

Support our schools: Vote yes on 4A and 4B

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Letters to the Editor

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Sometimes it's important to step back and celebrate the good things happening in our community.

A few months ago, the new Grand Junction High School opened its doors to students. Completed on time and under budget, the beautiful facility is a testament to what our community can achieve together. School officials were surprised when students from across the valley showed interest, resulting in a bump in enrollment due to the excitement about the new building. But this high school is more than just a building; it's a symbol of progress, demonstrating how our community can come together to provide quality learning environments for our students.

In addition, the annual Kids Count survey from the Colorado Children's Campaign recently highlighted some encouraging trends in Mesa County. This in-depth analysis provides statistics on how children are faring across Colorado's counties, and it was great to see how well we are doing locally. For example, 98.7% of Mesa County kids attended full-day kindergarten, slightly above the state average. Test scores in math and English language are steadily improving, and while we still trail some of the wealthiest counties, our performance is strong compared to similar regions like Montrose and Pueblo.

It's worth noting that wealthier counties, like Douglas, tend to spend significantly more per student than Mesa County by regularly passing mill levy overrides. This additional funding gives those districts advantages in educational resources, reflected in their higher test scores. While Mesa County doesn't have the same financial resources, we can look to this as a clear reason to invest more in our schools, with the expectation that we'll see even better outcomes for our students and community.

We all know that it's not just about statistics — education impacts lives, families and the future of our community. Our high school graduation rate has reached its highest level in over 17 years, showing steady improvement. More than 1,000 District 51 students now earn college credits in high school. These opportunities give them a head start, reducing future college costs and preparing them for success in careers or further education. District 51's leadership and educators have worked hard to make these gains possible, and it's clear that they're responsible stewards of the tax dollars we've entrusted to them.

This November, voters will be asked to consider issues 4A and 4B, which involve a bond issue and a mill levy override. It's important to emphasize that neither of these measures will raise taxes beyond current levels. When a prior mill levy override was approved years ago, District 51 used those funds to increase instructional time for students and update curriculum, directly contributing to improved performance. The extra classroom time has made a tangible difference in student outcomes, helping raise test scores and graduation rates. We need to sustain that progress, and

these ballot measures will help ensure our schools continue to have the resources they need to provide quality education.

The bond issue would provide \$190 million for critical renovations at Central High School and Fruita Monument High School. Anyone familiar with these schools knows these upgrades are long overdue. Central and Fruita Monument deserve the same quality facilities as their peers. These renovations will improve safety, technology access and the overall learning environment, ensuring students have the tools and spaces they need to thrive in today's world. Schools across Mesa County would also receive safety and security upgrades and Priority 1 and 2 maintenance repairs.

It's important to understand that this bond issue is funded with revenue from previously approved bond measures. In other words, no new taxes are involved. This continues our investment in our schools and community.

Both of us have personal ties to District 51. Bernie is a graduate of Grand Junction High School, as are his mother, his four children and several other relatives. Cody's family includes long-time D51 students and educators. We've both seen firsthand the incredible impact that quality education can have on a family's future. Our community is full of success stories — people who have gone on to become leaders, entrepreneurs and professionals, all starting right here in District 51.

There's no greater investment than ensuring our children have the opportunities they need to succeed. Education is the foundation upon which our community's future will be built. By voting "yes" on 4A and 4B, you're not only supporting necessary improvements for our schools, but also standing up for the future of our children and our valley.

We strongly urge you to vote "Yes" on 4A and 4B. Let's keep moving forward for the benefit of our kids, our schools and our community.

Chris Kennedy is a Grand Junction City Council member. Bernie Buescher is a former Colorado state representative and Colorado secretary of state.



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