



# East Helena Public Schools

School District No. 9

P.O. Box 1280 \* East Helena, MT. 59635

Superintendent/ Administration Office (406) 227-7700

Eastgate Elementary School (406) 227-7770 \* Prickly Pear Elementary (406) 227-7720

Radley Elementary School (406) 227-7710 \* East Valley Middle School (406) 227-7740

East Helena High School (406) 227-7730

*“Success For All”*



8.16.21

Dear EHPS Parents,

I am excited to welcome you and your children to the 2021-22 school year as the new superintendent of this amazing school district. Our maintenance staff has worked hard over the summer break to have the schools in tip top shape for the students. Principals and teachers are getting the schools and classrooms ready. There are plenty of new faces in our schools this fall starting with the folks working in the offices. Here's the Admin staff rundown:

### **New Leadership and Introductions**

Eastgate and Prickly Pear Elementary - [Brandon Crusat](#) will begin his second year in East Helena at the helm of Eastgate and Prickly Pear Elementary schools. Brandon had 5 years of experience as a school principal near Boise, Idaho before taking over here in East Helena. We are excited to have him on board!

Radley School - Please welcome [Gus Somerfeld](#) to the Principal's role at Radley. Formerly a successful 5th grade teacher and high school football coach, Gus is shifting gears for the district in his new role and is excited to be able to make this important transition for the kids and teachers at Radley School.

EVMS - [Brenda Stoltz](#) is a familiar face at EVMS having served several years as the computer technology teacher and then more recently, a 2 year stint as the vice principal. She is transitioning this year to the principal's office. Mrs. Stoltz has a wealth of background and experience in business and education that will lend themselves well to her new leadership role. [Krista Swindell](#) comes to us from Pennsylvania via Anaconda. Krista is joining us this year in the vice principal's role at EVMS. She has an extensive background in education and a passion for helping kids succeed. This will be her first full time dedicated admin position.

EHHS - [Brian Kessler](#) is a Helena original and Helena High graduate. Prior to entering school administration he was a health/PE teacher at Helena. He has experience as a vice principal with 1 year at Helena High School and 1 year at Havre High School. In the vice principal/athletic director role at EHHS is [Shaun Murgel](#). He is the "old hand" around here with 2 years experience in this position. Shaun is an EH original having been born and raised here. He has extensive experience in education and athletics

having coached at the collegiate level and worked in schools in Montana, Nevada, and Oregon before making his way back home to help us out at EHHS.

Then there's me, [Dan Rispens](#). I grew up in Helena and taught English for 7 years at Helena High before joining the admin team in East Helena back in 2001. Although I have 20 years experience in school administration, I have never been a superintendent before and am new to the position this year. I am excited about the opportunity to lead the schools in this great community.

As you can see from the list above, ALL of your EHPS Administrators are in the first year or two in their current positions (Except Mr. Murgel with 2 years experience!). We are excited to be here to help out, and we ask for your patience as we learn the ropes of these new jobs!!!

### **COVID Protections**

There has been plenty of news coverage lately regarding the latest outbreak of COVID and the new Delta Variant. We are monitoring the situation closely. People in our community have strong feelings regarding the mandated use of facemasks in the schools. Current school board policy regarding masks is that masks are optional at the choice of the individual, and anyone who feels the need to wear a mask can certainly exercise that option. Additionally we are working to keep classes as small as possible to allow for distancing and working to limit the mixing of students. Custodians will be sanitizing regularly and hand hygiene will be emphasized. We'll need the community's support to keep our schools open and safe. Here's what you can do to help out:

- **Get vaccinated** if you're 12 years old or older. There will be a FREE vaccine clinic in the EHHS north parking lot Tuesday, August 17 from 5PM - 7PM. The clinic is sponsored by Blue Cross Blue Shield. No appointment is necessary. With more people vaccinated, the virus has less chance to spread and mutate which protects others including unvaccinated children.
- **Stay home or keep kids home** if they are sick or symptomatic.
- **Be aware of possible exposure** to COVID and take it seriously.
- **Follow health dept guidance** regarding safe practices and the need for quarantine and/or isolation. [The Lewis and Clark County Health Dept COVID 19 Hub can be found here.](#) Check out this information to keep yourself and those around you safe.

Last year, we were one of the few districts that managed to open 5 days /week to in-person instruction. We found out last year, if the entire community works together, we can minimize the spread and keep schools open.

There are still many unknowns about this latest outbreak. We are monitoring the local conditions. These unknowns cause anxiety and unrest around the community which can have a negative impact on our children. Working to understand our friends and neighbors who may have differing views will strengthen our schools and our town. Fighting about it won't.

If you choose to have your child mask in school, please communicate your wishes to their classroom teacher so he/she can support you and your child.

## **Busing**

[Bus routes can be found here.](#) This year we're adding another bus route, route 8, and trying to re-start the shuttle bussing for the younger kids. Here are some important details:

- Route 8 is for High School students only. There will be other buses coming to the same stops for the K-8 students.
- Once route 8 drops the high schoolers, it will shuttle K-5 students across town.
- There is no shuttle service between schools for middle and high school students at this time.
- We will monitor shuttle usage and make adjustments as we move forward.
- You do not need to register your child for the bus. Find the stop nearest your house and have them there 5 minutes prior to the scheduled pick up time,
- **Masks are required by all persons on public transportation.** This is a CDC Order, not a guidance or recommendation. It is not a state or local rule. As an order it has the weight of federal law and is the same rule that requires masks on airline flights and city buses. As a recipient of federal funding, we could risk losing our funding if we do not enforce the rule. The rule applies to routes, field trips, and activity trips for sports.
- If you have questions about bus routes or stops, contact [Nick Turner](#), bus supervisor.
- If you have questions about the CDC Mask rule for buses, contact your elected officials in Washington DC.

## **Wildfires and smoke**

The ongoing drought is wreaking havoc with wildfires this summer and the smoke has become an unpleasant fact of life. School office staff and athletic coaches will be monitoring air quality and making adjustments day by day to keep kids safe. When air quality is deemed “unhealthy for sensitive groups”, students who suffer respiratory issues will have the opportunity to stay indoors from recess. If air quality shifts to “Unhealthy” or worse, all students will stay indoors. Air quality changes on an hour by hour basis which means the morning recess may be indoors while afternoon may be outdoors. Indoor air quality in our schools is actually pretty good due to investments made in our air handling systems over the last several years. If you have questions or concerns about your child and air quality, please contact your child's teacher or the school administration.

Thanks everyone! and Make it a Great Day!

**Mr Rispens**