governor Bullock and Lt. Gov. Cooney are encouraging schools to consider the guidance provided and develop their own Health and Safety plans to reopen. While every district is unique, school districts should consult their local public health officials to address the specific needs of each school and take every possible safety measure to keep students, educators, and staff healthy and safe.

The plan is categorized into three different phases to align with Governor Bullock's Reopening the Big Sky Plan. Nothing in the guidance prevents a school from taking additional precautions based on their needs.

Each phase has high level guidance for schools and includes more specific protocols and recommendations for each school to consider for their individual plan. The plan also includes best practices related to academics, extracurricular activities, transportation, physical and structural protocols to minimize interactions and crowding, while considering ways to promote the social, emotional, and behavioral health of students.

Some of the highlights encourage schools to consider:

- Accommodations for students, teachers, and staff who are in at risk group
- Occupancy limits that allow for social distancing
- Guidance on traffic flow to avoid crowding in congregational spaces
- Cleaning and disinfecting protocols
- Processes for monitoring students and staff for symptoms and history of exposure
- Producing guidelines in relation to isolation or quarantine if needed
- How to serve meals while minimizing congregation
- Adjusting transportation schedules
- Protocols for sports and other extracurricular activities

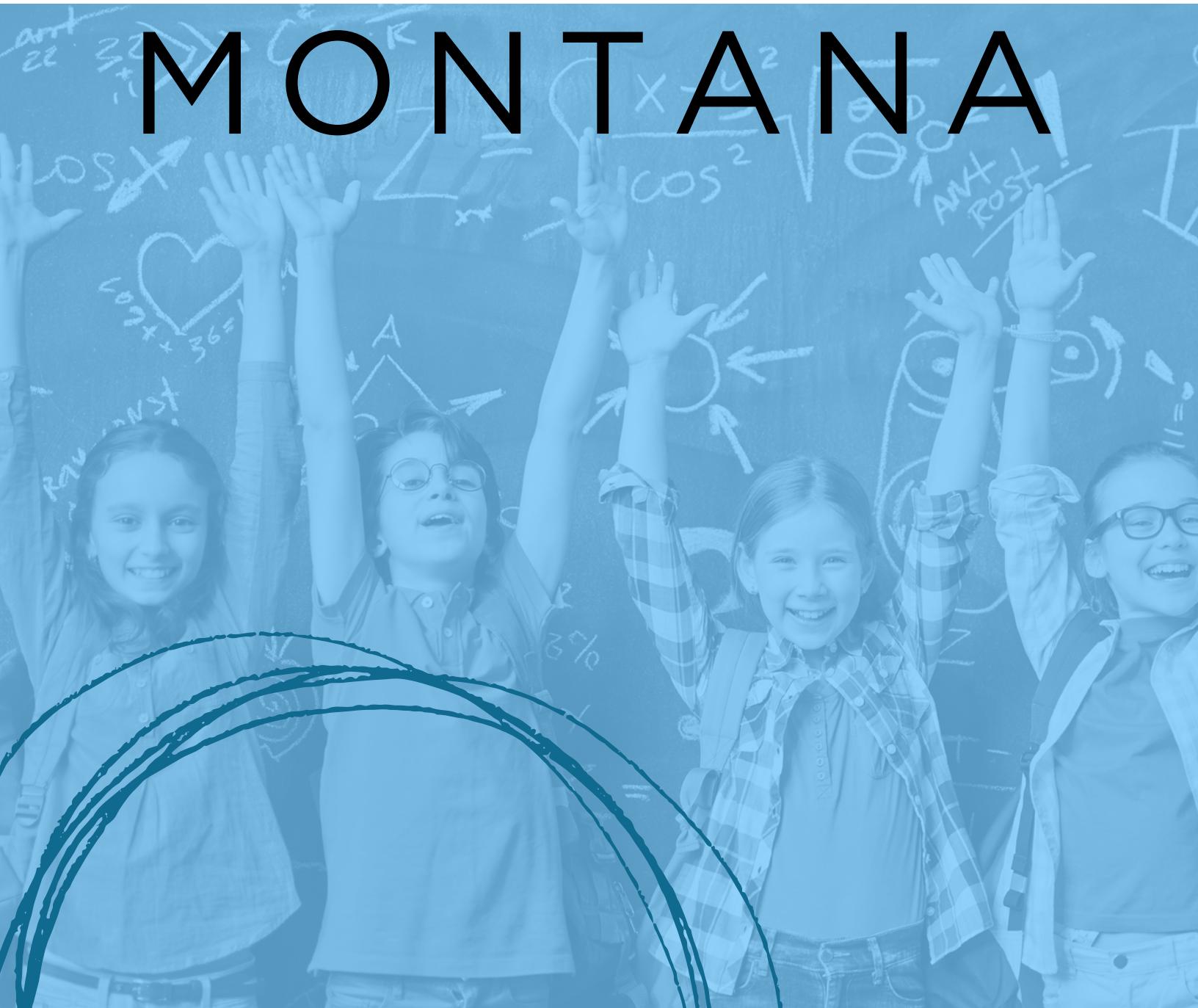
A list of comprehensive additional resources is provided for schools including from the Centers for Disease Control, the Office of Public Instruction, and the Montana High School Association.

The full plan is available here:

<https://covid19.mt.gov/Portals/223/Documents/Education%20Final.pdf?ver=2020-07-02-123418-013>

GOVERNOR'S PLAN
FOR REOPENING SAFE AND HEALTHY SCHOOLS FOR

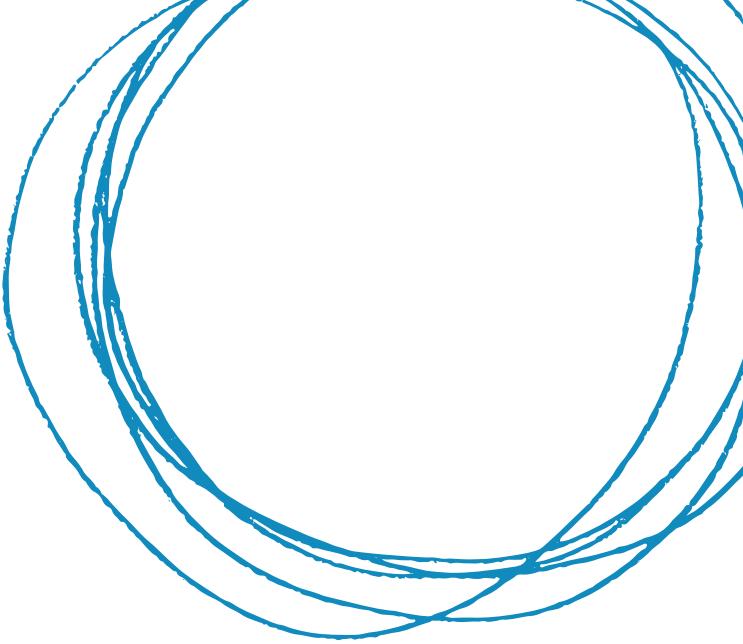
MONTANA



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OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

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Dear Education Community:

Over the past several months, Montanans have demonstrated incredible resolve in adapting to numerous changes in their everyday life. While these changes have proven challenging, one of the most disruptive has been the impacts on our students. Our public schools are the foundation in which the future leaders of Montana are made.

We are acutely aware of the role played by in-person teaching, not only in the students' lives, but also in the lives of the entire family. Public education has shaped who we are today, and we want to make certain that our children have the same experience. This is why we have made the safe reopening of our public schools a top priority. School administrators and teachers have been working tirelessly to not only ensure that the students are currently receiving the highest possible standard of education, but also to formulate plans to safely resume classes in the fall. Noting the uniqueness of every school district in Montana, our goal for this document is not to be prescriptive, but to provide effective, flexible guidelines to all schools in hopes that we can safely resume in person instruction in the fall.

In order to achieve this, our office met with a group of professionals, from teachers to administrators to union representatives, for several weeks to gain insight and input from those with firsthand knowledge of the struggles schools have had and expect to have throughout this crisis. Those meetings have led to the creation of this document: The Governor's Plan for Reopening Safe and Healthy Schools.

We would like to thank everyone involved in the creation of this document for their hard work, and all the citizens of Montana for their flexibility and grit in this difficult time.

Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Steve Bullock.

STEVE BULLOCK
Governor

A blue ink signature of Mike Cooney.

MIKE COONEY
Lieutenant Governor

Abstract.



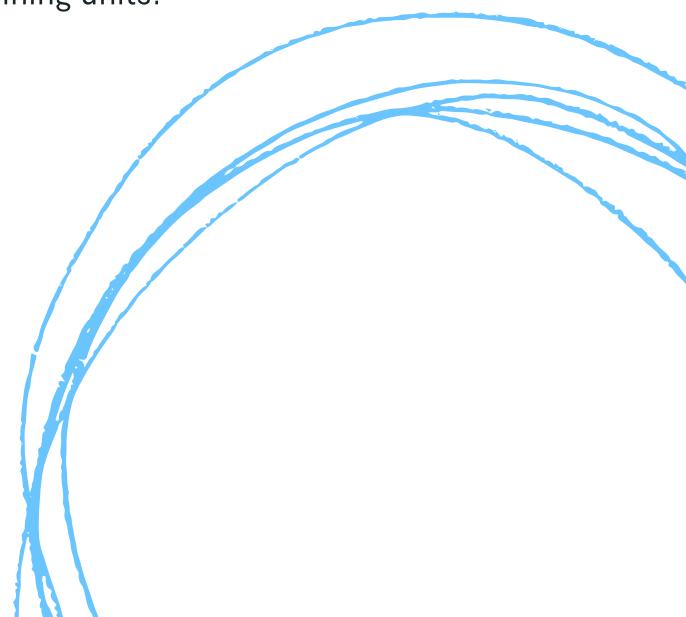
When evaluating the efficacy and priority of opening in-person instruction for students, it is vital to remember the important role schools play in the lives of students. For many of these children, school is the best place to be for a variety of reasons. In a time of endless unknowns and constant flux, school can provide structure and familiarity. The constant barrage of unknowns and bad news can cause great anxiety, but school can serve as an effective grounding tool and distraction from the many unknowns in our current world.

Many families rely on schools to supply various services, such as school meals, counseling, and childcare. Additionally, while students are not in their normal classroom settings, teachers and school employees no longer have close contact with students who may be at risk for child abuse. Numerous studies have also shown the importance of socialization and social connections, especially in the developmental years, connections that schools provide daily. COVID-19 has also exacerbated already existent inequalities inherent in our system, inequalities that public schools, often heralded as “the great equalizer” can help combat through equal opportunity educating. While health and safety are the first priority, it is imperative that we do not lose sight of the importance of in-person instruction in the process of safely re-opening schools.

Health & Safety Plan.



Recognizing that Covid-19 has impacted different areas of our state in different ways, that each school district in Montana is unique, and that all reopening plans for the upcoming year should reflect local needs, each school district should create a Health and Safety Plan which serves as the local guidelines for all school reopening activities. The Health and Safety Plan should be created in consultation with local health officials, while also keeping in mind discussions with collective bargaining units.



Phased Reopening Plan.

