

Immunization Conversation

By Cathy Dausman



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Gov. Jerry Brown signed Senate Bill 277 June 30, yet immunization conversations continue. The bill, which largely eliminates the personal belief exemptions for school-required immunizations, takes effect Jan. 1, 2016. SB 277 sets as its goal the statewide “total immunization of appropriate age groups” against 10 childhood diseases plus “any other disease deemed appropriate,” as recommended by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Family Physicians.

While many fervently support the mandatory school immunization program, its detractors are equally as determined to see this new law end before it starts. Google SB 277 and a list of organizations against mandatory immunizations pops up: California Coalition for Vaccine Choice maintains both a website and Facebook page. Another, Our Kids Our Choice, said in a press release that the organization was “disappointed and surprised” with the governor’s decision to sign the bill into law. “With the stroke of a pen, he has dismissed over 200,000 Californian school chil-

dren who depend upon personal belief exemptions in order to receive a free and appropriate education.”

OKOC lists itself as a “non-partisan, grassroots group of 9,600 politically active health choice advocates” whose members believe “it is in society’s best interest to maintain freedom of choice for what we put into our children’s bodies.”

Nurse practitioner Aimee Paulson of Walnut Creek supports mandatory school vaccinations. Paulson writes she has spent “increasingly more time educating patients about the risks and benefits of vaccination” and is “very satisfied” that SB 277 passed. She added that she has not seen an active measles case recently, but did confirm one Hib (type B influenza) case.

“We are fortunate to have the ability to protect our families and communities against the pre-vaccine devastation of polio, measles, influenza, hepatitis and many other illnesses,” Paulson said, provided “we continue pro-vaccine efforts.”

Sarah Ellison calls the immunization question “an important public health issue,” and one that pits a parents’ right to decide against the risk an unvaccinated child would pose “to the

more [medically] vulnerable population.”

The Lafayette mother of two children, ages 1 and 4, feels having the ability to immunize children against childhood diseases is “one of the greatest advances in medicine,” whose effectiveness also depends upon herd immunity – immunize a high enough percentage of the population and even those unvaccinated will receive some measure of protection against the disease.

“We’re cautious,” Ellison said, recalling how she and her husband asked family members to get whooping cough booster shots after her youngest was born. That same child did experience a reaction in the form of a skin rash after a measles shot; something she said was “pretty bad for two weeks.”

Still, Ellison insists on keeping her children fully immunized, saying in spite of the side effects it is worth the risk.

Connie Kellaher is director at Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church Nurtury Preschool. Because they are a state-licensed preschool Kellaher said MVPC will be in full compliance with SB 277 when it takes effect. Although Kellaher has not yet reviewed all incoming student documents, she is not aware that any student currently claims a personal belief exemption.

And there is a bit of wiggle room within the PBE clause.

Nanette Farag, chief of staff for Assemblywoman Catharine Baker, said: “If a child has an exemption on file before the bill takes effect in January they do not have to get immunized until they reach the next grade span.” A grade span is a specific class range – birth to preschool; kindergarten to sixth grade; seventh to 12th grade. “Children who have never been enrolled in school prior to Janu-

ary 1, or children who will transition to a new grade span after January 1, will be required to provide proof of immunization or submit a medical exemption in order to enroll in school,” she added.

Baker, herself a parent of two young school age children, calls herself “a fierce supporter of parental rights, including the rights of parents who have children who cannot be vaccinated.”

“This bill strikes the right balance between a parent’s personal choice

and personal responsibility,” she said.

Baker said she supported amendments that included narrowing the list of required vaccinations to 10, expanded the bases of medical exemptions, and gave schooling options to parents who did not want to vaccinate their children. “We have to consider the decision of parents who choose not to vaccinate, and also the liberty of those who cannot vaccinate their children or themselves due to their health circumstances,” she said.

More Information Online

Information about Senate Bill 277:

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160SB277

CDC Immunization schedules:

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/hcp/child-adolescent.html>

How the legislators voted:

http://leginfo.ca.gov/pub/15-16/bill/sen/sb_0251-0300/sb_277_vote_20150625_1048AM_asm_floor.html

Getting Organized for Your Junior Year in High School

By Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D.

