



We're Pulling Together to End the Pandemic

8/13/2021

This week, Governor Inslee [issued a vaccine mandate for state employees, healthcare workers and contractors with exceptions for medical or religious reasons](#). PreK-12 and higher education workers were excluded from the mandate, although the majority of public colleges and universities have already established a vaccine mandate for anyone working at or attending their schools. King County and Seattle are also mandating employee vaccinations and it is possible that other cities and counties will follow suit. Chris Reykdal, Superintendent of Public Instruction, is advocating that the governor expand the mandate to include education workers. Part of his rationale is that there is currently no vaccine approved for use on children under 12, so their safety and well-being are greater when adults and older children in their lives are vaccinated.

AFT Washington supports vaccination for all as the pathway to ending the COVID pandemic, returning to in-person education and full employment of our members, and opening up communities that are safe and can thrive, whether mandated or not. We are deeply concerned about schools opening up in September and being forced to close soon after due to COVID outbreaks, which is demonstrably happening now in states where school starts earlier. This would make an already traumatic 18 months even more devastating. Students at all levels are still feeling the impact of shifting overnight to a virtual school model that was being developed as it happened, and many college students are struggling with financial insecurity and job loss as well – let's stand together and keep our students safe so they can heal.

The [Vaccines and Schools](#) resolution just passed by our AFT leadership recognizes that the current surge of the Delta variant has shown that children are not as safe from COVID-19 as we thought at the start of the pandemic. In addition to that, we all know adults who cannot get the shot due to health conditions. The best way to protect those who cannot be vaccinated is for all of us who can be vaccinated to get the shot and for everyone to follow proven safety precautions, such as masking when inside public spaces.

If vaccines are mandated, your local will bargain the impacts of that mandate. This has already begun in some higher ed locals, and we will be meeting soon with Classified Staff locals to plan for that possibility.

The Union is about solidarity – using our collective voice because we all do better when we all do better. Each of us doing what we can, pulling together for the common good, is the route to lower case rates and an end to the pandemic.

Every one of our members plays a vital role in our state's schools, communities, and the lives of Washington's students, as well as in the union. Staying safe and keeping others safe by doing what you can, whether that's masking or vaccinating or both, is as essential as you are. The more we pull together, the faster we get the boat we're all in out of the pandemic.

Grab an oar, and let's pull!

