November 8, 2021

Re: Communication from Board of Education on a Vaccine Policy in SD33

Dear Parents/Guardians/Caregivers and Staff,

The Board of Education has reviewed the draft K-12 Sector Guidelines for a Vaccination Policy, the potential implications for employees in the Chilliwack School District, and the impact on students and staff from an equity and inclusive lens if a vaccine policy were to be approved.

As part of the evaluation process, the Board also reviewed data shared by the Fraser Health and Vancouver Coastal Health Medical Officers at a joint meeting for Superintendents and Board Chairs, including data from the BCCDC (BC Centre For Disease Control) surveillance dashboard. Additionally, a recent survey completed by the BC Teachers' Federation was reviewed. These survey results of 5,996 active BCTF members indicated that vaccination rates are very high among BC public school teachers – 94% of teachers are fully vaccinated. Only 2% of BCTF members reported that they were not vaccinated. A further 2% did not answer the question, and 1% said they were partially vaccinated and intend to get their second dose.

The health and safety of our staff and students is paramount. The Chilliwack Board of Education values the expertise, direction, and guidance provided by the Provincial and Fraser Health Medical Officers. Their guidance continues to help us navigate the pandemic, while reducing the comparative risks in order to keep schools open for face-to-face instruction, which we know has a significant positive impact on students' academic success and mental health.

The advice from the Fraser Health and Coastal Health Medical Officers is that a vaccine mandate for staff is not likely to significantly reduce the comparative risk in schools. Vaccination mandates are more appropriate in high-risk settings where transmission is high and outcomes are severe. Schools are not considered high risk settings. The Medical Health Officers do not believe a vaccine mandate is necessary for schools to operate safely and therefore do not support a vaccine mandate in schools. Their advice is to encourage everyone in the community to get vaccinated and to continue implementing robust health and safety measures in schools.

Given the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data, the Board of Education does not support a vaccination policy at this time. Instead, the Board will take the following steps to ensure the health and safety of all in our school community:

- Continue to advocate vaccinations as an important step to protect all school community members, especially those who cannot be vaccinated or are immune compromised;
- Continue to work closely with the team at Fraser Health to monitor and respond to emerging events with a thoughtful and coordinated approach. This includes implementing enhanced, targeted and intensive measures in schools when a cluster is detected;
- Continue the maintenance and monitoring of ventilation systems to ensure they are in good working order, and maximize the amount of clean air entering our schools;
- Continue to be diligent in implementing Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings.

Please note that given all the facts – and to ensure we can keep our schools open and not exacerbate inequities in the system – the Board is confident this is the right decision to make. The Board wants to take this opportunity to thank staff, students and families for pulling together during this pandemic, supporting each other and our community, and helping to keep the comparative risk in our schools low.

We will continue to be diligent as an organization during this pandemic, while focusing on our collective efforts to support success for all learners. Thank you for your patience, kindness, and caring as we work through these challenges as a school community.

Sincerely,

Jared Mumford
Vice Chair
Chilliwack Board of Education