

Allendale Columbia requiring employees to get shots

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Allendale Columbia in March 2020 was the first local school to move to remote education. Now, 18 months later, it is near the front of the pack with another trend: requiring staff to receive a COVID-19 vaccination.

The private K-12 school in Pittsford announced the new policy in a letter to families Friday.

The decision seems to have come at a price — the departure of Allendale

Columbia's head of school, Glen Pinder, who just began his job last month. The board terminated him Aug. 18, apparently due to disagreement over the vaccination policy.

"While we appreciate Dr. Pinder and believe he also has the interests of our community at heart, we have a substantial difference of opinion in what it takes to keep our students and employees safe," board of trustees chairwoman Ann Balderston wrote.

Shannon Baudo, who previously had been serving as interim head of school, will resume that role.

In an interview, Balderston said only that the two parties "had a very different philosophy," and that his departure was a board decision. The

Requirement

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decision to implement a vaccine requirement came the week before Pinder's exit, which took effect Aug. 18. Pinder, reached by phone Sunday, declined to comment. He previously worked at schools in New York City and New Jersey, most recently Brooklyn Friends School.

His abrupt departure continues an up-and-down two years for the small independent school on Allens Creek Road, which has struggled to maintain enrollment and donor support in the shadow of the larger, nearby, similarly oriented Harley School.

In April 2019 the two schools announced a merger, only for Allendale Columbia to pull out three months later in the face of parent opposition.

Its enrollment stabilized in 2020-21 at 311 students, according to state data — approximately flat from the previous year, but still down 20% from 201617. The school also now offers day care and prekindergarten for children as young as 18 months.

There are waitlists for some younger grade levels, according to its annual report. Balderston said that with

from the New York State Association of Independent Schools that more than half of its member schools have vaccination mandates in effect.

Fewer than 10% of Allendale Columbia employees remain unvaccinated, she said. They will be allowed to begin on the first day of school, Sept. 9, as long as they have begun the vaccination process and have a second shot scheduled, if applicable. They will undergo regular testing until fully vaccinated.

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Allendale Columbia is requiring its staff to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

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improved financial support and enrollment trending up for the fall, she does not foresee the need for a merger or any other crisis action in the future.

As for vaccinations, Allendale Columbia joins Harley as the first prominent schools to require them locally.

The Rochester City School District announced last week that employees would need to be vaccinated or else face weekly testing. Most local colleges and universities in the Rochester area have mandated vaccines for students and staff as well.

Employees at most nonpublic schools are not unionized, greatly reducing the possibility of organized opposition to such a mandate. Balderston said the school learned

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