Times have changed and getting into college is much different than it was even five years ago. Selecting a college is a big decision, and both public and private schools are increasingly competitive. Going through the college admissions process can seem daunting, but those who start early on to accomplish the tasks associated with a college search and the application process will have an easier, more enjoyable and successful experience. And, of course, this effort is in addition to academics, sports, volunteerism and jobs.

Our community has fine high schools and counselors. Yet school counselors have their hands full keeping their caseloads on track academically to ensure graduation and support individuals with special needs. Essentially it is the responsibility of the student, with support from family, to fully engage in the process of preparing for, selecting and applying to colleges. Here is a checklist of some basic tasks to accomplish no later than the fall semester of senior year:

1. Verify the accuracy of your high school transcript and assess your eligibility and competitiveness for the University of California (UC) as well as the California State University (CSU) campuses.
2. Find out and keep track of deadlines related to what the high school counseling office requires from you (e.g. setting up a Naviance account).
3. Make an appointment with your school counselor to review college plans and get advice.
4. With your counselor’s guidance, begin a systematic search of “best fit” colleges that include *reach*, *targets* and *nearly certain to get in* options; use school breaks to visit college campuses.
5. Complete standardized testing requirements; for most students these tests are best taken in winter or more commonly spring of 11th grade. Although test prep companies often promote earlier prep, I personally have not seen much benefit to this strategy in my 12 years of counseling hundreds of high school students. In fact,

quite the opposite is true: I have often seen negative consequences such as burnout due to over preparation and serious dips in student confidence due to gaps in academic mastery that could have been avoided by waiting until the completion of relevant coursework. My mantra remains the best preparation for standardized testing is high school academic achievement. This has never been truer as the new SAT is released in January 2016.

6. Complete two SAT Subject Tests in different disciplines (e.g. science and math or math and humanities); these one-hour content-rich exams are still required or recommended by many well regarded schools nationwide and can strengthen your application to most schools, including several of the UCs.

7. If permitted as an 11th grader, attend talks by college representatives who visit your school this fall, attend college fairs, make campus visits, research college websites – learn all you can about colleges so you have a well-researched final list by fall of your senior year.

8. Check admission requirements as you explore college websites; although what is posted is for the current class of applicants, you can get a jump on things by understanding more about what it takes to apply to various schools; for example, you can benefit from paying attention to essay questions colleges pose to prospective applicants – these responses require much time and thought, and you can get a head start by considering how you might respond to similar questions next year.

9. Understand Early Action, Early Decision and Rolling application options and how they differ from Regular Application deadlines.

10. You will be asking your 11th grade teachers for recommendations; keep this in mind as you participate in class discussions, collaborate with your classmates and prepare for tests and projects; show staff and faculty respect and consideration in all your actions both in and out of the classroom.

11. Towards late winter or early spring, work with the counseling office to select appropriate senior coursework and maintain balance between demonstrating rigor and attaining good grades.

12. Check with your high school’s college and career office for local and regional scholarships you may be eligible for and consider your options for both 11th and 12th grades.

13. Become familiar with financial aid this year so you will be better prepared next year; visit <http://www.finaid.org/> to learn more.

Younger high school students and their parents can review this checklist and think about where they will be in the process next year around this time. Start early! Getting all the information, keeping it organized and on track is not a matter of intelligence – it is a matter of time and discipline. Every family with a college-bound student needs to decide how to handle the timing and complexities of college admissions. There are many resources at our fine schools and our counselors are first rate. There are excellent books and websites, and good organizational tools available. With all the resources in our communities, students can stay on track for college!



Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D. is an independent college advisor who draws upon 25 years of higher education experience to help guide and support the college admissions process for students and their families. Dr. LaScala is a member of NACAC, WACAC and HECA. She can be contacted at (925) 891-4491 or elizabeth@doingcollege.com. Visit www.doingcollege.com for more information about her services.

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