

**MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS
URBAN SUPERINTENDENT NETWORK**

Governor Charles Baker
Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Marylou Sudders
Secretary, Health and Human Services
Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Thursday, December 17, 2020

Dear Governor Baker and Secretary Sudders:

We, the 24 members of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents–Urban Superintendents Network have identified the following major concern regarding the flu vaccine mandate and approaching deadline.

It goes without saying that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented challenges that none of us could have anticipated. We appreciate the efforts that you and your staffs have undertaken over the last nine months to ensure that we are able to safely continue to meet the needs of our students and staff. We recognize that the uncertainty and unpredictability of this virus has necessitated a carefully measured approach and that there is no clear-cut blueprint for how to move forward at each step.

As you know, our students and families need our support more than ever. While we recognize the importance of requiring students to obtain a seasonal flu vaccination by December 31st, we strongly urge you to reconsider the mandate requiring that school districts take the lead in this work as well as the timeline required to achieve this goal.

We are in full agreement that minimizing the strain on our healthcare system is of utmost importance, particularly as we continue to see a concerning rise in the number of COVID-19 cases across our region. Requiring seasonal flu vaccinations by December 31, 2020 will no doubt help to soften the impact on our healthcare system in the months ahead. However, we cannot address one crisis by creating another – one that will have a long-term impact on the very people whom, as educators, we fully commit to guiding and supporting.

School districts are struggling to staff sufficient numbers of school nurses and medical support personnel to help with daily student health care which may also include Covid-19 monitoring, surveillance, and contract tracing. Enforcement of the flu vaccine, according to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s FAQ document, is left to the individual school district; another responsibility and mandate pushed to the local level without being given the tools and resources to fulfill the mandate.

Traditional enforcement for students who were not waived from vaccination requirements due to medical or religious reasons is to disenroll until such time as the student is vaccinated. Leaving enforcement of the flu vaccine for all students to the local level will result in local boards of health and school committees

making policy decisions on student disenrollment that will be as varied as there are school districts in our state. This inconsistency will hit urban districts particularly hard, where families struggle with access and many times fear medical institutions. For many superintendents, the thought of disenrolling for failure to receive the flu vaccine is not an option. Disenrollment, will, in fact, continue to increase inequity between and among school districts and be a moral disservice to our students and families.

Since this mandate was first issued, we have all been working diligently in our communities to have families comply with this requirement by December 31, 2020. We do anticipate that the large majority of our families will comply, thus having the intended impact on alleviating the strain on our healthcare system. However, it is near impossible to have *all* students in K-12 vaccinated and to also monitor the compliance, given that our staffing is limited and our nurses are consumed with contract tracing.

Therefore, we respectfully ask that you do what is in the best interest of all students and their enrollment status, and eliminate the requirement that school districts ensure that all students are vaccinated against the flu. However, if you determine that this policy is critical to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as a preventative step in this global health crisis, then we ask that you extend the deadline and that another state or local agency be identified to take responsibility for implementation, enforcement, and monitoring of the flu vaccine. Support and fund the tools necessary in that agency, including medical personnel who can visit children's homes to administer free flu shots when necessary.

We look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

Co-Chairs of the Urban Superintendent Network:

Dianne Kelly, Superintendent Revere Public Schools
Patrick Tutwiler, Superintendent Lynn Public Schools
Stefania Rachilla, Assistant Superintendent Springfield Public Schools

Cc:

James Peyser
Secretary of Education
Executive Office of Education

Jeffrey Riley
Commissioner of Education
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Representative Alice Peisch
Co-Chair Joint Education Committee
House of Representatives

Senator Jason Lewis
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