

## Surrey Board of Education will not mandate COVID-19 vaccines for staff

Tuesday, November 2, 2021

After carefully considering the matter, the Surrey Board of Education has decided to not mandate COVID-19 vaccines for staff.

"Our Board recognizes the importance of vaccines, and we continue to encourage anyone that is eligible to get vaccinated," says Terry Allen, Vice-Chair of the Surrey Board of Education. "We approached our decision not to implement a mandate in a very measured way and considered information from many sources, including Fraser Health, the Ministry of Education and the B.C. Public School Employers' Association.

"We have an obligation to our community to keep our schools open and to continue providing a safe learning environment for our students. Schools are a low-risk setting for transmission and public health experts have assured us that our schools are safe and that we do not need 100% vaccination rates for safe operation."

The Surrey/White Rock areas have high community vaccination rates, with over 90% of those eligible already having received at least one dose and about 87% with two doses. Furthermore, we know that in-school transmission continues to be low.

In making a decision, the Board weighed both the pros and cons, and paid particular attention to the guidance of public health. In a presentation to the Board, public health officials stated that if there were a vaccine mandate for all staff, efficacy in minimizing transmission would be limited, particularly in areas of high vaccination coverage. They also cautioned that a mandate may exacerbate inequities (lower vaccination rates among low-income, racialized minorities) and further entrench those who are opposed to vaccinations.

"Given all the information we considered, the Board decided not to pursue a vaccine mandate at this time unless directed by Public Health," says Allen. "The Board of Education also will not be seeking voluntary disclosure of vaccine status, but we will be gathering information on vaccine status which is already provided by public health."

The Board followed the provincial process closely and made this decision with input from key partners and stakeholders.

The Board, all of whom are fully vaccinated, will continue to support vaccinations by hosting clinics and continuing to promote vaccination to our school communities.

by Sheila Reynolds at 7:50 AM