

Connecticut educators denounce right-wing record of Biden's pick for Education Secretary

Robert Milkowski
24 December 2020

The response of the corporate media and the teachers unions to President-elect Joe Biden's selection of Miguel Cardona as his nominee for Education Secretary has been nothing short of effusive.

In the eyes of the Democratic Party and all of its backers, Cardona's two chief qualifications for the position are that he is Latino and that he has forcefully advocated the reopening of schools during the pandemic as Connecticut's commissioner of education. If Biden takes office in January, Cardona will immediately promote racial politics to accelerate the school reopening policies pursued by the Trump administration, fraudulently claiming this will be for the benefit of "black and brown" students.

In its article, headlined, "Biden Picks Latino Chief of Connecticut Schools as Education Secretary," the *New York Times* glowingly wrote, "The selection of Dr. Cardona, a Latino, would fulfill Mr. Biden's campaign promise to appoint a diverse cabinet and a secretary of education with public school experience—a blunt juxtaposition to Ms. DeVos, a billionaire champion of private schools that she and her children attended."

The *Times* quotes multiple union officials praising Cardona, including Stuart Beckford, the second vice president of the Hartford Federation of Teachers, who states, "He has provided the stability the state has needed, and also focusing on equity and diversity." The article quotes American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten, who hailed Cardona's "deep respect for educators and their unions."

The *Times* writes, "Teachers in Connecticut, who endorsed Dr. Cardona's nomination, said that his leadership had struck the right balance of transparency and flexibility, even during the coronavirus crisis."

In fact, the "teachers in Connecticut" referred to are the Board of Education Union Coalition, including the Connecticut Education Association (CEA), the American Federation of Teachers Connecticut, and state affiliates of

the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the United Auto Workers (UAW).

The union bureaucrats that co-signed an endorsement of Cardona inhabit a different world than the rank-and-file educators that teach and work in schools across Connecticut, whose lives have been thoroughly endangered by the policies pursued by Cardona.

When the CEA posted their endorsement of Cardona on their Facebook page, they were met with a torrent of denunciations by Connecticut educators, with one commenting, "Commissioner Cardona has played fast and loose with teachers' and students' lives, and is not pro-teacher. The CEA should be embarrassed at this political pandering, and should never have put teachers' support in their endorsement. CEA support of this potential nomination is yet another slap in the face to the teachers it is supposed to represent."

Dr. Tina Manus, a public school teacher in Connecticut, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "The fact that the Education Union Coalition endorsed Miguel Cardona without surveying members is disgusting. No action taken by them speaks more to their tone deaf approach to leading educators in CT, as well as their blatant and purposeful disconnection from the Rank and File."

Dr. Manus added that Cardona "put the entire state of CT at risk, opening schools and allowing those schools to become vectors of community COVID-19 transmission. His policies are the reason COVID numbers went up and poor communities are suffering now.... He further exacerbated the already wide gaps in economics, social class and healthcare poor communities suffer within."

Nicole Rizzo, who has been teaching in Connecticut for seven years, and is also an organizer for Connecticut Public School (CTPS) Advocates, told *Newsweek* magazine Cardona "was biased in his representation of reopening schools. The metrics that he and the governor proposed for

school reopening, they continually revised without explanation.”

She added, “Many of these schools are lacking basic, rudimentary resources including personal protective equipment and sanitization products.”

Rizzo conducted a survey on the (CTPS) Advocates Facebook page in reaction to the Education Union Coalition’s endorsement of Cardona, which found that an extremely small percentage of the 392 educators polled supported his nomination (7.1 percent), while the majority voted against him (92.9 percent).

Another Connecticut teacher, Thea Bell, told the WSWS, “Cardona has not spent much time in a classroom and apparently fast tracked it out as soon as he could. He smiles all the time when people are suffering. He delivers policy with a smug ‘let them eat cake’ smile of an elite who, now that he has risen above, could not care less about those still struggling.”

She added, “My school refused to allow me to teach remotely. They ultimately fired me for basically being medically fragile and high risk. At the last minute they rescinded my termination and put me on unpaid leave this year. My lawyer intervened. Cardona had NO plan to shield vulnerable educational workers in his demand to open face to face. Instead, he is letting teachers fight singular legal battles, lose their jobs, retire, get fired, etc.”

Since the summer, Cardona has joined Connecticut’s Democratic Governor Ned Lamont in falsely claiming that schools are not vectors for the spread of COVID-19. In an op-ed in the News-Times last week, without citing any evidence, Cardona claimed, “Cases reported by schools, which include students who are in full remote learning, are being traced back to community spread happening outside the building.”

A Hartford educator who chose to remain anonymous spoke about this to the WSWS, stating, “Cardona never allowed for the possibility of school closures. He claimed teachers would receive PPE, but no improvements made to ventilation systems in extremely old buildings. Data was being manipulated; the CSDE kept saying kids don’t contract the virus to justify the reopening. The decisions were not based in reality. They kept moving the goalposts on what would require a closing, and Cardona didn’t listen to the teachers pleading not to reopen the schools. Teachers have gotten sick and some have died.”

He continued, “The state’s own reopening safety thresholds were set at 25 out of 100,000 as the trigger to move to full remote. We moved way beyond those thresholds. As the infection rates rose, the CSDE just kept re-writing the reopening plan... moving the safety threshold. We documented all of it. Our numbers of infection are now

way over 100 out of 100,000 in some towns. He does not care, he wants it open for optics. I would say also because now it seems to suggest he has ‘found a way’ to keep it open.”

In concluding he said, “We have had several iterations of the Connecticut school reopening plan. Again, the CSDE just kept rewriting it as the infection rates rocketed. They gaslit everyone. It’s been really tragic for many. I no longer want to be an educator. There is no integrity in the public system.”

As a result of these and other policies implemented by the state’s Democratic politicians, Connecticut now has the fifth highest ratio of deaths per person among all US states. In total, 170,705 of the state’s 3.6 million residents have been infected with COVID-19 and 5,736 people have died. Cases have surged in the past two months following the reopening of schools throughout the state, with a record 8,129 cases on December 7.

Educators must draw the necessary conclusions from Biden’s selection of Cardona, which underscores that his administration will pursue the same homicidal policies as the Trump administration of opening all schools and nonessential businesses as the pandemic rages.

Although the Democrats’ tactics may vary, their fundamental goal—keeping the economy open in the interests of Wall Street—remains the same. Both parties are beholden to the same ruling elite, whose wealth has vastly increased alongside the ever-greater suffering and death of workers during this global pandemic.

Educators and all workers must organize themselves independently of both corporate-controlled parties and the pro-capitalist unions, through the formation of rank-and-file safety committees. These committees must prepare for a political general strike, with the goal of closing all schools and nonessential businesses to stop the spread of the pandemic and save lives.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact