

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P.O. BOX 750 › MADISON, WI 53701 › (608) 256-8900 › WWW.FFRF.ORG

August 19, 2021

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL:

Dr. Carlton D. Jenkins
Superintendent of Schools
545 West Dayton Street
Madison, WI 53703

MMSD Board of Education
via board@madison.k12.wi.us

Re: Follow the Science: Protect Students & Staff by Mandating COVID-19 Vaccines

Dear Superintendent Jenkins & Esteemed Board Members:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and our local membership to urge the Madison Metropolitan School District to protect the health and safety of its students, faculty, staff, and community members by adopting common sense, data-driven COVID-19 prevention measures. Mandating masking-only while ignoring the cure for the disease—COVID-19 vaccinations—is neither acceptable public policy nor good science.

FFRF is a national nonprofit headquartered in Madison, with more than 35,000 national members, including more than 1,500 throughout Wisconsin and hundreds of Madison area members. FFRF works to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate about nontheism. The nonreligious in the United States in fact are the demographic most apt to be and willing to be vaccinated, according to Pew.¹ In addition to our concerns based on principle and science, FFRF has a personal stake in MMSD policies regarding COVID-19 mitigation, as most of our staff, many of whom have school-aged children, call Madison their home.

As an institution that champions reason and evidence-based decision-making, FFRF has been dismayed to witness the politicization of what should be the straightforward task of mitigating the spread of this deadly virus. We understand that MMSD is under enormous pressure to meet the needs of the diverse community it serves, but ultimately, science has provided a clear path forward for safely reopening schools: mitigate the spread of COVID through mandatory masking (which MMSD has thankfully already implemented), and achieve herd immunity by requiring that all on-site employees be vaccinated. Despite the politically motivated backlash to such measures, it is imperative that MMSD nevertheless implement the necessary protective measures to keep its students and employees safe. This is, quite literally, a matter of life and death.

Now is the time for MMSD to act, to the best of its ability, to curb the spread of the COVID-19 delta variant. The average number of cases in Wisconsin has grown from a 7-day average of 729 on Aug. 1 to 1,412 on Aug. 18, 2021, with more than 3,690 new cases

¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/03/23/10-facts-about-americans-and-coronavirus-vaccines/>

reported over the past two days.² This steep increase has led state health officials to urge eligible state citizens to get vaccinated now to slow the spread and stop an even more deadly variant from developing.

Finally, we make note of the welcome news that the Food and Drug Administration is on the verge of fully approving the Pfizer vaccine, possibly before Labor Day.³ There is, in short, every reason to adopt a COVID-19 vaccination mandate, not only to safeguard the health of your student population and staff, but to protect the greater Madison community as well.

Everyone must do their part to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Devastatingly, more than 8,350 Wisconsinites have died from Covid-19 and more than 711,000 have tested positive.⁴ **COVID-19 mitigation efforts have worked in Wisconsin.** We went from being one of the nation's most consistent hotspots last fall to flattening the curve.⁵ We simply cannot accept any additional preventable deaths or the prolonging of the pandemic when the remedy is at hand. Thank you for your efforts to be part of the solution.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker
Co-Presidents

² <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/wisconsin-covid-cases.html>

³ "FDA aims to give final approval of Pfizer vaccine by early next month," <https://nyti.ms/3AbJy5f>

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/wisconsin-covid-cases.html>

⁵ "COVID-19: Wisconsin Summary Data," Wisconsin Department of Health Services, January 26, 2021, <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/data.htm#summary>