

Belchertown recall vote follows outcry over vaccine mandate proposed for student athletes

Updated: Jan. 20, 2022, [Story source: MassLive.com](#)

By **Jim Russell | Special to The Republican**

BELCHERTOWN — Voters will decide next week whether to remove two school board members who supported a COVID-19 vaccine mandate for student athletes.

The five-member board abandoned the vaccine proposal last fall following vociferous community opposition. A new policy the school board approved Jan. 11 requires those participating in extracurricular sports to test negative each week. This applies to students irrespective of vaccination status.

The **Jan. 24 recall vote targets board members Michael Knapp and Diane Brown**. The **ballot asks voters** whether they are “for the recall” or “against the recall” of each candidate.

The **ballot** lists three candidates for Knapp’s seat: Knapp, Stephan Corbin and Kristen Lech. There are no other candidates for Brown’s seat.

The election takes place at the Belchertown High School gymnasium, 142 Springfield Road. Polls will be open 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Knapp and Brown have said they will continue doing the school board’s work and expect to serve out their terms. Brown was elected in 2019, with her term expiring May 15. Knapp’s three-year term expires in 2023.

In a recent interview, **Knapp** told The Republican the recall is “politically” motivated and that his advocacy for the mandate was based on what is in the best interests of children and the district. He said he would not be deterred by those objecting to his progressive politics.

Brown, a retired teacher in the district, ran for office on the premise that her professional educational experiences would be of value.

Corbin, a sports coach, is a principal organizer of the recall vote and hopes to defeat Knapp. He said in a **Belchertown Public Access Television segment** that the school board’s inability to listen to the community, particularly related to vaccine mandates for children, creates alienation, and this fact prompted the recall effort.

Lech, also hoping to unseat Knapp, did not address the vaccine mandate in **her segment**, describing instead a need for the board to work cooperatively and take better heed of community concerns.

The school board’s proposed vaccine mandate would have applied to students 16 and older participating in extracurricular, not-for-academic-credit sports. It included a provision for athletes opting against getting vaccinated to show proof of a negative COVID-19 test.

The draft policy had gotten majority approval during a first reading Nov. 2. A second reading was scheduled for the **Nov. 9 meeting**, but support for the idea collapsed and the proposal was tabled.