



Dear D51 Families and Colleagues:

We hope y'all have had a great week. We have had a lot of great things happening this week throughout the district, even though it was a short week for students, and we continue to celebrate our D51 School Board during Board Appreciation Month. Thank you to our Board of Education for your dedication to our students, families, and staff.

On Monday, our family attended the MLK Day Ceremony & March in downtown Grand Junction. Thank you to Black Citizens & Friends for organizing a wonderful event for our community to celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. King. It was great to see so many D51 students, families, staff, and D51 Board Members attend the celebration. Proclamations were read by the different municipalities, our own Palisade High School "Popular Acclaim" singers performed under the direction of Matt Doty, and our own Petie Pope was awarded the Making a Difference Award. Congratulations to Mr. Pope for all that he has done for our district and the community.

The theme for this year's ceremony was "Develop Courage to Stand Up for Yourself & Others." During the ceremony, the topic of anti-semitic flyers that were recently distributed throughout our city was brought up. The call to action was to condemn acts of hate like this, and I want to make it clear that myself, our leadership team, and our Board of Education join in the chorus of leaders in our community in calling out and condemning acts of racism and hate like this. There is no place for hate in our community, and it will never be tolerated in our schools. In the words of Dr. King, "We must use the weapon of love." D51 is committed to being a district that welcomes all into our schools with open arms, and we will stand up to hate of any kind when we see it in our schools and in our community.

#### D51 ENROLLMENT DECLINES & AGING FACILITIES

At Tuesday night's Board meeting, Shannon Bingham, who serves as our demographer, presented an overview of our current student enrollment numbers and where he is projecting them to head in the coming years. This topic has been front and center in the state and national media as of late as the trend of declining student enrollment is a reality across the country. In our district, Shannon attributes that loss of enrollment mainly to declining birth rates and more families and students moving out of the state of Colorado instead of in due to multiple factors, including rising housing costs. And the pandemic only intensified the declines in enrollment. A [report released by CDE](#) this week noted that the state of Colorado is down over 3,000 students this year compared to last year, and we are down over 400 students in D51.

This is an extremely important topic for our community, and you will be hearing a lot more about it in the weeks and months ahead. As our enrollment continues to decline, it leads to things like inefficient and unsustainable staffing, difficulties with providing adequate services for students such as special education services and multiple course offerings, underutilization of facilities, and increased safety risks. This topic directly ties in with our Strategic Plan Focus Areas of having Prepared and Supported Students & Staff and our Strategic Plan Priority Area of modeling Transparent & Effective Resource Allocation. I would encourage families and staff to take the time to view Shannon's presentation from Tuesday evening. You can click [here](#) to watch the video. Shannon begins his presentation at the 2 hr 17 min mark. You can also read more about this topic at the state level [here](#).

Also important to note is that Shannon is simultaneously assisting us in exploring how we, as a community, want to address the issues we have around aging school facilities as well as the current grade configuration in the Fruita area that doesn't match the rest of the school district. More information will be presented on those topics, as well. Surveys and town hall style meetings will be held soon on these topics to gather input, and we will keep you updated on when and where those opportunities will be held.

#### D51 EMPLOYEE RECOGNIZED WITH MAKING A DIFFERENCE AWARD

During the Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration on Monday, D51 Environmental and Safety Manager Petie Pope was recognized with the "Making a Difference Award." This award, presented by Black Citizens and Friends, is given to someone in the community who goes above and beyond.

"Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. implored us to be the best we could be at all the things we do and believed that each one of us could make a difference in the lives of others by doing both small and large things," said Black Citizens and Friends President David Combs. "In this belief, Black Citizens and Friends carried these ideas forward by recognizing an individual who exemplified this by making them the recipient of our Dr. Martin Luther King "Making A Difference" award."

Petie has been with the School District for more than 20 years and has always gone above and beyond to support our students and staff in the district. He has always been passionate about serving his community and does so with a smile. We are proud to have Petie as an employee at the School District and grateful for the work and dedication he has given to our schools and community. A recognition well deserved!

#### MLK ESSAY/POSTER CONTEST WINNERS

Congratulations to our 2023 Martin Luther King Jr. D51 student essay/poster contest winners. Every year, D51 students participate in this meaningful community activity that teaches about the significance of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s impact on our world today. First through third place winners received cash prizes, and the Grand Prize winner featured their poster image on the 2023 MLK Jr. T-shirt.

A huge shout out to all of the students who participated, and congratulations to our D51 student winners:

#### D51 Essay Winner:

Sean Vandenberg, Summit School

#### D51 Poster Winners:

- **Elementary:**  
3rd Place: Sheridan Doyle, Shelledy Elementary  
1st Place: Eric Cordova, Appleton Elementary
- **Middle School:**  
3rd Place: Tiana Padilla, Independence Academy  
2nd Place: Rosilyn Abbath, Independence Academy  
1st Place: Sophie Ham, Independence Academy
- **High School:**  
2nd Place: Jeremy Rosales, R-5 High School  
1st Place: Adina Gutierrez, Central High School
- **Grand Prize, T-shirt Winner**  
Adina Gutierrez, Central High School

#### D51 FINANCE DEPARTMENT RECEIVES EXCELLENCE IN FINANCIAL REPORTING

One of the Priority Areas in the District's Strategic Plan is Transparent & Effective Resource Allocation, and the D51 Finance Department is committed to continued financial transparency and accuracy in all that they do. Our Finance Department was recently awarded the Government Finance Officers Association's Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting. This Certificate of Achievement is the highest form of recognition in governmental accounting and financial reporting and represents the significant accomplishment by a government agency and its financial management.