Reopening for school districts has been categorized into three phases that align with Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III of the Governor's Reopening the Big Sky Plan. The below phases are in place to guide and clarify which steps each school district should take based on which phase the state is in.

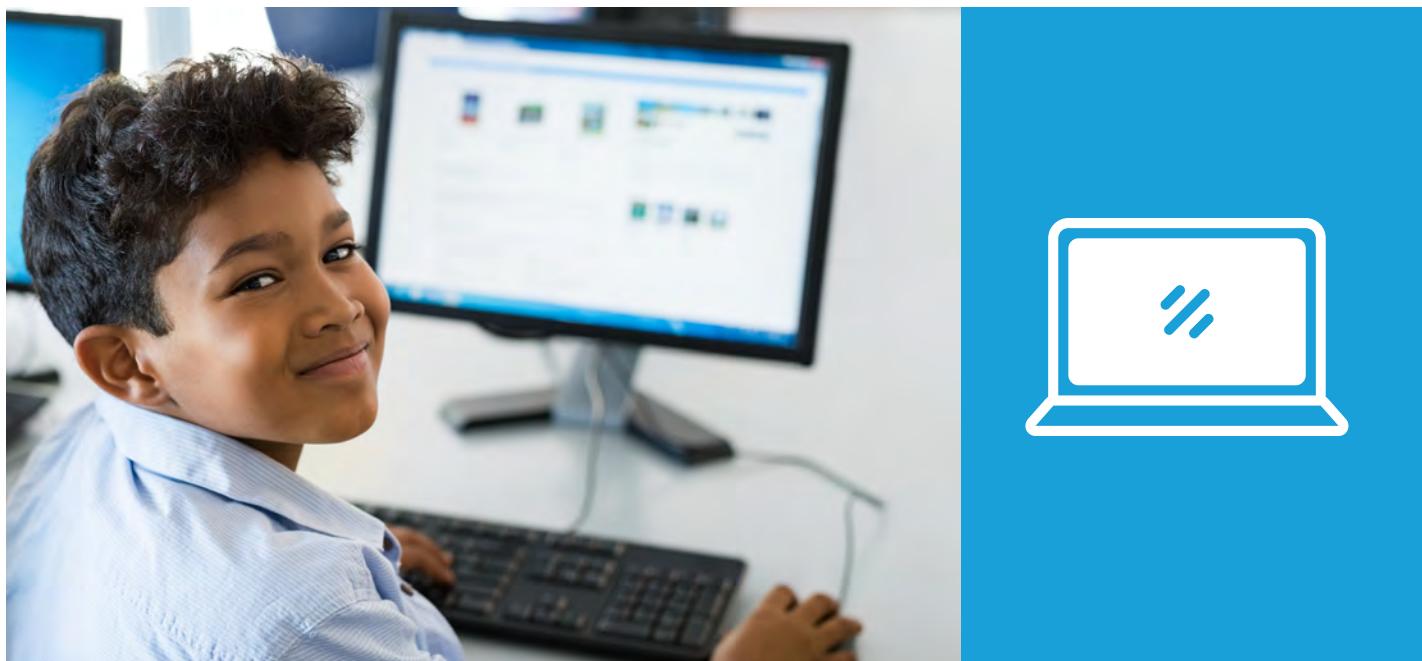
These designations provide guidance as to how school districts can operate in each of the different phases:

- Phase I lifts the stay at home order to allow for gradual re-opening while minimizing the spread of COVID-19 through strict social distancing and building safety protocols. Schools may re-open for in-person instruction depending upon the circumstances of their community. For those students unable to attend in-person, school districts should continue to provide a manner of remote learning, school meals (where applicable), services for students with disabilities, and any other services customarily provided in a school setting.
- As the state moves into Phase II, school districts will open and to continue to adhere to strict social distancing and building safety protocols. Limitations around large social gatherings remain in place.
- Phase III eases most restrictions, but still encourages social distancing and limitations on large social gatherings to allow the economy to strategically reopen while continuing to prioritize public health. While this phase will facilitate a return to a "new normal" for schools and communities, it will be equally important to continue to monitor public health indicators and adjust strategies to mitigate community spread.



Phase One.

- ✓ Schools may re-open for in-person instruction.
- ✓ Each school district should have a plan for students who are unable to attend in-person that addresses: a manner of remote learning, access to school meals (where applicable), services to students with disabilities, and any other services customarily provided in a school setting.
- ✓ School districts that re-open should operate under a Health and Safety Plan developed in coordination with local public health officials.



The plan should consider the following:

- Identification of a pandemic coordinator and pandemic team in each school district;
- Accommodations for students who will engage in remote learning;
- Preparations to meet the applicable requirements under Section 504 and IDEA for students on issues related to remote learning;
- Accommodations for students, teachers, and staff in an at-risk group or for those caring for someone in an at-risk group;
- Occupancy limits that follow local and state guidelines on classroom size and that allows for social distancing;
- Rules for traffic flow and congregational spaces (bathrooms, concession areas, hallways, etc.);

- Procedures for cleaning, sanitizing, disinfecting spaces, surfaces, and any areas used by students and staff;
- Processes for monitoring students and staff for symptoms and history of exposure;
- Guidelines on the use of masks by all staff and/or students;
- Guidelines in relation to isolation or quarantine for anyone with COVID-19 symptoms or a history of exposure;
- Guidelines for when a quarantined staff, student, or visitor may return to school;
- Expectations for the posting of signs in highly visible locations that promote everyday protective measures, and how to stop the spread of germs;
- Procedures to offer mental health services and counseling for students and staff;
- Protocols for sporting activities consistent with the CDC Considerations for Youth Sports;
- Procedures for restricting the use of cafeterias and other congregate settings, and serving meals in alternate settings such as classrooms;
- Protocols for adjusting transportation schedules and practices to create social distancing between students;
- Schedules for training faculty and staff on the implementation of the Health and Safety Plan; and
- Systems for ensuring ongoing communication with families around the Health and Safety Plan.

PHASE ONE

The plan may consider the following:

- Methods of limiting the number of individuals in classrooms and other learning spaces;
- Methods of staggering the use of communal spaces and hallways and ensuring regular cleaning;
- Procedures for limiting the sharing of materials among students; and
- Processes for identifying and restricting non-essential visitors or volunteers.

Phase Two.

- ✓ School districts will provide in-person instruction after developing a Health and Safety Plan, developed in coordination with local health officials.
- ✓ The district's Phase II Health and Safety Plan should follow the same criteria set forth for Phase I.



Phase Three.

✓ School districts will provide in-person instruction after developing a Health and Safety Plan, developed in coordination with local health officials.



The plan should consider the following:

- Identification of a pandemic coordinator and pandemic team in each school district;
- Accommodations for students, teachers, and staff in an at-risk group or for those caring for someone in an at-risk group;
- Processes for monitoring students and staff for symptoms and history of exposure;
- Guidelines in relation to isolation or quarantine for anyone with COVID-19 symptoms or a history of exposure;
- Guidelines for when a quarantined staff, student, or visitor may return to school;
- Expectations for the posting of signs in highly visible locations, that promote everyday protective measures, and how to stop the spread of germs;
- Procedures for cleaning, sanitizing, disinfecting spaces, surfaces, and any areas used by students and staff;
- Procedures for restricting the use of cafeterias and other congregate settings, and serving meals in alternate settings such as classrooms;
- Protocols for sporting activities consistent with the CDC Considerations for Youth Sports;
- Schedules for training faculty and staff on the implementation of the Health and Safety Plan; and
- Systems for ensuring ongoing communication with families around the Health and Safety Plan.

The plan may consider the following:

- Guidelines on the use of masks by all staff and/or students;
- Occupancy limits that follow local and state guidelines on classroom size that allows for social distancing;
- Methods of limiting the number of individuals in classrooms and other learning spaces;
- Methods of staggering the use of communal spaces and hallways and ensuring regular cleaning;
- Procedures for limiting the sharing of materials among students;
- Processes for identifying and restricting non-essential visitors or volunteers; and
- Protocols for adjusting transportation schedules and practices to create social distancing between students.

PHASE THREE





The following best practices may be considered to assist in the planning process:

Academic.

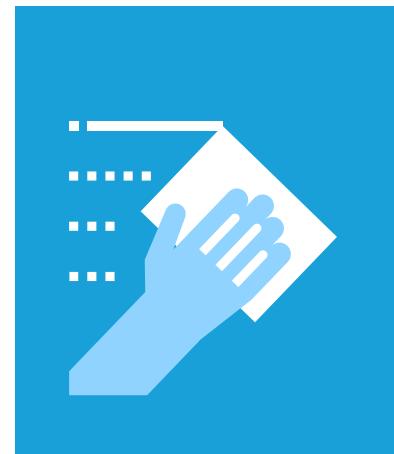
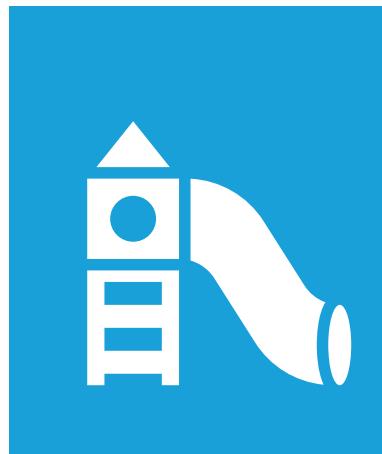
- Students and/or teachers in an at-risk group or those caring for individuals in an at-risk group should have additional accommodations provided to them including teaching classes remotely, utilizing a larger classroom where social distancing can be maintained, or given an option not to return until the risks are reduced.
 - Schools that reopen will need to take into consideration that some teachers and staff will fall into the at-risk category because of their age or other health risks or are caring for someone in an at-risk group.
 - Students who are high risk or who have family members who are high risk should not be penalized for failing to attend and should continue to receive remote support.
 - Accommodations should also be extended to students and staff who are required to quarantine due to exposure or potential exposure.
- Develop a plan to distribute learning materials and technology devices to students receiving offsite instruction;
- Train staff to serve students through remote learning;
- Address any digital divide that may exist within the community or student body to ensure equitable access to instruction for staff and students;

- Create sufficient communication protocols to assist parents and students with offsite learning;
- Prepare for a seamless switch from offsite to onsite through professional development, flexible student, and staff schedules;
- Coordinate with special education staff to ensure Individualized Education Plan teams, including parents, review and update IEPs for special education students and address educational and health services in a manner that can be implemented both offsite and onsite;
- Ensure the availability of staff and access to technology to provide alternative offsite instruction options for students who may request remote learning;
- Implement a technology troubleshooting hotline for parents and students to access when encountering difficulty with available resources; and
- Establish protocols for students to remain in the same groups or classroom, while teachers rotate when practical.



Physical & Structural.

- Review implementation of staggered student arrival times to minimize crowding near school entrances;
- Keep libraries, gyms, playgrounds off-limits unless they can be sanitized between groups;
- Install physical barriers and post guidelines for general hygiene in areas of high traffic where distancing cannot be implemented;
- Break larger classes into smaller groups;
- Separate student desks as much as possible;
- Disinfect all work areas, counters, restrooms, doorknobs, and stair railings;
- Clean all hallways, common areas, and the outside of lockers;
- Air conditioning system filters should be cleaned and changed;
- Allow for cleaning time in classrooms;
- Ensure the school is thoroughly ventilated and cleaned—opening all doors and windows or turning the air conditioning/heating systems up;
- School office staff are encouraged to continually wipe down counters, faxes, copiers, telephones keyboards and use sanitized pens in the main office;
- Provide masks for those present in the school building; and
- Monitor and screen any non-school staff, including parents, when entering school buildings.



Social, Emotional, & Behavioral.

- Ensure staff are trained to identify students struggling with trauma;
- Provide training and resources on recovering from traumatic events;
- Share information with parents regarding helping children cope with tragedies;
- Notify teachers, staff, students, and parents about support services available; and
- Expand mental health outreach and treatment strategies, including online appointments.

PROVIDE TRAINING

Ensure staff are trained to identify students struggling with trauma and more. Provide training and resources on recovering from traumatic events

KEEP PARENTS INFORMED

Share information with parents regarding helping children cope with tragedies

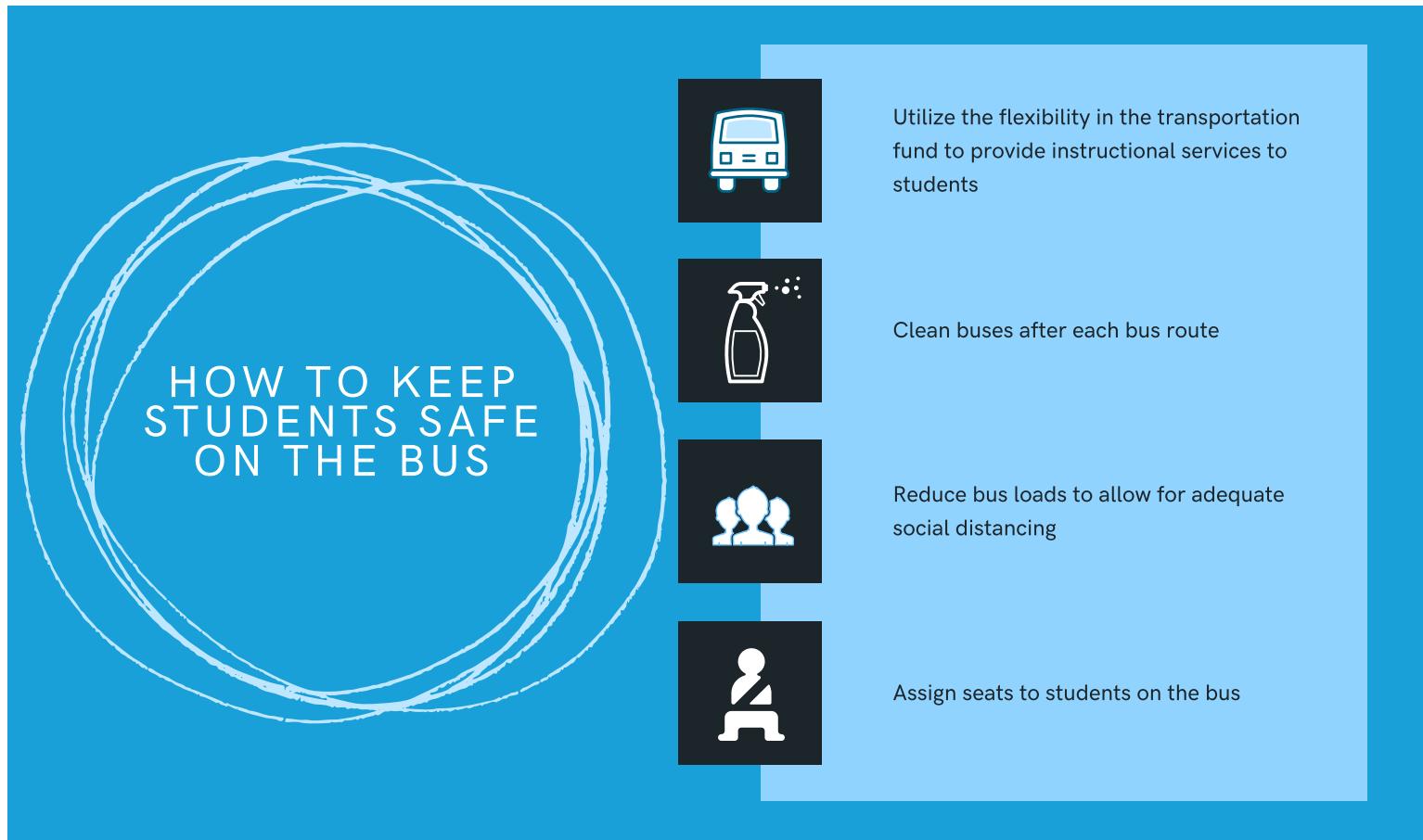
SHARE AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Notify teachers, staff, students, and parents about support services available

PRIORITIZE OUTREACH EFFORTS

Expand mental health outreach and treatment strategies, including online appointments.





Transportation.

- Utilize the flexibility in the transportation fund to provide instructional services to students;
- Clean buses after each bus route;
- Reduce bus loads to allow for adequate social distancing; and
- Assign seats to students on the bus.

Business.

- Review MT-PEC Back to School Emergency School District Policies to select and adopt appropriate policies and options that will enhance and support school district options;
- Review existing district policies cross referenced in the emergency policy series to ensure those policies are in place and workable during a public health emergency;
- Contact county emergency manager to assess PPE supply chain; and
- Determine information technology status and operational needs.

Extracurricular, Activities, & Athletics.

- Review the size and type of events that may be held at a school facility and implement various guidelines based on number of attendees, location, and arrangement of facilitates;
- Accommodate at-risk individuals who may not be able to attend events and gatherings at the school facility;
- Establish staggered mealtimes and additional facilities if social distancing cannot be accomplished;
- Encourage greater use of online/virtual events;
- Use outdoor venues if they allow for better spacing and air flow;
- Frequently disinfect all equipment before physical education classes, band, choir, CTE, robotics, etc.;
- Frequently disinfect all equipment before and after events of any school teams; and
- Identify whether travel is appropriate given the current stage of the pandemic.



- ✓ **Lowest Risk:** Performing skill-building drills or conditioning at home, alone or with family members.
- ✓ **Increasing Risk:** Team-based practice.
- ✓ **More Risk:** Within-team competition.
- ✓ **Even More Risk:** Full competition between teams from the same local geographic area.
- ✓ **Highest Risk:** Full competition between teams from different geographic areas.

(CDC Considerations for Youth Sports)

Additional Resources.

CDC Considerations for Schools

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html>

CDC Cleaning and Disinfecting

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/clean-disinfect/index.html>

CDC Print Resources

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html?Sort=Date%3A%3Adesc>

CDC Youth and Summer Camps

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/summer-camps.html>

CDC Face Coverings

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

CDC Hand Washing Information

<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/index.html>

CDC Social Distancing

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>

MT-PEC Back to School – A Roadmap for Safely Reopening Montana’s Public Schools

Using Emergency School District Policies

https://issuu.com/montanaschoolboardsassociation/docs/mtpec_emergency_public_school_district_policiesfi

National Federation of High School Sports Associations

https://www.nfhs.org/media/3812287/2020-nfhs-guidance-for-opening-up-high-school-athletics-and-activities-nfhs-smac-may-15_2020-final.pdf

OPI Guidelines

<http://opi.mt.gov/Re-opening-School>

Montana High School Association Guidelines

<http://www.mhsa.org/>



MONTANA
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE



REOPENING MONTANA SCHOOLS GUIDANCE

PUTTING MONTANA STUDENTS FIRST

JULY 2, 2020





July 2, 2020

Dear Montana students, families, and educators,

Thank you for going above and beyond to successfully complete this school year in the face of extraordinary circumstances. I am proud and inspired by your leadership. COVID-19 showed that no matter the challenges that our schools face, communities will step up to ensure students continue to receive the excellent education that they deserve while keeping safety at the forefront.

As your Superintendent of Public Instruction, I committed to bringing together diverse task forces to create high-quality guidance and resources for reopening Montana schools this fall. I am pleased to be able to share this guidance document and I want to thank the students, parents, educators, health officials, Office of Public Instruction (OPI) specialists, and other dedicated individuals who came together to create it.

In this document, you will find various scenarios under which education might be operating this coming school year. It includes guidance and resources in the areas of:

- Safe physical environments.
- Academic programming.
- Social-emotional support.
- Flexibilities within state rules and statute.
- School nutrition.
- Special education.
- A variety of other issues related to education.

The OPI will continue to update this document based on your feedback and the evolving health situation in our state. While there is much uncertainty with what the coming school year will look like, we must all work together to put Montana students first.

Please continue to visit the OPI's "Reopening Montana Schools" [webpage](#) for the latest information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elsie Arntzen".

Elsie Arntzen

Montana Superintendent of Public Instruction



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Overview of School Reopening Guidance

Superintendent of Public Instruction Elsie Arntzen launched the Montana Flex 2020 and Montana Learn 2020 Task Forces (see [Appendix F](#) for a list of task force members) to assist in developing K-12 public schools reopening guidelines for the 2020-2021 school year. Superintendent Arntzen has consistently shared that the new normal in Montana's K-12 schools will look different because of COVID-19. She has begun organizing the internal and external flexibilities the OPI and schools will need to serve students in this new environment.

In May and June 2020, the Task Forces were charged with drafting school re-opening guidance that is reflective of safety factors, family needs, student learning, and teacher professional development. The guidance is intended to reflect the flexibility necessary for local control and decision-making, while providing a framework of options for local communities.

These task forces, in collaboration with the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI)'s, *Montana School Safety Advisory Committee*, represented by the Office of Public Instruction Superintendent's Office, OPI-Health Enhancement & Safety Division, Montana Disaster and Emergency Services, Montana School Boards Association (MTSBA), MT Department of Health and Human Services, University of Montana Safe Schools Center, Salish Kootenai College, Montana School Counselor Association, Lewis & Clark Public Health, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Montana Department of Justice, School Administrators of Montana (SAM), Montana Rural Education Association, Montana Small Schools Alliance, Governor's Office of Community Service, National Center for Health Care Informatics - Praxis Center, Kalispell Police Department, Butte Central, T.E.S.T., Inc., Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education(OCHE), Reflex Protect, and the Region 17 Comprehensive Center at Education Northwest, developed the following guidance.

**Disclaimer: Any information appearing in this document regarding COVID-19 is subject to change. This document is a guidance document composed by Montana education stakeholders. The guidance is dynamic and will change and grow as the impact of COVID-19 changes. This document is not a legal document or an exhaustive list of actions that will need to be considered. This document is for general informational purposes only and should not be construed as advice, requirements, or mandate. The information, samples, templates, tips, and techniques provided in this document are intended solely as examples of practices, do not impose, or imply legal or regulatory requirements, and may not apply to all situations based upon circumstances. This document does not substitute for any law, or regulations, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or other public health messages or guidance.*

Montana is a "local control" state. The best and final public education decisions are made by school district administrations, local school boards, and community stakeholders who know the context and unique needs of their local communities.



Per the Governor's directives ([Appendix A](#)), and in coordination with local public health departments who are authorized to announce the process for recovery, the school district working with authority of the local school board may begin the preparations for the reopening of schools. The local health department should also be a partner in ensuring schools are reopened in a healthy and safe manner.

As we approach the beginning of the school year, we encourage school leaders to plan for multiple scenarios and consider the different consequences of each. Concurrently, we want to ensure, regardless of the scenario, when we re-engage with students that schools continue to take safety precautions to ensure the health of their students, staff, and greater community.

It is recommended that you form a reopening planning team including your school's/district's "Emergency Operation Team" (EOP), school leadership, staff, local tribal leaders, and community stakeholders, and assign a lead, at minimum, for the following recovery areas:

a) Social, Emotional, and Behavioral

b) Academic Programming

c) Physical & Structural Safety

Additional planning teams may be needed to address local needs beyond the above three.

As COVID-19 impacts are fluid, we anticipate that multiple scenarios may occur when schools re-open in the fall of 2020 or may occur throughout the school year. Four scenarios are included as guidance examples for you. Following state directives, individual districts in consultation with local health authorities should determine which scenarios best fit their local situations.

- **Scenario 1:** Buildings Closed: All students remote learning.
- **Scenario 2:** A limited number of students present in school building, with remote learning occurring for students who are off-site
- **Scenario 3:** Increased capacity/number of students in the school building, limiting number of activities to allow for continued physical distancing, and continued remote learning for students who are off-site
- **Scenario 4:** Near full capacity and full operations, continued vigilance in health and safety best practices, with remote learning for students who are off-site

Much of the guidance provided under Scenarios 1 and 2 is applicable to Scenarios 3 and 4. You will see overlap, to ensure appropriate gravity is given to individual considerations within each scenario. Additionally, Scenario 2 recommendations include logistical items for schools to consider prior to reopening school buildings after a prolonged closure. **Therefore, we recommend reviewing the document beginning with Scenario 1 and reading through each phase's guidance.**

As plans are developed, school leadership should include their local health department, students, families, school boards, community members, local tribal leaders, teachers' unions or other collective bargaining units to ensure all stakeholders are informed of the safety planning and decision-making process. School leaders can start by reviewing the [CDC's Schools Decision Tool- Public Health Considerations for Reopening Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) to determine readiness for reopening.



This document will provide guidance for where flexibilities exist within code and statute and could be beneficial as you reopen your schools and navigate potential complexities presented by COVID-19 (See [Appendix C](#)).

You can use the questions below to direct you to guidance specific to the topic for which you are searching.

Guiding Questions	Relevant guidance
Will you be providing any remote learning opportunities to students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Utilize guidance for Scenario 1.
Do you anticipate a blended learning model with some students on campus at times and other students receiving distance instruction?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">If yes, first visit the Academic Programming guidance in Scenario 1 and then visit the Academic Programming guidance for Scenario 2.Utilize Social, Emotional, and Behavioral and Physical and Structural Recommendations from Scenario 2.
Are you anticipating an increased need to assess students for purposes of determining current levels of proficiency?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">If yes, visit Scenario 1's guidance on Assessment.
Is physical distancing still a necessity?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">If yes, first visit Physical and Structural Recommendations from Scenario 2.
Do you anticipate it necessary for cleaning, sanitation, and hygiene precautions to be more stringent than normal?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">If yes, first visit Physical and Structural Recommendations from Scenario 2.
Are you looking for guidance related to services for students with disabilities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Visit the Special Education guidance.
Are you looking for flexibility in the law to better allow you to provide support for students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Visit the identified Flexibilities.

In each scenario, schools are encouraged to follow current [CDC guidelines](#) (see [Appendix B](#)) and other safety measures to prevent a re-emergence of COVID-19.

As schools reopen, the district's planning team can monitor the progression within the phases. **In all scenarios**, all staff are encouraged to monitor for re-emergence of COVID-19 symptoms. School administration should remain in constant contact with the local health department for continued updates on community re-emergence indicators. Regardless of the state's current phase status, it is recommended that school leaders review the guidance provided for each scenario to determine which conditions for student learning and safety need to be addressed in their schools. **Student safety and well-being is the number one priority.**

Additional resources related to school re-opening are provided by the Montana University System and the Montana Public Education Center (MT-PEC). Please see [Appendices D and E](#).



Scenario 1: Buildings Closed: All students remote learning.

All students remote learning model: This model will only occur if the state of Montana is under a complete stay-at-home order and/or school buildings are closed.



Scenario 1: Buildings Closed: All students remote learning.

Social, Emotional, and Behavioral

Student, Staff, and Family Considerations

- Create a plan to communicate with and support students.
- Identify and provide access to well-being and mental health support for students, families, and all staff.
- Notify teachers, staff, students, and parents about support services available.
- Access mental health and healthcare providers for support. Activate mental health/student support service team (school counselor, community Mental Health Partners, CSCT) to plan for students and staff, in conjunction with local mental health services staff, including post-traumatic stress syndrome counseling.
- Facilitate collaboration with local tribal resources and indigenous support systems.
- Facilitate the provision of wrap-around services to all students and families in need.
- Ensure that all student groups are receiving equitable services per [Montana's ESSA plan](#).
- Establish consistent schedules and routines to ensure stability for students and families.
 - Provide structured time for students to meet with teachers.
- Include students in planning conversations with administration and school boards.
 - Create focus groups of students to provide input and feedback on school opening plans/processes.
- Modify school traditions that promote engagement to continue in a remote format. Examples include assemblies, celebrations, lunch with the principal, etc.
- Include families and the community in planning conversations with administration and school boards.
 - Create focus groups of family and community members to provide input and feedback on school opening plans/processes.
- Provide guidance and support to families to support their student's education.
 - Ensure learning/instructional environments that do not rely on parents to act as the teacher.
- Post information on the school district website and on social media for parents regarding helping children cope with tragedies (i.e., "Teaching Children How to Respond to Tragedies" from the National Association of School Psychologists).
- Offer Trauma-informed resources.
- Implement a social-emotional learning curriculum.
- Facilitate opportunities for students to socialize with peers in a safe manner.



- Facilitate student engagement in elective courses.
- Align approaches for afterschool programs.
- Provide training and resources for classroom teachers on recovering from traumatic events.
- A mental health status report, based on guidelines provided by the counselors and the Crisis Management Team, is encouraged to be provided to the EOP and/or school administrator each day. This report can include the mental status of students and staff to determine if additional mental health services are needed.
- Provide times for staff to feel supported, voice concerns and/or solutions, and reconnect as a school team. These times could look like scheduled individual and group check-ins, informal gatherings, and/or established all staff discussions. Encourage and model the importance of self-care practices upon return to school.

Acceptable Use of Technology and Online Ethics

- Update acceptable use plan for the use of district devices and technology.
 - Including policies/procedures for educators using social media and personal texts/cell phones to communicate with students.
- Develop a plan to communicate the acceptable use plan to all students and families.
- Ensure student data privacy protections are in place
- Require a signed consent of agreement with the policy.
- Use current digital citizenship or acceptable use agreements, and include language describing usage of district-issued devices at home.
- Create a clear, succinct statement describing safe, successful online learning interactions, including basic digital citizenship.
- Develop protocols to recognize and report cyberbullying.
- Provide professional development for teachers in online guidelines, including mindfulness about what is in the background of webcams when working from home and using recordings to document one-on-one student interactions, as necessary.

Communication

- Post all information from the district and school levels in a centralized location for all community members to access ([Example](#)).
- Create a spreadsheet, district-wide, for all codes, etc. to access all learning platforms and programs.
- Employ a consistent communication plan and platform (SeeSaw/Google/Slack/cell phone/email) between:
 - Staff and Families
 - Staff and Student
 - Student and Student

- Staff and Administration
- Staff and Staff
- Administration and Community

- Ensure and facilitate use of the communication platform throughout the district.
- Document all direct communication and communication attempts with families.
- Update all parent contact information.
- Develop communication protocol at a classroom, school, district and community level.
 - Ensure communication is necessary and not excessive. Assign groups of students to one specific educator so all students have one adult in the building that they expect to receive consistent communication from, and facilitate weekly check-ins of students with limited access to technology and/or students with low engagement.
 - Post weekly [learning plans for each classroom](#) in a centralized location for students and families to access.
 - When communicating with parents of Middle School and High School students via email, include the student email in the communication when appropriate.
- Provide guidance to families on the structure of the school day.
- Provide consistent opportunities for families to provide feedback to teachers.
- Set norms for how students can reach out to teachers, and help empower students to connect with each other, by:
 - Developing norms for a reasonable time limit for responses to student questions.
 - Allowing for flexibility of schedules of both teachers and families while maintaining appropriate boundaries.
 - Considering setting up an appointment-making program that allows teachers and students time to meet in response to student questions and needs (e.g., standardized electronic calendar platform).
- Make sure support staff are briefed and participating in communication attempts and protocol.
- Develop a protocol for notifying families when changes to learning plans occur.
- Ensure that all Limited English Proficient parents have access to all communication in their [primary language](#).
- Make all materials and communications [accessible](#).

Roles and Responsibilities

- Define teacher role and parent expectations at the beginning of the year through community meetings (virtual or face-to-face back-to-school night or printed/electronic communication).
- Provide opportunities for parents to download apps and to attend training on necessary technology tools at the start of the school year.
- Each student should have a designated contact person, particularly for students receiving Individual Education Plan (IEP), English Learner (EL), and 504 services.



- Determine a plan for all members of a student team for delivering and providing accommodations in IEPs, 504s, and EL status.
- Create and share district-wide guidelines with families to help with reasonable academic remote work time.
- Teachers should provide weekly opportunities for office hours, community meetings for the whole group, small group, and 1:1 instruction for all students.

Equity Considerations

- Create a clear attendance plan and communicate with all families, students, educators, and staff.
 - Consider extenuating circumstances and maintaining equitable access for students.
- Allow for one-on-one meetings for students having difficulty accessing online platforms.
- Allow for small meetings for student tutoring.
- Allow for flexibility in staff hours for students who only have access to online resources outside of typical school-day hours.
- Consider classes that may require an increase in supply budget to provide and send home lab materials.
- Evaluate course placement/prerequisites on a case by case basis.
- Consider that technology is not available for everybody.
- Every effort should be made to ensure Internet and Wi-Fi accessibility for teachers, students, and families.
 - Consider hotspots or satellite for the Internet, if the internet for all is not a possibility, and rely on the postal service to connect with all families.
 - Explore the possibility of a school bus mobile internet hotspot.
- Provide access to technology and devices for student use.
- Collaborate and coordinate with community businesses, providers, and members to facilitate phone line, internet, and computer access for all families/students/teachers.
- Provide teachers with professional development.



Academic Programming

*When implementing remote learning, note available flexibility provided by MCA [20-1-101 \(5\)\(14\)](#) and [20-7-118](#) that offsite learning is specifically authorized as a means of meeting the aggregate hours of instruction.

