

NEWS

Central Bucks pulls field trip to Washington D.C., Holocaust Museum over mask, vaccine requirements; faces backlash



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Pandemic rules over masks and vaccination disclosures ended a planned Central Bucks field trip to Washington, D.C. on Tuesday, sparking controversy online early Wednesday morning.

Tamanend Middle School 9th graders were originally planned to head to the nation's capital on March 31, but the motion failed approval in a 7-1 vote Tuesday night.

Director Karen Smith was the lone vote for the trip. Board director Dr. Mariam Mahmud was absent Tuesday.

A Twitter post from Diana Leygerman, a former school board candidate and Philadelphia teacher, lambasted the vote saying one board member's stance on vaccinations robbed students of an important opportunity.

"Our SB just cancelled a field trip to DC where students were supposed to visit the Holocaust Museum because a School Board Member's kid isn't vaccinated. An important educational trip cancelled because she made a choice but isn't willing to accept the consequences of that choice," Leygerman wrote.

The post, which was seen by nearly 90,000 users by 2 p.m. on Wednesday and shared several hundred times, is referring to director Lisa Sciscio's objections raised prior to this week's vote.

Sciscio said she couldn't support a trip to Washington, D.C., in large part because the city

requires proof of vaccination to enter some businesses.

Assistant Superintendent Charles Malone said the planned visits, which included the Holocaust Museum, were specifically chosen because they wouldn't require disclosure of vaccination status.

Anti-Semitic comments disrupt CBSD meeting: Transphobic, anti-semitic comments disrupt Central Bucks meeting: 'This is hate.'

Middletown official resigns: Middletown Township official resigns amid exposure of hate, conspiracy-filled posts

While museums can be included in Washington's list of businesses affected by the vaccine mandate, there is no requirement that patrons show proof of vaccination if attending a special event at that museum.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's website says it requires visitors wear a face covering and answer coronavirus symptom screening questions, but there does not appear to be a rule that vaccination status must be disclosed.

The section on screening questions specifically tells visitors not to volunteer any additional medical information, like pre-existing conditions.

Sciscio's problem didn't seem to be with the museum and other potential memorial sites on the trip, but rather that eventually the students may have to use a business that does have those requirements.

"I mean, it's six in the morning till eight at night ... There's kids who will have to use restrooms. There's kids who may want to get something to eat ... I have a ninth-grader at Tamanend. I have a problem with this," Sciscio said.

Although the vote canceled the field trip, other places for an alternative visit, like New York City, were suggested for future consideration.

Leygerman's tweet and other social media posts drew comments accusing the change of being anti-Semitic because of the now canceled visit to the Holocaust Museum.

Similar accusations have been made toward some board members and about the district at large before, especially recently following a controversial Nov. 9 meeting.

Transphobic and anti-Semitic comments from two area residents brought one woman to

tears after members of the audience pleaded with board President Dana Hunter to gavel down one person's rant against "zionism and communism" in the district.

Hunter has said previously that censoring the two men would have violated their first amendment rights at a public meeting.

Anger continued to grow, however, as calls for the board to condemn the comments from residents and groups like the Anti-Defamation league went unanswered in the days after the meeting.

Four members of the board at that time would eventually release a statement against those comments about a week after the meeting, though Hunter wouldn't speak on it again until the board's Dec. 6 reorganization meeting - when new members like Sciscio were sworn in.

Smith said Wednesday she believed the issues raised by Sciscio this week were purely about vaccines, masks and the pandemic.

Smith didn't comment on the vote Tuesday but reiterated a statement she made on Facebook earlier the following day.

"Just to be clear, I voted yes for field trips that require vaccines and/or masks. If families made a choice not to be vaccinated, then that choice has a consequence. I don't think all our student body should (lose) the opportunity to visit valuable learning experiences because of the choice of others," Smith wrote.

Smith said the vote on the Tamanend trip has already caused administrators at Tohickon Middle School to cancel their planned trip to Washington even though the board approved it several months in advance.