

**July 23, 2021
Board of Education, School District 51
Grand Junction, CO 81501**

**RE: Open Letter to School District 51 Board of Education Expressing the
Physicians of Mesa County Medical Society Concerns with Announced
Changes to the 2021-22 COVID Related Protocols.**

Dear Board of Education:

We first want to thank you for your leadership last year. Your good judgment and incorporation of Centers for Disease Control and other COVID mitigation guidance so that in-person learning occurred was truly remarkable. Our schools remained open and our children got the essential education, socialization and other support that many did not because their schools were closed. You truly put our kids' best interests to heart.

However, we, the physicians of the Mesa County Medical Society are disheartened to learn that your 2021-22 Back to School protocols are changing from requiring face coverings to "heavily encouraging" them for students, staff or visitors. This change is not consistent with the Centers for Disease Control or American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations. We fear this will result in far fewer people wearing masks and increase the risk of exposure to students, staff and visitors.

We are especially concerned that this change includes settings where students under the age of 12 learn. These children remain at great risk of contracting and spreading COVID because they are not currently eligible to receive the vaccine. This is only amplified by the more infectious and aggressive Delta variant being the predominant form of COVID found in Mesa County presently.

While we understand that you have competing concerns, we believe that the health and safety of the students, staff and visitors in your buildings needs to be paramount. In reality, what you did last year with cohorting, masking and so forth worked and we fear that the proposed changes will only result in more COVID outbreaks, school closures, less in-person learning time, more mental illness, more COVID disease in our community and increased morbidity and mortality.

We would gladly meet with you, Dr. Sirko, or any other person to discuss our concerns. We are also happy to help work with you to make the 2021-22 school year as successful as last year.

Respectfully,

**Board of Directors
Mesa County Medical Society**