Remote Learning Platforms

- Consider using online learning platforms previously used in the face-to-face classroom setting.
- Ensure all teachers and administrators sustain usage of the agreed upon platform.
- Provide professional development for teachers on the selected learning platform ([Example](#)).
- Collaborate with teachers to ensure required professional development is within negotiated contracts.
- Provide parent professional development and education on different grading models, technology, platforms, educational philosophies, and reasoning.
- Provide mentor programs for teachers new to the profession, or any teacher who is facing challenges with technology or platforms.
- Provide tutorials for all utilized technology for staff, families, and students.
 - E.g., how to access, check, submit instructional materials.

Instructional Delivery: Remote learning

- Educational leadership identifies steps to ensure instructional integrity.
- Develop guidelines for teachers in synchronous and/or asynchronous delivery, keeping in mind equity with internet access and device availability ([Example](#).)
- Create guidelines for asynchronous instructions including the use of teacher made videos, professional videos, etc.
- Create guidelines for synchronous instructions including recording length and attendance, and by providing multiple synchronous opportunities so families can juggle multiple schedules, etc.
- Provide all synchronous instruction in optional asynchronous formats.
- Provide teacher training in best practice in delivery methods virtually.
- Communicate standards and expectations for lesson delivery to parents and students.
- Provide students and staff with materials (technology, lab supplies, paper copies) for remote learning.
- Provide guidelines for length of instruction and activities per day/week (note minute recommendation under roles and responsibility).
- Provide consistent expectations and equitable policy for late work.
- Identify priority standards and incorporate previous grade content into grade level standards. Grade level content should always be the focus.



- Find ways to assess and formatively assess students regularly to confirm essential benchmarks.
- Facilitate teacher engagement in standards (benchmark) priority work during the summer of 2020 to ensure delivered learning is focused and efficient (consult contract negotiations).
- Consider forming a committee of teachers to unpack and prioritize standards across content areas and grade levels.
- Develop appropriate scope and sequence for the 2020-21 school year.
- Adjust scope and sequence as needed based on student beginning-of-year benchmark assessments.
- Be flexible and open to new grading systems (e.g., proficiency-based, standards-based grading; Personalized/proficiency-based learning both at the individual level and as an exception to aggregate hours of instruction are allowed under MCA [20-9-311 \(4\) \(d\)](#) and Rule [10.55.906](#)).
- Be consistent and communicative in implementation of the grading system.
- Update grading platforms/tools.
- Ensure assessments match the grading system.
- Provide professional development to teachers on any newly adopted grading system.
- Communicate to families and students any changes and implications of newly adopted grading systems.
- Provide professional development on how to differentiate instruction in remote settings.
- Provide time for co-planning with teachers.
- Teachers should include group work so that students can communicate and get to know each other.
- Provide families with clear, concise, essential standards and/or benchmarks for each grade level or course.
- Encourage teachers to provide families with options to individualize learning experiences that best suit their family needs.
- If adopting new textbooks, consider ones with easy-to-use online access and accommodations (e.g. read aloud capabilities).



Student Assessment

- Develop a yearlong plan for assessing student proficiency
- Plan to conduct diagnostic assessments.
- Communicate and organize all assessments prior to lesson design.
- Assess students at the beginning of the school year to identify current student proficiency.
- Ensure assessments align with Montana content standards.
- Establish procedures to check weekly for student proficiency. Adjust instruction accordingly.

Physical and Structural Safety

Safety Considerations for Remote learning

- Limit the use of paper packets. Consider alternative methods to passing paper assignments and projects back and forth between teachers and students.
- Provide training and/or resources on how to clean personal items such as laptops and keyboards if they are shared and for home use.
- School staff will disseminate to students current and medically accurate information regarding infectious and communicable diseases; including the transmission and prevention of diseases, as required by the [Montana Health Enhancement Standards](#).



Scenario 2: A mixed model of traditional and off-site learning.

In Scenario 2, a limited number of students will be present in the school building at one time, with remote learning occurring for all students not onsite. This will require a blended approach for the planning and delivery of learning opportunities for students.



Schools that plan to reopen should consult the Governor's school reopening guidelines provided in [Appendix A](#). In all phases, all staff are encouraged to monitor for the re-emergence of COVID-19 symptoms with school administration in contact with the local health department for continued updates on community re-emergence indicators. School leadership should monitor daily attendance for increases in absenteeism.

If schools plan to reopen they should consider:

- Implementing an alternative educational delivery model that includes a mix of in-person and remote learning.
- Providing focused individual education, especially for at-risk students.
- How to reconnect and meet the educational needs of students who fall behind in a remote learning environment.
- The importance of maintaining the connection between students, teachers, and parents.
- The important role that schools play in the health of students, families, and communities.

If relaxed restrictions are resulting in a new wave of infections, **schools may need to return to Scenario 1**. Continue to work in collaboration with local health officials who can help determine any level of transmission in the community.

CONFIRMED or SUSPECTED case of COVID-19

- Collaborate with public health to ensure each school has a plan for reporting, contact tracing and both short-term or extended closures in the case of a positive COVID case related to the school or community.
- Utilize [CDC guidelines](#).
- Schools may need to implement short-term closure procedures regardless of community spread if an infected person has been in a school building. Please refer to the [Interim Guidance for Administrators of US K-12 Schools and Childcare Programs-Confirmed Case](#) for more information. See also [Appendix B](#), Confirmed Case of COVID-19 in the Building: School Decision Tree.

Social, Emotional, and Behavioral

Student, Staff, and Family Considerations

- School districts planning for students and staff to return following COVID-19 closures must prioritize efforts to address social and emotional learning and mental and behavioral health needs. Equally important is ensuring that staff feel their physical and mental health needs are supported. Districts should ensure all policies or recommendations are culturally sensitive and ensure equity and access for all youth. For more information, see the ASCA and NASP [School Reentry Considerations: Supporting Student Social and Emotional Learning and Mental and Behavioral Health Amidst COVID-19](#).
- Activate the mental health/student support service team to plan for students and staff, in conjunction with local mental health services staff, including post-traumatic stress syndrome counseling.
- Provide training and resources for classroom teachers on recovering from traumatic events. This information will be provided in a separate document to provide guidance and support.
- Post information broadly for parents regarding helping children cope with tragedies (i.e., [**“Teaching Children How to Respond to Tragedies” from the National Association of School Psychologists**](#)).
- A mental health status report, based on guidelines provided by the counselors and the Crisis Management Team, is encouraged to be provided to the school administrator each day. This report can include the mental status of students and staff to determine if additional mental health services are needed.
- Notify teachers, staff, students, and parents about support services available.
- Provide times for staff to feel supported, voice concerns and/or solutions, and reconnect as a school team. These times could look like scheduled individual and group check-ins, informal gatherings, and/or established all staff discussions. Encourage and model the importance of self-care practices upon return to school.
- Create a plan to communicate with and support students if school does not return to “normal” in the fall.
- Facilitate collaboration with local tribal resources and indigenous support systems.
- Facilitate the provision of wrap-around services to all students and families in need.
- Establish consistent schedules and routines to ensure stability for students and families.
 - Provide structured time for students to meet with teachers.
- Include students in planning conversations with administration and school boards.
 - Create focus groups of students to provide input and feedback on school opening plans/processes.
- Include families and the community in planning conversations with administration and school boards.
 - Create focus groups of family and community members to provide input and feedback on school opening plans/processes.



- Provide guidance and support to families to support their student's education.
 - Ensure learning/instructional environments that do not rely on parents to act as the teacher.
- Offer trauma-informed resources.
- Implement a social-emotional learning curriculum.
- Facilitate opportunities for students to socialize with peers in a safe manner.
- Facilitate student engagement in elective courses.
- Align approaches for afterschool programs.
- Provide training and resources for classroom teachers on recovering from traumatic events.

Acceptable Use of Technology and Online Ethics

- Develop an acceptable use plan for the use of district devices and technology.
- Develop a plan to communicate the acceptable use plan to all students and families.
- Require a signed consent of agreement with the policy.
- Use current digital citizenship or acceptable use agreements, and include language describing usage of district-issued devices at home.
- Create a clear, single-page statement describing safe, successful online learning interactions, including basic digital citizenship.
- Develop protocols to recognize and report cyberbullying.
- Provide professional development for teachers in online guidelines, including mindfulness about background content when working from home and using recordings to document one- on-one student interactions, as necessary.

Communication

- Post all information from the district and school levels in a centralized location for all community members to access ([Example](#)).
- Create a spreadsheet, district-wide, for all codes, etc. to access all learning platforms and programs.
- Employ a consistent communication plan and platform (SeeSaw/Google/Slack/cell phone/email) between:
 - Staff and Families
 - Staff and Student
 - Student and Student
 - Staff and Administration
 - Staff and Staff

- Administration and community
 - Ensure and facilitate use of the communication platform throughout the district.
 - Document all direct communication and communication attempts with families.
 - Update all parent contact information.
 - Develop communication protocol at a classroom, school, and district level (e.g. weekly newsletter, bi-monthly phone calls).
 - Ensure communication is necessary and not excessive. Assign groups of students to one specific educator so all students have one adult they expect to receive consistent communication from.
 - Facilitate weekly check-ins of students with limited access to technology and/or students with low engagement.
 - Post weekly [learning plans for each classroom](#) in a centralized location for students and families to access.
 - When communicating with parents of middle School and high School students via email, include the student in the communication when appropriate.
 - Provide guidance to families on the structure of the school day.
 - Provide consistent opportunities for families to provide feedback to teachers.
 - Set norms for how students can reach out to teachers, and help empower students to connect with each other by:
 - Developing norms for a reasonable time limit for responses to student questions.
 - Allowing for flexibility of schedules of both teachers and families while maintaining appropriate boundaries.
 - Considering setting up an appointment-making program that allows teachers and students time to meet in response to student questions and needs (e.g., standardized electronic calendar platform).
 - Make sure support staff are briefed and participating in communication attempts and protocol.
 - Develop a protocol for notifying families when a teacher is sick and unable to attend to remote/blended learning responsibilities.
 - Ensure that all Limited English Proficient parents have access to all communication in their [primary language](#).
 - Make all materials and communications [accessible](#).

Roles and Responsibilities

- Define teacher role and parent expectations at the beginning of the year through community meetings (virtual or face-to-face back-to-school night or printed/electronic communication).
- Provide opportunities for parents to download apps and to attend training on necessary technology tools at the start of the school year.

- Each student should have a designated contact person, particularly for students receiving IEP, IL, and 504 services.
- Determine a plan for all members of a student team for delivering and providing accommodations in IEPs, 504s, and EL status.
- Create and share district-wide guidelines around “minutes” with families to help with reasonable academic remote work time.
- Teachers should provide weekly opportunities for office hours, community meetings for the whole group, small group, and 1:1 instruction for all students.

