

## D161 school board gives approval to vaccine requirement for staff

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The Flossmoor District 161 school board voted 5-1 Nov. 22 to approve a Memorandum of Understanding regarding a COVID-19 vaccine requirement for all staff members. The board previously discussed implementing a requirement in September.

Staff members with religious and medical exemptions on file, pending administrative approval, will continue to test regularly, according to Superintendent Dana Smith. Along with the agreement, the district is to provide each Flossmoor Education Association staff member with a \$750 recognition stipend, regardless of vaccination status, for going above and beyond. It is to cost the district a total of \$258,000.

Board Secretary Christina Vlietstra cast the lone dissenting vote.

"I do not believe any person should be forced, for any reason — especially not for terms of employment — to receive any medical treatments such as a vaccine," Vlietstra said. "It is unethical for us to ask that of our employees."

Superintendent Dana Smith said the district saw 60 adults and 56 children get COVID-19 vaccination shots on Nov. 22 during Flossmoor School District 161's first clinic event at Normandy Villa. The event was open to families and staff of both District 161 and Homewood School District 153. First and second doses, as well as boosters, were available during the clinic. Another clinic open to all residents is being conducted from 3 to 6 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 7, at James Hart School in Homewood.

## Women's group gives \$20,000 for education on kidney disease

**BY CHRONICLE STAFF**

A special \$20,000 grant from Links, a national organization of professional women of color, is helping to boost an effort in the South Suburbs to share information on kidney disease.

The Black Kidney Awareness Resources and Education (KARE) project is being directed by the South Suburban Chicago chapter of Links. The women of the South Suburban Chicago Chapter of Links, Inc. have been active in the community for more than 40 years, and are part of the national organization of professional women of color committed to leadership, friendship and service.

"The purpose of this nine-month KARE project is to raise awareness about kidney disease in the Black community because Black Americans have some of the highest incidence rates of diabetes and high blood pressure — the two leading causes of kidney disease," said Monica Fox of Flossmoor, who serves as director of outreach and government relations for the National Kidney Foundation of Illinois.

"In fact, Black adults in the United States are at increased risk of developing kidney disease at rates far exceeding those for white adults, and are four times more likely to develop kidney failure than their white counterparts," she said. "Despite these staggering statistics, many Americans are unaware they have kidney disease."

The South Suburban Chicago Links group had its KidneyMobile available for screenings at South Suburban College and at the Calumet City library in November. A typical screening allows participants to receive a battery of free, comprehensive medical tests, and the opportunity to review their screening results with a trained medical professional on site.

"We are so happy to be participating in this important project because results from these screenings are startling," said Mallory Sutton, Links chapter president.

From the first screenings, "about 70% of attendees had results that put them at risk for kidney failure and one attendee received news that he was actually in stage 3 kidney disease and was referred to the emergency room and was admitted," she said.

People who were screened were invited to participate in a 12-week program geared towards improving key health outcomes to increase overall health and reduce the risk of kidney disease.

Sutton said the program, Linking Because We KARE, will include education, exercise classes, cooking demonstrations, accountability touchpoints and incentives. Participants will use the Powered By Action app to receive all information and stay connected to the group.

Anyone interested in joining the group should email [blackkaressc@gmail.com](mailto:blackkaressc@gmail.com) or contact Monica Fox at 708-989-6664.

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