



# NEWS

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## **STUDENT AND STAFF SAFETY TO BE TOP-OF-MIND IN SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 57 DECISION ON WHETHER OR NOT TO IMPLEMENT VACCINE POLICY**

Last night (Oct. 26, 2021), at the School District No. 57 (SD 57) Board of Education Regular Meeting, Board Chair Sharel Warrington announced that the decision on whether or not to implement a vaccine policy in SD57 needs to be thoughtful. “The health and safety of students and staff in School District No. 57 has been a priority throughout the pandemic,” says Warrington, “We have followed all protocols based on Public Health Orders and continue to work in consultation with our Local Health Authority.” The decision to shift the responsibility regarding vaccination policies to local boards of education has required boards to seek legal guidance and utilize a common framework to ensure consistency across the province. On Friday, October 22, 2021, the Board of Education received the [BC Ministry of Education’s vaccine policy guidelines](#). These guidelines were developed in collaboration with the First Nations Steering committee, British Columbia Teacher’s Federation (BCTF), Canadian Union of Public Employees British Columbia School Trustees Association (CUPE BCSTA), British Columbia Public School Employer’s Association (BCPSEA) and other school leadership associations and are meant for kindergarten through grade 12 employees only.

These guidelines clearly state: “Boards that decide to implement a vaccine policy as a workplace health and safety measure should allow time for consultation with local partners, should be transparent in their communications with staff and should provide sufficient time to allow currently unvaccinated staff to become vaccinated before final implementation.”

“We, as a Board, need a clear understanding of data and evidence,” explains Warrington, “This will help to determine the possible impacts a vaccine policy will have on ensuring in-person learning for all students.” The health and wellness of the learning and working environment in all of the District schools is of primary importance. Any impact on the learning and working environment and the programs and services to students within SD57’s schools must be clearly understood before any policy decision is considered. “Ensuring in person learning and ensuring our schools stay open is critical,” continues Warrington, “In person learning supports the social and emotional development of all our students and access to programs and services are vitally important to the health and wellbeing of every child.”

“As we move forward, the Board will need to work with the Northern Medical Health Authority, says Warrington, “It is apparent there is more information needed to guide our decisions that is not readily available. We will also need the support of government in addressing the health and safety of all students and employees in the k-12 sector. We will need to consult with our stakeholders, rights holders and community to hear all perspectives on vaccine policies. We will also need to ensure that no decision can be made without seeking legal advice, addressing privacy issues, contractual matters and the implication of Charter rights, human rights and employment and labour laws.”

“We understand the angst in the community and the fear regarding a vaccine mandate,” continues Warrington, “We know there are community members who are extremely concerned about how the board will proceed.”

“The Board has not made a decision to implement a vaccination policy, “says Warrington, “We must first understand the impact of a vaccination policy before any implementation plan is considered. We need to get it right.”

The Board and District continue to encourage all employees who are able to be vaccinated to get vaccinated. The Provincial Health Officer stresses that vaccines are the most effective way to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

The Board continues to monitor and ensure we have protocols and supports in place to protect the health and safety of all our students and employees.

As SD 57 moves forward in alignment with the BC Ministry of Education’s vaccine policy guidelines, the *primary focus of the Board as we move forward will be:*

- *Ensuring the first priority is on the health and safety of all students and employees of the district*
- *Reducing impacts to in person learning*
- *Working to develop a consistency of approach across the province*

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