Equity Considerations

- Create a clear attendance plan and communicate with all families, students, educators, and staff.
 - Consider extenuating circumstances and maintaining equitable access for students.
- Allow for one-on-one meetings for students having difficulty accessing online platforms.
- Allow for small meetings for student tutoring.
- Allow for flexibility in staff hours for students who only have access to online resources during the evening.
- Provide a space for students to meet for guided study hall, and in-person access to tutors.
 - Identify community partners to provide childcare options for hybrid models to provide guided study halls.
 - Place tutors and laptops at lunch distribution sites.
- Identify classes that lend themselves more to online learning and which classes may require more in-person time.
- Consider classes that may require an increase in supply budget to provide and send home lab materials.
- Evaluate course placement/prerequisites on a case-by-case basis.
- Consider that technology is not available for everybody.
- Every effort should be made to ensure Internet and Wi-Fi accessibility for teachers, students, and families.
 - Consider hotspots or satellite for the Internet.
 - Explore the possibility of a school bus mobile internet hotspot.
- Provide for access to technology and devices for student use.
- Collaborate and coordinate with community businesses, providers, and members to facilitate phone line, internet, and computer access for all families/students/teachers.
- Provide teachers with professional development.
- Allow flexibility for more sick days in student attendance requirements.



Academic and Extracurricular Programming

**When providing remote learning to students, please review [Scenario 1's Academic Programming](#) prior to reviewing recommendations for Scenario 2

Program considerations

- Accommodations for students, teachers, and staff in an at-risk group:
 - Schools that reopen will need to take into consideration that some teachers and staff will fall into a health risk category. These individuals should have additional accommodations including teaching classes remotely, utilizing a larger classroom where physical distancing can be maintained, or given an option not to return until the risks are reduced.
 - Students who are high risk, or who have family members who are high risk, should not be penalized for failing to attend and should continue to receive remote support.
- Accommodations should also be extended to students and staff who are required to quarantine due to exposure or potential exposure.
- Modify extracurricular activities.
- Refer to the [Guidance for Opening up High School Athletics and Activities](#) from the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) and Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC) for more information on safety precautions for athletic training and events for Phase 1.
- Blended learning should allow for learning in the classroom with meaningful practice at home (purposeful discussions/activities through an online platform).
- Health enhancement teachers should provide to students current and medically accurate information regarding infectious and communicable diseases; including the transmission and prevention of diseases, as required by the [Montana Health Enhancement Standards](#).
- Pursue virtual activities and events in lieu of field trips, student assemblies, special performances, school-wide parent meetings, and spirit nights.
- Organize pre-developed study packets and suggested activities for students and parents in case of a second closure of schools due to re-emergence of the virus and/or for students who remain in the remote learning environments due to individual/family high-risk categories.
- Consider alternative schedules for class instruction.
- Alter the bell schedule to limit the number of students in transit between classes at any one time.
- Realign a bell schedule to include times for hand washing/sanitizing. School districts should create a unique plan that is appropriate for their school size.
 - Example: stagger transition times by wing/area of the school/last name initial/grade level, etc.
 - Example: create specific sanitation times during the school day.

Physical Education (PE)

- Make time for wiping down and sanitizing areas.
- Be thoughtful of passing areas between classes and allowing for corridors that maintain physical distancing recommendations.
- Develop practices that address class size.
- Ensure handwashing occurs before and after PE class.
- Take home clothing used for PE class; clothing should not be kept in locker rooms.
- Allow time for cleaning of shared equipment between classes.
- Promote physical distancing in areas of congregation (e.g., locker rooms).
- Consider the current phase of the pandemic and whether competition is appropriate per MHSA guidelines. This would include potential isolation and quarantine measures that could arise because of travel, and additional screening that may be required because of travel.
- Encourage outdoor and individual activities when possible.

Music – vocal, instrumental, and general

- Emphasize physical distancing for vocal and instrumental music classes according to spatial allowances and room size.
- Allow for the cleaning and sanitizing of equipment before and after use.
- Provide instruction for healthy practices to use when cleaning personal instruments.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO)

- Sanitize materials/tools before and after competitions and entrance to classrooms.
- Instruct students to clean devices and space before and after class.
- Limit equipment sharing by students to include both hand tools, power equipment, culinary tools, computers, etc. as well as protective gear, safety glasses, welding helmets, shop coats, smocks, ear protection, etc.
 - Some CTE equipment may have many small pieces that may require use of differentiated sanitization methods.
- Limit class sizes to reduce the number of items used by multiple students.
- Adjust class size and classroom layouts to comply with physical distancing recommendations.

Physical & Structural Safety

Sanitation/Hygiene

- Ensure that hand sanitizer stations are easily available and located throughout the school, especially entrance areas.
- Demonstrate proper hand washing protocol and sanitation practices for hand sanitizing and cleaning of personal space and shared equipment.
- Place posters or flyers for proper hand washing, cough hygiene, stay at home while sick, etc. at multiple locations in the school.
- To minimize possible exposure at water fountains, turn-off drinking fountains and only allow use of bottle fillers, if available, or water bottles to be brought from home.
- Assess ventilation in classrooms and ensure that ventilation systems are working properly and are at optimal operation.
- Disinfect all work areas, counters, restrooms, doorknobs, and stair railings several times daily; use other staff to assist. Clean all hallways, common areas, and the outside of lockers daily to a level of sanitation prescribed by the CDC. Refer to [CDC/EPA Cleaning and Disinfecting Guidance](#) for best practices and approved disinfectants list.
- School office staff are encouraged to continually wipe down counters, faxes, copiers, telephones, keyboards, and use sanitized pens in the main office.
- Follow [CDC guidelines](#) for guidance to appropriately clean and disinfect buildings, busses, and playgrounds.
- Review current operating procedures for cleaning and disinfection of buildings, busses, playgrounds, etc. to ensure accordance with CDC recommendations.
- Consider ways to minimize sharing of high-touch materials.
- Keep each student's belongings separated from others' in individually labeled containers, cubbies, or areas.
- Ensure ventilation systems operate properly. Increase circulation of outdoor air by ensuring outdoor air exchange through air handlers are functioning properly throughout classrooms and by opening windows and doors. Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety or health risk (e.g., risk of falling, triggering asthma symptoms) to students using the facility.
- Inspect all buildings, facilities, equipment, materials, etc. and determine status and needs for operations.
- Maintain a status update for facilities not ready for occupancy.
- Prepare an isolation area within the school building, and supply the isolation area with personal protective equipment.
- Consult with your local county health department to develop an approved meal service plan for individual school sites.



Physical Health

- Develop communication systems with county health for potential COVID exposure to school buildings, students, or staff.
- Require anyone (student and staff) with [COVID-19 symptoms](#) to stay home.
- Continue procedures compliant with applicable privacy laws, FERPA, HIPAA, and the ADA.
- Recommend school nurses or designated staff compile frequent health reports for the Emergency Operations Planning (EOP) Team.
- Recommend [CDC Practice good hygiene guidance posters](#) (hand washing, cover while sneezing/coughing, physical distancing) be visible in classrooms and common areas.
- Require handwashing in regular intervals.
- [The CDC recommends cloth face coverings](#) when physical distancing is not possible. This recommendation may be challenging for students (especially younger students) to wear in all-day settings such as school. If schools require face coverings, they should provide instructions to students and staff on the [proper use, removal, and cleaning of cloth face coverings](#).

Physical Distancing

- Consider ways to convert outdoor space into learning space for months when weather is accommodating.
- Keep students in the same groups or classroom, with teachers rotating when practical.
- Students may alternate school days. Allow for cleaning time in classrooms between groups.
- Space seating/desks at least six feet apart when feasible. Turn desks to face in the same direction (rather than facing each other), or have students sit on only one side of tables, spaced apart.
- Prohibit congregation in hallways and lunchrooms; if possible, serve lunches in classrooms to avoid gathering of students in the cafeteria; stagger class changes to avoid large groups of students in the hallway; stagger dismissal for the same reason.
- Install physical barriers, such as sneeze guards or partitions, particularly in areas where it is difficult for individuals to remain at least six feet apart (e.g., reception desks, bathroom sinks).
- Provide physical guides, such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signs on walls, to ensure that staff and children remain at least six feet apart in lines and at other times (e.g. guides for creating “one way routes” in hallways).
- [Consider CDC guidance on pupil transportation](#). Schools should consider the need for more buses or alternative schedules to safely transport students. When physical distancing on buses is not possible, schools should consider cloth face masks and other mitigation strategies.



Scenario 3: A mixed model of traditional and remote learning with an increased number of students in school buildings.

In Scenario 3, there will be an increased capacity/number of students in the school building. This coincides with the governor's Phase 2, which increases permissible group size to 50 persons. Additionally, during this scenario schools will limit the number of activities to allow for continued physical distancing and will continue to provide remote learning opportunities for students who are not onsite.



Corresponding governor's orders for this scenario increase permissible group size to groups of 50 and states to:

- Avoid GATHERING in groups of more than 50 people in circumstances that do not readily allow for appropriate physical distancing. It is recommended to continue physical distance in gatherings of any size. Groups larger than 50 people should be canceled unless physical distancing can be maintained.
- ALL VULNERABLE INDIVIDUALS should continue to adhere to stay home guidance. Members of households with vulnerable residents should be aware that by returning to work or other environments where distancing is not practical, they could carry the virus back home. Precautions should be taken to isolate vulnerable residents.
- It is recommended that gatherings occur in shifts (recess, cafeteria and hallway passing). Larger school events that draw in-person crowds are discouraged (sports, assemblies, dances etc.).
- All staff are encouraged to continue monitoring for re-emergence of COVID-19 symptoms and be in contact with local health departments and local hospitals/health providers for continued updates on community re-emergence indicators. Continue to monitor attendance for increases in absenteeism.

If relaxed restrictions are resulting in a new wave of infections, schools may need to return to Scenario 1 or 2. Continue to work in collaboration with local health officials who can help determine any level of transmission in the community. If a confirmed case has entered a school, all decisions should be made locally, in collaboration with the local public health department. Follow the [CDC Consideration for School Closures](#) recommendations.

COVID-19 may come in waves, so understand that the recovery process may repeat several times. It is highly recommended that you **always be prepared** for school cancellations. Additional considerations are below:

**If during Scenario 3, you will be providing remote learning, review [Scenario 1's Academic Programming](#) guidance.

**Review [Scenario 1](#) and [Scenario 2's Social, Emotional, and Behavioral](#) guidance for more information related to screening, monitoring, and promoting the wellness of students, families, and staff.



Social, Emotional, and Behavioral

- Continue to monitor/screen staff and students for any need of additional support services.
- Continue the time for staff/student check-ins and promotion of wellness strategies.
- Continue to refer for support services as needed.

Academic and Extracurricular Programming

- Organized youth activities should avoid gathering in groups of more than 50 people in circumstances that do not readily allow for appropriate physical distancing.
- Pursue options to convene sporting events and participation in sports activities in ways that minimize the risk of transmission of COVID-19 to players, families, coaches, and communities. Limit gatherings, events, and extracurricular activities to those who can maintain physical distancing, and support proper hand hygiene.
- Refer to the [Guidance for Opening up High School Athletics and Activities](#) from the MSHA for more information on safety precautions for athletic training and events for Scenario 3.
- If reinstating indoor physical education for students, ensure frequent disinfecting of articles such as mats and athletic equipment BEFORE and BETWEEN classes.

