



Washington State Legislature

January 11, 2021

The Honorable Jay Inslee
Washington State Governor

Secretary Umair Shah
State Department of Health

Subject: Seeking Revised COVID-19 Vaccine Guidance for all School Employees in Phase 1B2

Dear Governor Inslee and Secretary Shah,

As members of the Washington State Legislature and supporters of our educational system, we are writing to express our disappointment with the Department of Health's recent guidance related to Washington's COVID-19 Vaccine Phases. Based on your graphical representation of the phases and its timeline, it appears that many school district employees will not be eligible to receive their first dose of the COVID vaccine until at least April. If timelines slip and school employees are unable to receive their first dose until later in April, by the time they are fully vaccinated and gain full protection from the virus, school districts across Washington will be nearing the end of the school year. This is unacceptable.

According to your recent guidance and timeline, school employees "50 years or older" are eligible to receive their vaccines as early as February. However, school employees "under 50 years" of age will not be eligible until at least April. As you know, many of our school district employees are below 50 years of age. Their school districts are expecting many, if not all grade levels, to soon be returning to the classroom to be potentially interacting with hundreds of students per day. We acknowledge the need to prioritize vaccines for older Washingtonians and strongly believe that educators should be equally prioritized with older Washingtonians, especially considering the essential service they provide.

As you know, school employees, students and families have made tremendous sacrifices during this pandemic and, like us all, they deeply hope for circumstances to return to normal soon. However, nothing will even resemble normal until our schools are fully functioning, given that they are foundational in so many ways to all Washington communities. For school districts to expect teachers, administrators, and support staff to return to an in-building environment – interacting with hundreds and potentially thousands of students and parents – without providing an opportunity to be protected is unacceptable.

We urge you to revise your recent guidance so that all school employees who wish to get a vaccination can receive one in February as part of Phase 1B2.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Sen. Lisa Wellman
Chair, Senate Early Learning & K-12 Committee

Rep. Sharon Tomiko Santos
Chair, House Education Committee

Sen. Brad Hawkins
Ranking Member
Senate Early Learning & K-12 Committee

Rep. Alex Ybarra
Ranking Member
House Education Committee