



MEMORANDUM

TO: School District Superintendents
FROM: Montana OPI Superintendent Elsie Arntzen
DATE: May 19, 2021
SUBJECT: Planning for the 2021-2022 School Year

As you prepare to plan for once again welcoming students back into the classroom for the 2021-2022 school year, I want to first thank you for all of the tremendous work you, your educators, your classified staff, and your administrators have done to not only keep our school doors open in many of your districts, but more importantly keep our students safe and learning. This past year has been unprecedented, and you have been tremendous leaders in your communities, and our wonderful Montana teachers have continued to put our amazing Montana students first.

On February 12, 2021, Governor Greg Gianforte issued a directive implementing Executive Order 2-2021. In the memo, he rightfully noted that “access to school is essential to the development, social, mental, and educational needs of school-age children.” Further, he said that “schools should make reasonable efforts to follow school guidelines and best practices recommended by the CDC and the Montana Office of Public Instruction.”

Since that time, our state has continued to reopen, and there have been many changes to state and local policies on the required use of masks or face coverings. As a result of a change in state law, many counties have eliminated their requirements for the wearing of masks or face coverings in public space and private businesses.

In light of the changes occurring across the state, as we move into the 2021-2022 school year, **the OPI strongly recommends that school districts across Montana rescind, or allow to expire, any existing face covering mandates, and develop policies that make the wearing of face masks and other coverings optional, voluntary, and a matter of family choice.** Further, the OPI supports schools making



the decision to remove those mandates for the remainder of the present school year, as well as for any summer instruction programs.

We in Montana have proven that we can keep our children safe and keep them learning. We cannot enter another school year subjecting our students to any additional loss of instructional time. We also cannot perpetuate the notion that masks will be a permanent feature in our state's classrooms. I encourage you to evaluate your policies and work toward removing masks wherever possible.

It is important that our children have as normal a school experience as possible – as soon as possible. This is one way to help accomplish that objective. I sincerely hope your school districts will consider this guidance as they plan for the new school year. Thank you for putting our Montana students first. I am here to serve you if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Elsie Arntzen

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Elsie Arntzen", is written over a large, faint circular watermark or stamp. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.