Physical and Structural Safety

- It is recommended to continue physical distancing in gatherings of any size.
- Sanitation guidelines established in [Scenario 2 continue](#).
- Continue to collaborate with your local health department.
- Continue to limit communal spaces, such as cafeterias and playgrounds with shared playground equipment. If this is not possible, stagger use, and disinfect between uses.
- Outdoor areas, like playgrounds, generally require normal routine cleaning but do not require disinfection. (Source: [CDC](#))
 - Consult with your local health department to develop an approved meal service plan for individual school sites.
 - For school meal service options and considerations, reference OPI's Planning Checklists for a) [Meals Delivered to and Eaten in the Classroom](#); b) [Meals Served in the Cafeteria and Eaten in the Classroom](#); and c) [Meals Served in the Cafeteria](#)



Scenario 4: Near full capacity of attendance and operations in a traditional setting, with remote learning for students not onsite.

- For ALL INDIVIDUALS there is no limit on group size, however, everyone should observe physical distancing and minimize contact time with others, and limit time spent in crowded environments.
- VULNERABLE INDIVIDUALS may still need to take precautions, and remote learning for students not onsite should be available.
- Continue to follow the Governor's Guidelines for Phase Three.

Continue monitoring for re-emergence of COVID-19 symptoms and be in contact with the local health department for continued updates on community re-emergence indicators.

During this time, schools are encouraged to review the school EOP plan and adjust their Emergency Operations Plan Infectious Disease annex as gaps are identified.

The Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) technical assistance center offers free training: [SCHOOL EOPS IN-DEPTH: PLANNING FOR INFECTIOUS DISEASES](#)

**If, during Scenario 4, you will be providing remote learning, review [Scenario 1's Academic Programming](#) guidance.

**Review [Scenario 1, Scenario 2, and Scenario 3's Social, Emotional, and Behavioral](#) guidance for more information related to screening, monitoring, and promoting the wellness of students, families, and staff.



Special Education Considerations for All Scenarios

The Office of Public Instruction (OPI) is committed to supporting students, schools, and families during this unprecedented time. We are committed to continued efforts to be flexible and consider a wide range of delivery methods and modalities in order to make good faith efforts in providing services to students with disabilities in accordance with the intent of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The OPI has compiled the guidance, resources, and tools below to assist districts, IEP teams, and families as they work together to provide the most appropriate services in light of the unique individual circumstances of students, schools, and communities. Information can be found at [COVID-19 Special Education Information](#).

When reopening school buildings after extended closures due to COVID-19, there are several things that need to be considered regarding special education programs. The following is a list of things to consider:

Special Education

- Establish a committee or team to outline the steps necessary to implement the district's reopening plans regarding special education.
- Consider how to facilitate the transition back into the school environment to limit the impact of a student's disability.
- Consider what professional development staff may be needed to support student mental health, physical health, and altered learning environment needs.
- Plan for staffing, depending on the Scenario
- Determine who will be the district point of contact communicating with special education staff and parents.
- Review facility plans to ensure physical distancing and ADA compliance.
- Consider if/how new cleaning procedures may adversely affect any student such as those with chemical sensitivities.
- Determine a process to handle evaluations and reevaluations of IEPs
- Prepare for remote learning in the event school buildings must close again.
- Review the information and data collected prior to and during the school building closure, including observations and information provided by parents.
- Determine how students will be assessed for proficiency
- IEP teams should use information collected from a variety of sources to determine whether additional services are required and what those services will be.



Nutrition Considerations for All Scenarios

Schools participating in OPI School Nutrition Programs have options for serving students when re-opening in the fall. Programs should contact your [regional specialist](#) directly for school nutrition questions and concerns. The [OPI School Nutrition Guidance for Schools and Families](#) page provides resources for school re-opening.

The federal school nutrition programs administered by the Montana Office of Public Instruction has approved flexibility to support local communities during COVID-19 school site re-opening. Follow precautions to ensure the safety of school food service professionals and families by considering the following guidance:

Food Safety

- For food safety guidance, reference [OPI's Meal Service Procedures During a Pandemic](#).
- Consider remote meal service options that maximize safety and physical distancing, such as grab and go breakfasts and lunches. Reference OPI's [Planning Checklist for Remote Meal Service](#).
 - No self-serve stations or buffets.
 - Staff wear masks and gloves while interacting with individuals.
 - Establish hours of operation that allow for facility occupancy that meets physical distancing requirements.
 - Develop traffic flow patterns and seating arrangements for each venue.
 - Adopt school breakfast in the classroom strategies for lunch.
 - Designate entrances for those leaving campus for lunch.
- Consult with your local health department to develop an approved meal service plan for individual school sites.
- For additional school meal service options and considerations, reference OPI's Planning Checklists for a) [Meals Delivered to and Eaten in the Classroom](#); b) [Meals Served in the Cafeteria and Eaten in the Classroom](#); and c) [Meals Served in the Cafeteria](#)
- Identify additional staff to monitor the designated entrance for off-campus lunch students.
- Stay six feet apart from others, including coworkers and families.
- Set up prep stations, work areas, carts, and tables so that people stay six feet apart.
- Wash hands frequently using [proper handwashing methods](#).
- [Sanitize hands](#) when hand washing is not possible.
- Wear disposable gloves and change them frequently.
- Wear aprons that are single-use or laundered daily.
- Clean and sanitize high-touch surfaces regularly.
- Follow CDC recommendations on using [face masks](#) and [hand hygiene](#).



Flexibilities Available to Schools

Federal waiver information:

The OPI has applied, received, and is continuing to seek flexibility through waivers under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 as amended as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. The 2020 and pending state and federal waivers are important as they provide school districts with some relief and the ability to focus locally on the basic educational services and needs of students.

To date, the OPI has received waivers for the following requirements (see the [USED Waiver Granted Letter](#)):

- [Assessment requirements](#) in section 1111(b)(2) for the school year 2019-2020.
- [Accountability and school identification requirements](#) in sections 1111(c)(4) and 1111(d)(2)(C) - (D) that are based on data from the 2019-2020 school year.
- [Report card provisions](#) related to assessments and accountability in section 1111(h) based on data from the 2019-2020 school year.

Additionally, the OPI received approval for the [Fiscal Flexibility](#) waiver, which provides flexibility in the use of funds and other requirements covered under ESEA including the Title I, Parts A–D, Title II, Title III, Part A, Title IV, Parts A–B, and Title V programs.

The [Montana Waivers](#) page is intended to provide information to the public on what the waivers mean today, and in the future, and how the public can engage in the discussion through the Public Comment Process.

Pursuit of additional flexibilities

The Montana FLEX 2020 task force provided recommendations for flexibilities to pursue which may reduce policy burden or provide relief to schools. The final recommendations from the Task Force were within five focus areas:

- Strengthening existing policy flexibility
- Evaluating progress and impact of state graduation, credit, funding, licensure, and accreditation policies
- Maximizing flexibilities in assessment, accountability, and reporting systems
- Fostering and supporting local innovation
- Leveraging federal flexibilities and resources

Task Force members and OPI staff outlined **draft** action plans to consider why, what, when, how, and who could implement the new flexibilities that were identified as crucial-do now. Those draft plans are in the *Montana Flex2020 Task Force Report: Recommended New Flexibilities* report located at this [link](#).



Additional Resources

Social, Emotional, and Behavioral

OPI School Mental Health

- Use the resources on this page to learn more about resources and supports for promoting school mental health.

ASCA and NASP School Reentry Considerations: Supporting Student Social and Emotional Learning and Mental and Behavioral Health Amidst COVID-19

- A document from the American School Counselor Association and the National Association of School Psychologists with recommendations for supporting student social and emotional learning and mental and behavioral health amidst COVID-19.

Trauma-Informed Care for Schools Before, During and After Emergency Events

- Presentation from the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools technical assistance center, covering (a) Trauma and Retraumatization, (b) Manifestations of Trauma in Students, (c) Trauma-Informed Approach, and (d) Considerations for Preparedness Planning.

Addressing Barriers to Learning: Plan ahead to support the transition back of students, families, and staff

- The Center for Mental Health in Schools and Student/Learning Supports quarterly e-journal from Summer 2020 focused on school reopening for Fall 2020.

CASEL Leveraging SEL as you Prepare to Reopen and Renew your School Community

- In this guide, CASEL shares a framework with actionable recommendations to help school leadership teams plan for the SEL needs of all students and adults during the upcoming transition into summer and the beginning of the new school year. While this guidance is written for school leadership teams, states and districts will play critical roles in ensuring schools have the resources, support, and guidance needed to carry out these actions. This guide positions SEL as a critical underpinning to the success of overall transition planning, recognizing school leaders have multiple other considerations for reopening schools, including academics, operations, access to technology, and physical health.

CDC Checklist for Parents

- Parents can use this guide to help protect your family from COVID-19 by practicing and promoting everyday healthy habits. If an outbreak occurs in your community, your school may dismiss students to prevent further spread of the virus. Use this checklist to plan and take action if COVID-19 outbreak occurs in your community.

CDC Checklist for Teachers

- Teachers can use this checklist to plan and take action if COVID-19 outbreak occurs in your community.

Acceptable Use of Technology and Online Ethics

Montana Department of Justice: Students and Technology

- An article outlining safety precautions teachers should take regarding students and technology.



[Great Falls: Computer Acceptable Use and Internet Agreement](#)

- An example of acceptable use and an internet agreement.

Communication

[OPI Family and Community Engagement](#)

- The home page for OPI Family and Community Engagement resources.

Equity

[OPI Empowerment and Equity Resources](#)

Academic Programming

Remote learning Platforms

[OPI Online Learning Resource Page](#)

[EdReport's Instructional Materials During Remote Learning: Reflection and Planning Tool](#)

- Use this tool to reflect on the availability, accessibility, and use of high-quality instructional materials to ensure your district has what it needs for re-entry in the fall and the return to in-person learning in the future.

[TNTP Learning Acceleration Guide](#)

- The New Teacher Project created the following guidance, organized around a few key questions, to help school and district stakeholders responsible for learning acceleration planning:
 - How do we create a plan to accelerate student learning?
 - How do we accelerate student learning in the next two years?
 - What other challenges should we be anticipating as we plan to accelerate student learning?

Student Assessment

[KY: COVID-19 Considerations for Reopening Schools Evaluating Students' Academic Readiness](#)

- Kentucky guide for how to identify student gaps in learning and need.

Physical and Structural Safety

Physical Health

[FERPA and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)

- The purpose of this guidance is to answer questions that school officials may have had concerning the disclosure of personally identifiable information from students' education records to outside entities when addressing the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Physical Distancing

[CDC recommendations on social distancing](#)

Guidance for Opening up High School Athletics and Activities

[National Federation of State High School Associations guidance for High School Athletics](#)

[Montana High School Association \(MHSA\) May 18-19 Board Decisions related to Athletics](#)

The guidance addresses the waiver of bricks and mortar requirement, incomplete extensions for eligibility, and Music Festival changes for the 2020-21 school year.



