Dear D51 Families and Colleagues:

I want to start off by thanking everyone who came out to our first Listening Tour session Thursday at Bestslope Coffee in Fruita. It was great to talk with folks in the community and meet some new faces, as well. These sessions are a great opportunity for me to get to know families and community members better and share some exciting things happening in the district, including our three year Strategic Plan. Please consider joining me for one of the other Listening Tour sessions:

- Monday, Sept. 12 - Mt. Garfield Middle School, 3475 Front St., 4-5 p.m. (snacks provided)
- Tuesday, Sept. 13 - Career Center, 2935 North Ave., 12-1 p.m. (lunch provided)
- Thursday, Sept. 15 - Basil T. Knight, 596 N. Westgate, 7-8 p.m. (in Spanish, following Multilingual Family Engagement Night - snacks provided)
- Friday, Sept. 16 - Kiln Coffee Bar, 326 Main St., 8-9 a.m. (coffee donated)
- Wednesday, Sept. 21 - Zoom meeting in English, 6-7 p.m.
- Monday, Sept. 26 - Zoom meeting in Spanish, 6-7 p.m.

The final Zoom session on Sept. 26 will be a hybrid meeting, covering both the regular Listening Tour topics and a focus group on communications efforts with our linguistically diverse population. One of the goals of the Strategic Plan is to find more ways to communicate and connect with families who primarily speak a language other than English at home. This focus group will go a long way toward achieving that goal, and we look forward to engaging with the community at that session!

Free and Reduced School Meal Reminder
Nutrition Services Director Dan Sharp and I had a great time serving lunch to students in the Chipeta Elementary School cafeteria on Wednesday (you can check out the photos here). I learned a lot about the hard work it takes to ensure that all of our D51 students have access to healthy meals each day. I also learned that if you spend too much time chatting it up with the students in the line, you can quickly fall behind on food prep! Thanks to the amazing Nutrition Services staff at Chipeta for showing me the ropes. I promise I'll stay on top of my duties next time!

It's always a privilege to get out into schools and meet students, and our partners at KKCO/KJCT and KREX came to capture the moment and talk about free and reduced-price school meal applications. Families can apply for free or reduced-price school meals any time of year. If you have not yet applied, I encourage you to do so at myschoolapps.com.

Insurance Update
One of the Priority Areas in the Strategic Plan focuses on "Transparent & Effective Resource Allocation." Our most important resource that we can invest in is our people, and one of the main concerns we have heard over the last few years has been the significant increase in monthly out-of-paycheck costs to employees for insurance premiums. In fact, costs related to our overall health plan have grown unsustainably for our employees in D51 over the past 4 years, which has resulted in employee premiums increasing by an average of 114% since 2019. To help alleviate increasing insurance costs to our employees, and to ensure that we are building our insurance reserves back to a normal level, we engaged in a Request for Proposals process last spring to pursue a more cost-effective path for our employees moving forward.

On Tuesday, the D51 Board of Education voted to move forward with negotiations with Monument Health to finalize a benefits structure for a single plan option and develop a transition plan for moving to a single plan option. This change will help stabilize costs and make our health insurance coverage more affordable for all employees and their families.

Open enrollment will start in October and those on D51's medical insurance will have two tiers of in-network coverage starting Jan. 1, 2023: Monument Health (including St. Mary's) for Tier 1 and United Healthcare (including Community Hospital) for Tier 2. If you are a staff member, please refer to the email sent to all employees Wednesday for more detailed information. Further updates will be provided as they become available.

GJHS Workforce Development Day
In an effort to better prepare and support our D51 students, a Priority Area within the Strategic Plan is to have "Robust & Aligned Options for Learning Experiences" for all of our future D51 graduates. Career exploration and support for students in the hiring process is a key piece of that effort.

"Effective Community Partnerships to Advance Strategic Goals" is another Priority Area within the Strategic Plan. On that note, all Grand Junction High School students will participate in a Workforce Development Day on Sept. 20th. The event will feature a Career Fair, College Fair, guest speaker, and ways to explore multiple career pathways. If you are a local business owner interested in participating in Workforce Development Day, we'd love to have you join us! Please click here to see a flier with more details.

Safety Presentation
Our nationally recognized D51 Safety and Security Team does amazing work day in and day out to keep our schools, and the staff and families in them, safe. Our team is constantly learning, adapting, and staying up to date on best practices, and will be expanding this year to add additional security officers, along with other safety upgrades. Our security officers have law enforcement experience and training and, together with our School Resource Officers, are assigned to cover schools across D51. Safety is a topic of interest for all families and staff, and I encourage you to attend or watch our next School Board meeting at 6 p.m. on Sept. 6 in the Harry Butler Board Room, 455 N. 22nd St., to hear a comprehensive update from our Safety and Security Team.

Rainbow Fentanyl
Our partners at the Grand Junction Police Department and Western Colorado Drug Task Force have recently informed us of a troubling new drug that is colorful and looks like candy. They would like all parents/guardians and school staff to know what it is and what it looks like. This drug is being called rainbow fentanyl and has been circulating in Mesa County. Approximately 60,000 of these pills have been seized on the Western Slope in the last couple weeks. Please talk with your children or students about this dangerous drug and accepting pills from anyone other than their doctor. To learn more, please visit the DEA website.

AP Scholars
I'm proud to announce that 206 D51 students were recently named Advanced Placement Scholars for the 2021-22 school year. This includes nine students who qualified for an AP Capstone Diploma by earning scores of 3 or higher in AP Seminar and AP Research, plus a 3 or higher on four additional AP exams. We also had 95 students earn an AP Scholar Award by earning a score of 3 or higher on three or more AP exams, 57 students earn an AP Scholar with Distinction Award by earning an average score of at least 3.5 on all AP Exams taken and scores of 3 or higher on five or more of these exams, and 45 students earn an AP Scholar with Honor Award by earning an average score of at least 3.25 on all AP Exams taken and scores of three or higher on four or more of these exams. Congratulations to these hard-working D51 students!

All schools are closed on Monday for Labor Day and elementary and middle schools are closed on Tuesday for elementary planning and middle school conferences. Have a happy holiday!

Brian Hill

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