Earning this award is a significant accomplishment, but earning it 28 years in a row speaks to their continued excellence in ensuring we are being good stewards of our taxpayer dollars and maximizing those dollars for the benefit of our students. Congratulations to Melanie Trujillo, our Chief Financial Officer, and her entire team on such an amazing achievement!

#### D51 GIRLS WRESTLING

I'd like to take this opportunity to highlight our incredible D51 Girl's Phoenix Wrestling team! Girls Wrestling became a CHSAA Varsity Sport three years ago, and our D51 wrestling team has been hard at work ever since.

They are currently ranked 12th in Colorado, with several individuals ranked in the top 10. This past weekend, they competed in a tournament in Utah and beat out the 3rd ranked team in the country, taking home the championship title! They'll compete again this weekend in the MLK Tournament at Central High School, and I encourage you to come out and support them. Matches start at 2:00 p.m. on Friday and 9:00 a.m. on Saturday.

A shout out to their head coach, Chad Dare, and all of the D51 staff and families who support the team. The camaraderie you have worked to build on this team is apparent through the way they practice and interact with each other. Thank you for your leadership and support of the sport. I look forward to watching the team's continued success this weekend.

#### 2024 BANK OF COLORADO ART CONTEST

We all know the arts are integral to our educational system. Through art, our students develop a variety of life skills, including creative problem-solving skills, motor skills, language skills, social skills, and decision-making. Art also boosts critical thinking and objective observation and connects students to their culture and world.

Every year, D51 partners with the Bank of CO for the Annual Bank of CO Calendar Contest. All students in grades K-12 at D51 schools can submit their artwork to be featured in the 2024 Calendar.

Our district staff and families look forward to the Bank of CO calendar every year. It's an exciting opportunity for our students to branch out and display their artistic talents. I hope those with a creative and artistic side will consider entering this contest this year. For additional details, click [here](#).

#### M.E.S.A CLUB COMPETITION

MESA (Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement) is a nationwide program offered in public schools meant to encourage students on the path to careers in the technical fields. District 51 has six middle schools with MESA Clubs, including Mount Garfield, East, West, Redlands, Fruita, and Grand Mesa.

At the end of this month, students from each of these clubs will represent their schools in a paper airplane engineering competition. During the competition, students will be expected to research and fabricate prototypes and execute successful launches within the guidelines, competing for the longest time in the air and/or the furthest distance. Winners will be chosen for each category.

Our D51 STEM team works extremely hard all year to provide valuable educational opportunities and events for our STEM students. Shoutout to our STEM Coordinator, Jessica McDivitt, and her team for all their hard work coordinating, sponsoring, and executing these events!

#### UNIVERSAL PRE-K

The D51 Early Childhood Education Department is excited to announce our transition to the Universal Preschool Colorado (UPK) Program for the 2023-24 school year. The Universal Preschool Colorado Program ensures that every child in the year before kindergarten is eligible for 15 hours of state-funded, voluntary preschool each week, beginning in the fall of 2023. In addition, three-year-olds with [qualifying factors](#) will be eligible for 10 hours of state-funded preschool each week.

Our District 51 preschool programs provide a positive early education experience for ages three through non-school-age five-year-olds. Currently, our preschool program is a part-time program offering 12 hours of early childhood education through either a morning or afternoon session. Beginning in the 2023-24 school year, every eligible child in District 51 preschool will receive 12 hours of state-funded preschool each week. We have preschool classrooms at 20 sites within the district, including one on a Career and Technical Education campus.

All families with qualifying children must fill out a Universal Preschool Program application. For more information or to apply for Universal Preschool Colorado, visit the [UPK website](#) or contact our Early Childhood Office at 970-254-5429.

#### ADULT ENGLISH CLASSES

As part of our District's Strategic Plan, we continually seek ways to better engage and partner with our families in your children's education. During outreach conducted by our Migrant Services Department, we received feedback from many of our non-English speaking families that English courses would be beneficial in helping them engage and connect with the school district.

D51 is now offering adult English classes for beginners at Dual Immersion Academy. Classes will take place Tuesdays and Thursdays from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., January 24 - April 14. Space is limited, so please register in advance. [Click here](#) for additional information.

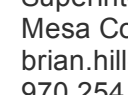
#### BOARD HIGHLIGHTS

The Board of Education held a business meeting on Tuesday in the Harry Butler Board Room. Highlights from the meeting can be found [here](#).

Click [here](#) to read President Haitz's message following this week's Board Meeting. As a reminder, you can watch the meeting by clicking on this [link](#). As always, our BOE meeting details can be found on our [website](#).

*Brian Hill*

Dr. Brian Hill  
Superintendent of Schools  
Mesa County Valley School District 51  
brian.hill@d51schools.org  
970.254.5193



2115 Grand Ave.  
Grand Junction, CO 81501  
d51schools.org  
(970) 254-5100

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