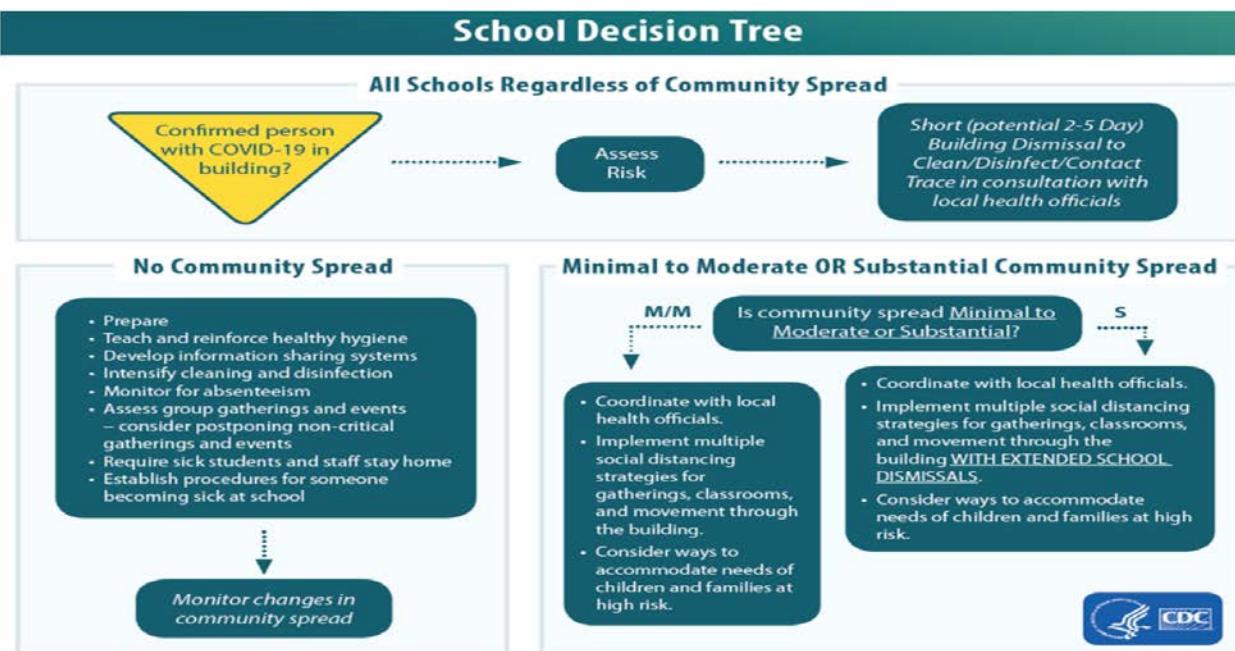
Appendix A: Governor's Guidance on Reopening Montana's Schools: April 22, 2020

[Guidance for the Phased Reopening of Montana, Phase One](#)

[Montana Reopening the Big Sky Phased Approach](#)

Appendix B: CDC Guidance for Resuming School Considerations for Schools

Updated May 19, 2020





Appendix C: Existing Flexibilities/Innovations in Code and Rules

	FLEXIBILITY	FINANCIAL	PROGRAMMATIC	LINK
1	Personalized/proficiency-based learning both at the individual level and as an exception to aggregate hours of instruction	20-9-311 (4) (d)	10.55.906 (3) & (4)	Proficient Student Guidance
2	Offsite learning is specifically authorized as a means of meeting the aggregate hours of instruction and generating ANB	20-1-101 (5)(14) 20-7-118		
3	Trustees have the authority to use transportation funds through individual contracts with offsite learning students' families, to reimburse the cost of meals ("board and room" is what the statute provides) and provision of correspondence (aka offsite) courses	20-10-101		
4	Use of the tuition fund to cover the full costs of IDEA that are not funded by (general fund budget per pupil + state and federal special education payment)	20-5-324 (5)(a)(iii)		Tuition Calculator link coming
5	The authority to enroll and admit children under the age of 5 and generate ANB when there are exceptional circumstances in the discretion of the trustees that merit waiver of the age requirement	20-5-101(3)		
6	The authority to continue to serve and generate ANB from a student who has graduated but who has not yet reached the age of 19	20-5-101	10.55.906(1)	
7	Eligible use of Adult Education funds for anyone who is 16 years of age or older who is not a regularly enrolled full-time pupil of the district.	20-7-701		
8	Multi-district agreements	20-3-363		
9	Transfer and flexible use of state funds	20-9-208		



10	Transfers for school safety	20-9-236 ; 20-9-502 ; 20-9-525		
11	Look back allowance	20-9-308		
12	Non-voted increases of base general fund by borrowing \$\$ from non-voted levies	20-9-308(2)(b)		
13	Ability to leverage major maintenance funds for loans from the Board of Investments or the private sector	20-9-471 ; 20-9-525(2)		
14	Flexibility to transfer donated funds that were not earmarked	20-9-604		

Note: The identified flexibilities were provided by The Montana School Boards Association's Executive Director, Lance Melton.



Appendix D: Montana Public Education Center (MT-PEC) Guidance for School Reopening

- MT-PEC partners developed [*Back to School: A Roadmap for Safely Reopening Montana's Public Schools using Emergency School District Policies*](#) to assist public school leaders in preparing for the start of the 2020-2021 school year.
 - **Model Emergency Policy 1900 Series** can aid districts in selecting and adopting appropriate policies and options that will enhance and support school district operations ([Montana Public Education Center](#)).
 - Examples of Adopted 1900 series policies.
 - [Clinton Elementary School District](#)
 - [Missoula County Public Schools](#)

Appendix E: Montana University System (MUS) Healthy Fall 2020: Planning Guidelines for Campuses

[MUS Healthy Fall 2020: Planning Guidelines for Campuses](#)



Appendix F: Montana Flex and Learn Task Force Member List

Flex2020 Task Force Members

- Task Force Facilitator: Dr. Julie Murgel, The OPI ESSA Accountability Director
- Representative Bruce Grubbs, Education Interim Committee
- Tammy Lacey, The Board of Public Education Vice-Chair
- Peter Donovan, The Board of Public Education Executive Director
- Lance Melton, The Montana School Boards Association Executive Director
- Kirk Miller, School Administrators of Montana Executive Director
- Dianne Burke, Montana Quality Education Coalition Executive Director
- Tracy Moseman, The OPI Chief Program Officer
- Kristine Thatcher, The OPI Director of Licensure
- Dustin Shipman, Big Sky Schools Superintendent
- Allison Evertz, Joliet Public Schools Superintendent
- Tom Korst, Hamilton Public Schools Superintendent
- Laurie Barron, Evergreen Schools Superintendent
- Corinna Guardipee-Hall, Browning Schools Superintendent
- Loverty Erickson, Wolf Point Schools Superintendent
- Kim Anthony, Billings Public Schools K-8 Executive Director
- Jon Martin, Noxon Schools Superintendent
- Jon Konen, Great Falls Public Schools Principal
- Godfrey Saunders, Belgrade Public Schools Superintendent
- Wade Sundby, Glasgow Public Schools Superintendent
- Greg Dern, Roy Public Schools Superintendent
- Heather Hoyer, Great Falls Public Schools Assistant Superintendent
- Joe Steele, St. Regis Public Schools Superintendent
- Monte Silk, Sidney Public Schools Superintendent
- Dinny Bennett, Forsyth Public Schools Superintendent
- Les Meyer, Fairfield Public Schools Superintendent
- Tobin Novasio, Lockwood Public Schools Superintendent
- Sharyl Allen, The OPI Deputy Superintendent
- Anne Bauer, Project Manager at the OPI
- Lona Running Wolf, Director of American Indian Student Achievement at the OPI
- Jason Butcher, Outreach Director, Reach Higher Montana
- Heather Jarrett, Reed Point Public Schools Superintendent
- Mike Perry, Hot Springs Public Schools Superintendent
- Pad McCracken, Montana Legislative Education Interim Committee Staff Member



Montana LEARN 2020 TASK FORCE

- Meghan Ascheman – Billings Parent & Special Needs Assistant
- Anna Baldwin – Arlee School Grants Manager & 2014 MT Teacher of the Year
- Molly Barta – Billings CTE Teacher
- Thomas Baty – Helena High School Fine Arts Teacher
- Sandra Beal – Ronan Middle School Principal
- Chad Berg – Bozeman Special Education Director
- Laurie Bishop – Livingston Legislator & Afterschool Alliance Director
- Dana Bremner – Browning Elementary Teacher
- Kim Chouinard – Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch
- Alyssa A. Cliver – Golden Triangle Curriculum Cooperative Director
- Paige Cooper-Cole – Plevna Guidance Counselor & Art Teacher
- Susan Davis – Belgrade Elementary English Learner Coordinator
- Tylene Eaton, RN – Prairie County Health Department
- Laurie Enebo – Glasgow Middle School Social Studies Teacher
- Jennifer Erdi Hickok – Colstrip Special Education Director
- Kelly Fedge DuBose – Bozeman Parent & Decoding Dyslexia CEO
- McCall Flynn – Education Policy Advisor to Governor Bullock
- Bob Griffith – Great Falls Education Association
- Bruce Grubbs – Bozeman Legislator
- Reginald Hageman – Helena High Health Enhancement Teacher & SHAPE MT
- Krista Hertz – Education Foundation for Billings Public Schools Director
- Dylan Huisken – Bonner Social Studies Teacher & 2019 Teacher of the Year
- Anne Keith – Board of Public Education
- Connie Keogh – Missoula Legislator
- Ellen Livers – Shodair Children’s Hospital
- Lorie Martinez – Columbus Family & Consumer Science & PE Teacher
- Kristina McGee – Glasgow High School English Teacher
- Ben Meyer – Stevensville School Board Trustee
- Haley Moseman – Capital High School Student
- Kelley Myer – Livingston Elementary Teacher
- Gary Myers – Helena School Technology Coordinator
- Sara Novak – Great Divide Special Education Cooperative Director
- Patrice O’Loughlin – Hardin School Nutrition Director
- Tricia Owens – Missoula Elementary Teacher
- Merrick Parnell – Power High School Social Studies Teacher
- J.R. Pierce – Shields Valley High School Agriculture Education Teacher
- Bianka Rock Above – Pryor Principal
- Linda Rost – Baker High Science Teacher & 2020 MT Teacher of the Year
- Sheryl Scheafer – Montana PTA President
- Mike Tatsey – Heart Butte Superintendent
- Brooke Taylor – Billings High School Math Teacher
- Lorie Thex – Ashland Elementary Teacher
- Sarah Urban – Helena High School Science Teacher



- Sue Vinton – Billings Legislator
- Christy Wright – Wyola Schools Superintendent

Office of Public Instruction Facilitators:

- Colet Bartow – Content Standards and Instruction Division Administrator
- Camille Biazzo – Assistant School Nutrition Director
- Carli Cockrell – Professional Learning Coordinator
- Susan Court – Youth Risk Behavior Survey Coordinator/Health Enhancement
- Marisa Graybill – Mathematics Instructional Coordinator
- Dick Trerise - Assistant Special Education Director
- Donnie Wetzel, Jr. - Indian Education for All Program Manager
- Holly Mook - Coordinated School Health Unit Director
- Dylan Klapmeier- OPI Communications Director

This document was prepared by Jacob Williams with Education Northwest and Tammy Lyons with the Montana Office of Public Instruction

