



October 2021

To Whom It May Concern,

As a network of 72 Washington schools, we are expressing our concerns that the Governor's recent vaccine mandate proclamation ([COVID-19 Vax Washington Amendment.pdf](#)) for employment in all state-approved, Christian/private schools could be a preview of vaccination mandates for students in K-12 settings. We are aware California has very recently made such a vaccine mandate decision and we would like to communicate to Washington state health, school, and government officials that we believe the State of Washington should avoid issuing any forced mandates regarding COVID vaccinations for students. Especially, if such mandates would be a requirement for private school attendance and therefore interfere with the operation of private religious schools. Based on the information and data we have, we believe the COVID vaccine for students is a decision best made by a child's parent, in consultation with their family physician, and not the state, for the following reasons.

**Parent/Physician Responsibility** - The assessment of a child's overall health risk and any such risk in the context of an in-person private school environment is the primary responsibility of the parent and their personal physician. Therefore, the state should only overstep the parent's natural rights and responsibility, and a private religious organization's own policies and procedures, in the rarest of circumstances involving an imminent threat to the health and safety. As outlined below, we do not see mandatory COVID vaccines for students as necessary for health and safety based on current information and data.

**School Safety** - The following measures have already been implemented and have demonstrated that private school campuses are healthy and safe environments. Additionally, that data shows that the at-risk individuals in Washington are being protected in the general population for whom the disease is a serious health threat.

- WA has immunized its at-risk population - seniors represent over 80% of COVID deaths and are already over 95% fully vaccinated. WA State has seen a drastic reduction in the instances of hospitalizations and deaths from COVID.
- A vaccinated person is protected from serious illness or death whether they contract COVID from a vaccinated or unvaccinated individual.
- Schools are already utilizing a number of effective mitigation strategies including ventilation, cleaning regimens, washing of hands, masking, cohorting, physical distancing, and going remote when needed continue to keep our school communities safe.
- Pathology for children and adults does not warrant mandatory student vaccination.
  - For example, in Snohomish County (population 822,000 residents) there have been [no COVID deaths in anyone under the age of 20](#) (see page 19) and 10 deaths for those in the 20-40 age range.
  - Individuals under the age of 50 represent 5% of WA COVID deaths.
- Parents desiring greater protection for their children already have ready access to multiple COVID vaccines and can freely choose to vaccinate their children at any time.

**Legal Liability/Vulnerability** - Schools could potentially be at risk of legal action and possibly in violation of Federal Law in the following areas if attendance is impeded based on a student COVID vaccine status.

- Children having adverse effects from the vaccine.
- Discrimination based on deeply held views of conscience by either parents or students.
- Usurping parental and student rights.
- Violating contractual agreements with parents.

**Historical COVID Childhood Pathology** – COVID does not have the same pathology for children as it does for those over the age of 50 and those with comorbidities at every age.

A recent report of daily hospitalization rates for King County confirm that PS-12<sup>th</sup> grade students are [60-95% less likely to be hospitalized](#) from COVID than fully vaccinated adults ages 65 and older. Children ages 1-14 are [more likely to die](#) of traffic accidents, drowning, or homicide than they are from COVID. Since the state is not requiring extraordinary and invasive measures to mitigate these greater risks of death in children and they are not creating the emergency in state hospitals, it seems inappropriate for the state to issue mandates that supersede parents and children's rights with respect to COVID risks and individual health decisions regarding vaccination.

**Negative Student and Educational Impact** - The past 18 months of remote learning demonstrate the need for students to be in-person at school. Because of vaccine hesitancy, a student vaccine mandate would result in more families moving their children to remote learning and/or homeschooling. As we have already seen, the result of having less students in-person negatively impacts student learning, particularly for students who are already at academic risk. Even if parents were allowed an exemption policy for vaccinations and students could remain in-person, this would result in segregating of students into different types of educational settings and environments that may negatively impact students.

In conclusion, we agree in principle that student vaccine mandate is not justified or needed to keep our network school communities safe and believe this health decision is best made by parents and their physician. As a result, we strongly urge the State of Washington to reject and avoid any new forced mandate requiring COVID vaccines for students but leave this as a decision for each parent to decide in consultation with their family doctor.

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