

**TO: American Federation of Teachers**  
**FROM: Guy Molyneux and Geoff Garin, Hart Research**  
**DATE: September 17, 2021**  
**RE: Survey of AFT K-12 Members on COVID-19 Vaccination Policies**

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*Hart Research Associates conducted a text-to-web survey among 2,008 active AFT K-12 members (1,417 teachers, 591 PSRPs) from August 26 to 29, 2021, on the issue of COVID-19 vaccination policies. The survey has a margin of error of  $\pm 2.2$  percentage points.*

**Two-thirds (67%) of K-12 members favor a requirement that all school employees be vaccinated unless they receive a valid medical or religious exemption, including 58% strongly in favor, while 30% oppose such a requirement.**

Support is similarly strong among teachers (67%) and PSRPs (65%), and exceeds 60% in every region of the country. Educators of color voice particularly strong support for a mandate—78% among Black members, 73% among Hispanic members—as do those at high personal risk for COVID-19 (74%) and those with someone in their household at high risk (75%).

K-12 members also support a vaccine requirement policy (73% in favor) in which employees are given the alternative of taking weekly COVID-19 tests.

### **K-12 Members' Support for Vaccine Requirements**

|                                     | <b>Support<br/>Mandate</b> | <b>Support<br/>Mandate/Test</b> |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                                     | <b>%</b>                   | <b>%</b>                        |
| <b>ALL MEMBERS</b>                  | <b>67</b>                  | <b>73</b>                       |
| <b>Teachers</b>                     | 67                         | 73                              |
| <b>PSRPs</b>                        | 65                         | 70                              |
| <b>Northeast</b>                    | 62                         | 72                              |
| <b>South</b>                        | 67                         | 71                              |
| <b>Great Lakes</b>                  | 65                         | 69                              |
| <b>West/Midwest</b>                 | 80                         | 82                              |
| <b>White members</b>                | 67                         | 71                              |
| <b>Black members</b>                | 78                         | 86                              |
| <b>Hispanic members</b>             | 73                         | 78                              |
| <b>Member at high COVID risk</b>    | 74                         | 80                              |
| <b>High COVID risk in household</b> | 75                         | 81                              |

In addition, two-thirds (67%) believe that a vaccine requirement for school staff would make them and their family more safe. This figure rises to 73% for those at high personal risk, and 74% for those with a high-risk person in their household.

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**By a similar 36-point margin—64% approve, 28% disapprove—AFT K-12 members would approve if their union negotiated a requirement that school staff in their district be vaccinated unless they receive a valid medical or religious exemption (8% have a neutral response).**

Patterns of support are very similar for a union-negotiated mandate, with teachers (64%-28%) and PSRPs (63%-28%) offering nearly identical views. Opposition does not reach even one-third in any region of the country. Educators of color and members at risk again voice strong support for a mandate—72%-16% among Black members, 68%-20% among Hispanic members, 70%-20% for those at high personal risk, and 72%-19% for those in a high-risk household.

### K-12 Members' Response if Union Negotiated Vaccine Requirement

|                                     | <u>Approve</u><br>% | <u>Disapprove</u><br>% |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| <b>ALL MEMBERS</b>                  | <b>64</b>           | <b>28</b>              |
| <b>Teachers</b>                     | 64                  | 28                     |
| <b>PSRPs</b>                        | 63                  | 28                     |
| <b>Northeast</b>                    | 60                  | 32                     |
| <b>South</b>                        | 63                  | 26                     |
| <b>Great Lakes</b>                  | 65                  | 29                     |
| <b>West/Midwest</b>                 | 76                  | 17                     |
| <b>White members</b>                | 66                  | 28                     |
| <b>Black members</b>                | 72                  | 16                     |
| <b>Hispanic members</b>             | 68                  | 20                     |
| <b>Member at high COVID risk</b>    | 70                  | 20                     |
| <b>High COVID risk in household</b> | 72                  | 19                     |

**Members voice very strong support for the principle that their union should negotiate vaccine policies with districts, so that school staff have a voice in how such policies are implemented (82% in favor, 11% opposed). Three-fourths or more also voice support for the AFT policies of working to make vaccines available (84% in favor), making sure that employees get reasonable medical and religious accommodations (79%), and working with districts to educate staff and encourage vaccination (75%).**

|   | <u>Favor</u><br>% |
|---|-------------------|
| Working to <u>make vaccines available</u> for employees at their worksites  | 84                |
| <u>Negotiating</u> with school districts on vaccination policies, including vaccine requirements, <u>so school staff have a voice</u> in how the policies are implemented | 82                |
| <u>Negotiating</u> vaccine requirements that <u>make sure employees can get reasonable accommodations</u> , so no one is penalized for medical or religious reasons       | 79                |
| Agreeing to work together with school districts to <u>educate school staff</u> about the benefits of vaccination and <u>encourage</u> them to get vaccinated              | 75                |

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**Among members who do not currently support the union negotiating a vaccine requirement, three messages prove particularly persuasive as reasons to approve a mandate:**

- Research shows that vaccination is the single most effective tool we have to protect ourselves and others from serious illness and death from COVID-19.
- Students and staff are about to begin the third straight school year under the cloud of COVID-19, and we must take every step we can to allow schools to remain open and safe.
- Bargaining with school districts to implement vaccine requirements gives workers a voice in the process, and helps make sure that workers' legitimate medical and religious concerns are respected.

**K-12 members also identify four key facts about COVID-19 and vaccination as strong reasons for the union to support vaccine requirements in schools:**

- The highly contagious Delta variant is increasing the risk of COVID-19 infection in many schools and communities.
- The Food and Drug Administration, or FDA, has now given full approval of the Pfizer vaccine.
- All children under 12 and many older children have not been vaccinated.
- More than 40% of all Americans are not yet vaccinated.

In addition, the survey results indicate that members are equally supportive of vaccine "mandates" and vaccine "requirements," so this language choice does not appear to be significant.