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## Barrington School Committee: Vaccine policy to be amended

### Vaccination will no longer be a requirement to be hired



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Posted Tuesday, March 7, 2023 6:51 am

**By Josh Bickford**

The Barrington School Committee will be changing the district's Covid-19 policy.

At its meeting on March 2, the committee agreed to amend the policy so that being vaccinated is not a requirement to be hired by Barrington Public Schools. The committee reached a consensus on the matter, but did not actually vote.

The existing policy, drafted more than a year ago, led to the eventual firing of teachers Stephanie Hines, Kerri Thurber and Brittany DiOrio. Those teachers had requested religious exemptions to the vaccine mandate but officials denied their requests.

After they were fired, the teachers appealed the decision and have also filed lawsuits against the district and the previous school committee. A recent School Committee meeting agenda listed an executive session item to discuss mediation of the claims filed by the former teachers.

At the March 2 meeting, School Committee member Frazier Bell opened the discussion about the policy by stating that he would like to see it amended so that the vaccination is not a requirement to being hired by the district. Bell said the school department would soon be hiring more teachers; he was concerned that the policy would negatively impact the district's ability to hire.

Committee member TJ Peck said he was a strong supporter of vaccinations, but referenced the district's decision to not require a booster shot. (Employees can instead follow other measures, such as periodic testing.)

Peck said he would prefer to let the policy expire — it is scheduled to expire at the end of June. He said if district officials were planning to let it expire then, it would likely be better to amend it sooner rather than later.

Committee member Megan Douglas asked school administrators if the policy had impacted the ability to hire new employees. Barrington Superintendent of Schools Michael Messoro said it had not hindered the district. Douglas later said she did not oppose amending the policy.

The committee, through consensus, decided to send the policy to the policy subcommittee, where it will be amended and then returned to the School Committee for review and a vote.

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MEET OUR STAFF

Jim McGaw

A lifelong Portsmouth resident, Jim graduated from Portsmouth High School in 1982 and earned a journalism degree from the University of Rhode Island in 1986. He's worked two different stints at East Bay Newspapers, for a total of 18 years with the company so far. When not running all over town bringing you the news from Portsmouth, Jim listens to lots and lots and lots of music, watches obscure silent films from the '20s and usually has three books going at once. He also loves to cook crazy New Orleans dishes for his wife of 25 years, Michelle, and their two sons, Jake and Max.

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