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To Whom It May Concern:

Given the rapid spread of the Delta variant of COVID-19 and that Flathead County is currently in an area defined by high transmission, new CDC guidance (along with the American Academy of Pediatrics) recommend that face masks be worn in indoor school settings. As health care providers in this valley, we support these recommendations and feel that this is likely the safest way to proceed into the new school year. However, we recognize that taking into account the current community and state climate likely makes a mask mandate controversial and difficult to require. We also recognize that masking during the school day is only one piece of a larger puzzle and if kids leave the school setting and are exposed to unmasked people in the evenings and on weekends, then this may limit the benefits of masking in schools.

We strongly acknowledge that protection from the spread of COVID-19 is a layered process that, in addition to masking, includes:

- COVID-19 vaccination
- Staying home if feeling ill
- Social distancing
- Good hand hygiene
- Cleaning/disinfecting

The more methods that are implemented, the better protection we will have as a community.

Sincerely,

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