

Motion:

The Arlington School Committee joins the Belmont School Committee in urging the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, through the Department of Public Health or through legislative action, to add an immunization requirement for COVID-19 to the existing list of required vaccines. The Arlington School Committee directs the Secretary to communicate to Senator Friedman, Representatives Garballey, and Representative Rogers that we sign onto Belmont's letter, and similarly thank them for their continued work on behalf of the children of Arlington.

Belmont School Committee
Letter to Senator Brownsberger and Representative Rogers

September 8, 2021

Dear Senator Brownsberger and Representative Rogers:

The FDA granting full approval to Pfizer-BioNTech's coronavirus vaccine for people 16 and over is welcome news, and should spur us into a new phase in combating COVID-19. A critical step forward will be requiring a COVID-19 vaccination for school attendance, just as we require children to receive vaccinations for measles, pertussis, diphtheria, chicken pox, and other communicable diseases. We are asking for your help in securing this by either action of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) or modifying Section 15 of chapter 76 of the Massachusetts General Laws (the law governing vaccine requirements and school attendance).

DPH has the authority to require age-eligible students be immunized against COVID-19. This would be the most straightforward path forward, but the DPH has made no comments about any COVID-19 vaccine requirements. We believe that DPH should have a plan to mandate the vaccine, or a clear medical and scientific rationale for why this will not happen.

If DPH does not use its authority under the law to mandate the COVID-19 vaccine for school attendance, the legislature can amend Section 15 of chapter 76 of the General Laws. Any change in the law should be flexible to allow for the addition of younger children when they become eligible for vaccines. If necessary, how soon could this legislation be introduced?

We have no time to lose. The school year has already begun. Throughout the pandemic we have seen people in all levels of government – local, state, and federal– state that the needs of children are paramount. Let us demonstrate this by taking the crucial step of requiring the COVID-19 vaccine for school attendance to protect children's health.

As always, the community of Belmont is grateful for your work on our behalf.

Sincerely,

The Belmont School Committee

Amy Checkoway, Chair
Catherine Bowen
Michael Crowley
Meghan Moriarty

Andrea Prestwich
Jamal Saeh