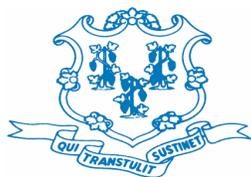


The Connecticut General Assembly



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Rep. Palm Tracking Student Immunization Data

CHESTER – **State Representative Christine Palm (D-36)** today expressed concern over the high percentage of unvaccinated students at Chester Elementary School (CES), which data released Monday by the State Department of Public Health (DPH) for the 2018-19 school year (the most recent available) indicates is 7.2%. While saying she is glad this is a decrease from the 2017-18 number of 10.2%, Palm says this high rate puts CES in a pool of 134 schools statewide which fall well below the widely recommended rate of no more than 5% unvaccinated.

“While I am pleased to see a decrease in the number of students who are unvaccinated, a 92.8% vaccination rate is still below the recommended threshold that guarantees ‘herd immunity,’” said Palm, who represents the towns of Chester, Deep River, Essex and Haddam. “Science tells us it’s vital for vaccination rates to stay above 95% in order for the wider population of students to be protected, especially those with compromised immune systems. I realize that with a very small school population, this number may represent only a few families, but percentages are a relative proportion of the entire population, so this number is of concern.”

Palm pointed out that while DPH figures for the current school year are not yet available, in conversations with RSD 4 Superintendent Brian White, she has learned that school personnel report CES rates have dropped a bit further, to 6.7%, which she calls “a very good trend.”

Palm said the schools in the other three towns she represents have acceptable herd immunity thresholds, despite a one percent increase in Deep River Elementary School (up from 2.2% to 3.3%), and a slight increase in Essex Elementary School (up from 1.7% to 2.1%). Both elementary schools in Haddam remained stable (Burr at 1.6%) or dropped. (At Haddam Elementary School, which closed this year, the percentage of unvaccinated students was trending downward).

At John Winthrop Middle School in Deep River, the percentage of unvaccinated students dropped from 2.5% to 1.8% from 2017-18 to 2018-19. And Valley

Regional High School in Deep River went from .3 to .2; Haddam-Killingworth High School decreased from 3.1. to 1.2.

Palm has made a point of meeting both in her district and at the Capitol with some members of the anti-vaccination movement, which has been on the rise. But, she says, a study widely cited which draws a correlation between vaccinations and autism has long been debunked.

“I believe in individual choice – both of religion and medical protocol – as long as they do not affect others,” Palm said. “Abortion, birth control, whether or not to circumcise a male baby, preventive mastectomy for women with the BRCA gene, to name but a few, are personal decisions that require much thought, and none is entered into lightly by the patient (or parent). But none of these affects the overall population, and so should remain a personal choice. The decision not to give a child protection against MMR, on the other hand, imperils not only that child, but the wider community of students.”

For this reason, Palm is among the House Democrats asking Caucus Leadership to raise a bill this year to remove the so-called religious exemption, which many people use to explain a philosophical opposition. (Virtually all of the exemptions claimed in all four towns in the 36th district, as elsewhere, are under the “religious” status.) Under legislation she would like to see enacted, while no one would be forced to vaccinate a child, that child would not be permitted to attend a public school.

“Given the excellent rates in the upper grades, this trend against vaccinations is more prevalent with younger parents, who do not remember the devastation childhood diseases like measles wrought upon generations before immunizations were created,” Palm said. “All medical advances carry some risk, but the preponderance of evidence is clearly in favor of inoculating against MMR, and I certainly hope the numbers of parents rejecting these advances does not continue to rise.”

See the complete list of Connecticut schools here:

<https://portal.ct.gov/DPH/Immunizations/School-Survey>

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