

Hon. Brandon E. Dewey
Mayor of Stevensville

Jenelle Berthoud
Town Clerk



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August 6, 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL TO:

Dr. Robert Moore, Superintendent
Stevensville School District
300 Park Avenue
Stevensville, MT 59870
mooreb@stevensville.k12.mt.us

Stevensville School Board
c/o: Greg Trangmoe, Chairman
300 Park Avenue
Stevensville, MT 59870
trangmoe@stevensville.k12.mt.us

Dr. Moore & School Board Members:

As public officials, we all carry the great responsibility in making sound decisions on behalf of those we serve and represent. In some cases, especially in the current era of COVID-19, our decision making can become politicized and misrepresented even with the best of intentions. I have no doubt that school administrators and our elected trustees make their decisions on behalf of our community with nothing less than the best of intentions at heart. For that you should be commended, as I deeply understand the associated conflicts and challenges.

Your recent decision to not require masks as school returns to session this fall is a troubling one, though. As officials across the state and locally reinforce the use of face coverings, you have taken a stance that does not speak to unity but rather undermines the many efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our community. The evidence speaks for itself: Face coverings slow the spread of COVID-19 in our communities. Your reckless decision to not require face coverings is one that puts our entire community at risk, especially our vulnerable populations. The Town of Stevensville continues to take measures and implement strategies that keep us safe. Our work will certainly not fully prevent the spread of COVID-19, but our goal is to flatten the curve and prevent wide-spread infection that would lead to a shutdown similar to what we experienced this spring.

The shutdown that was necessary earlier this year was necessary for many reasons. However, you know that it brought many drawbacks for the school community you are tasked with responsibility for. The close of the school year looked vastly different than many expected as students missed out on many experiences. The students, staff, and their parents demonstrated great adaptability in great stride and made their community proud. It is unfair that they be put in a position that may lead us to another school and/or community closure that could be prevented. With the willingness to set an example and adapt for the safety of their loved ones and community demonstrated by your student body and their support systems, I have no doubt they will respond favorably to a face covering requirement adopted by your administration and the school board. A requirement is different than a recommendation and sets an important expectation from the onset.

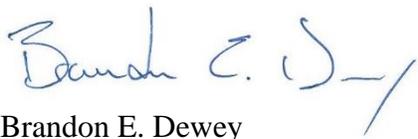
You are aware of the Governor's directive stating that *"Except as provided..., all businesses, government offices, or other persons responsible for indoor spaces open to the public shall require and take reasonable measures to ensure that all employees, contractors, volunteers, customers, or other members of the public wear a face covering that covers their mouth and nose at all times..."* In his directive, Governor Bullock goes on to state that *"All officers and agencies of the state are directed to assist in the administration and enforcement of this Directive, consistent with § 10-3-305(2), MCA."* These statements alone obligate you to follow the lead that the State of Montana, Ravalli County Public Health, and the Town of Stevensville have set in the interest of the health, safety, and wellbeing of our community.

I implore you to immediately reconsider your direction on this matter. Not doing so shows little willingness of the school community to collaborate, communicate, and integrate with the community that surrounds it and its leadership who continue to make informed decisions. As an expression of good-faith and support, the Town of Stevensville is here as your partner to help however possible including the commitment of 5,000 masks from our resources.

Town Council members and I have heard considerable feedback and concern regarding the decision I am asking you to reconsider. The Council will be discussing and considering the use of face coverings throughout the community at their meeting on August 13th. The school's reopening measures may be part of that conversation.

I appreciate your consideration of the above. Please do not hesitate to reach out to myself or a member of the Town's administration should any need arise that we can assist with.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brandon E. Dewey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Brandon E. Dewey
Mayor

cc: Stevensville Town Council