

Vaccines and Schools

WHEREAS, since the outbreak of COVID-19, our North Star has been to keep our members and our communities safe; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 variants, such as the highly transmissible and dangerous delta variant, pose a substantial risk to unvaccinated populations, and mutations of these variants pose a risk to all, including the rise in pediatric COVID-19 cases by 84 percent in the past week alone, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, changing the circumstances of this public health crisis; and

WHEREAS, vaccines are a critical tool for controlling the spread of communicable disease in society, as we have seen from diseases like measles, polio and smallpox; and

WHEREAS, the challenge with eligibility for vaccination among children ages 2-12 and the low vaccination rates among adolescents present the risk of heightened transmission in schools, with evidence showing growing numbers of children with severe illness from COVID-19, including those in Florida and Louisiana; and

WHEREAS, the Food and Drug Administration is expected to grant full authorization for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in September, with Moderna expected to submit its submission for full authorization within weeks—a critical step in confirming the safety and efficacy of current COVID-19 vaccines; and

WHEREAS, since our initial resolution on Oct. 7, 2020, as reported nationally, nearly 90 percent of AFT members working in school settings have been vaccinated, which is higher than the national average, because the American Federation of Teachers has continued to encourage broad vaccination with in-school clinics, education events and partnerships; and

WHEREAS, the polarized political climate and ongoing vaccine misinformation campaigns have created troubling resistance to vaccination that has led to more than 40 percent of Americans remaining unvaccinated, and thereby an intense surge in cases, hospitalizations and deaths in many communities across the country; and

WHEREAS, as was indicated by President Biden earlier this month, workplace vaccine policies will be employer-driven, rather than government-driven:

RESOLVED, that the American Federation of Teachers will continue to work with employers to provide safe workplaces, including considering employer-proposed vaccination policy, and through continued layered mitigation strategies; and

RESOLVED, that we encourage AFT representatives to meet with employers prior to their imposition of workplace vaccination policies in order to get more people vaccinated in a just and expeditious way including developing joint education about vaccines and creating accommodations (such as regular testing) for those who have not yet received a vaccine; and

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RESOLVED, as employers establish those vaccination policies, employees must have a voice in addressing the impact on workers through bargaining or other forms of consultation—including in workplaces where workers are not being given a voice in these discussions—to ensure workers are treated fairly, and that valid religious and medical exemptions are honored; and

RESOLVED, that the scapegoating of our union, leaders, members and affiliates who have stepped up during the pandemic, blaming them for the societal conflict around vaccination mandates, despite the fact that they have been vaccinated in record numbers, is wrong and must stop; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will continue our own efforts to address lack of access and misinformation as we continue to support the efforts of voluntary vaccination among our members, the people we serve, and our communities.