

CDC's politically motivated guidelines fuel media campaign to reopen US schools

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Over the weekend, a corporate media blitz made perfectly clear the purpose of the latest guidelines on school reopenings issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) last Friday. The weekslong propaganda campaign falsely claiming that schools are not vectors for the spread of COVID-19 now has the full imprimatur of the CDC and is rapidly escalating in order to reopen schools in all districts currently remote-only.

Numerous articles and editorials have been published since Friday in the print media, either praising the guidelines for their loose recommendations or demanding that they go even further.

The *New York Times* carried an article entitled, "C.D.C. Draws Up a Blueprint for Reopening Schools." The *Washington Post*, owned by Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, carried an article entitled, "CDC offers road map for safely reopening schools." The Associated Press headlined its article, "CDC: Strong evidence in-person schooling can be done safely." The *Wall Street Journal*, the principal mouthpiece of the financial oligarchy, titled its main article, "CDC Presses K-12 Schools to Reopen."

On Sunday morning, CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky appeared on CNN's "State of the Union," CBS's "Face the Nation," and NBC's "Meet the Press," invoking the guidelines to promote the reopening schools everywhere in the coming days and weeks.

On "Face the Nation," Dr. Walensky was asked, "Should areas of this country where there is B.1.1.7 still have in-person classes?" She replied, "There are over 1,000 B.1.1.7 cases that we have documented ... in 39 states." She added, "we have projections that it may be the dominant strain by the end of March. That said, the amount of disease in school is very much related to the amount of disease that's in the community."

Without providing any evidence, Dr. Walensky stated, "There's very limited transmission between students, between students and staff." Where this occurred, she blamed school staff for being negligent and spreading the virus in schools, saying this was due "breaches in mask wearing." She stressed that "what we're really advocating for now is ... in the high areas of transmission, the red zones you just talked about, getting our K-5 kids back in a hybrid mode," that is, part remote and part in-class learning.

Over the weekend, researchers found that more than 99 percent of all children in the US presently reside in what are classified as "red" zones by the CDC guidelines for having high levels of COVID-19 transmission. But the guidelines explicitly state, "*At any level of community transmission*, all schools have options to provide in-person instruction" (emphasis added).

In the highest "orange" and "red" tiers, the guidelines recommend, "Elementary schools in hybrid learning mode or reduced attendance" and "Middle and high schools in virtual only instruction unless they can strictly implement all mitigation strategies, and have few cases; schools that are already open for in-person instruction can remain open, but only if they strictly implement mitigation strategies and have few cases."

These aspects of the guidelines will be quoted by superintendents, governors and other officials across the country in the coming weeks to reopen schools and to keep them open, even as new surges from the more infectious variants of the virus spread throughout schools, which lack the resources to provide the most elemental safety and mitigation measures, let alone those suggested by the CDC.

The CDC guidelines were published the day after Chicago Public Schools (CPS) began reopening last Thursday, after the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) carried out an abject betrayal of its members by pressuring them to accept the deadly reopening plan. Opposition continues to grow in Chicago and other school districts like Philadelphia and Montclair, New Jersey, where educators continue to resist back-to-school orders.

The Biden administration, emboldened by the CTU's betrayal, has charged the CDC and political apparatus to swiftly move on the offensive in a coordinated effort to promote these unscientific and dangerous guidelines and seize the initiative. The events of the past two weeks have been a carefully orchestrated counterattack on educators fighting to save lives.

Educators and parents have taken to social media to lambast Biden and the CDC for what amounts to a criminal endeavor that is putting their lives and that of their communities at incredible risk. In dozens of Facebook groups opposed to school reopenings across the US, members posted hundreds if

not thousands of critical comments.

On one post, an educator wrote, “It just shows how the system does not care about COVID spreading and hospitalizing or even killing teachers, bus drivers, cafeteria staff and the other people who would be in the buildings with poor ventilation. Neither does it care about the students, who would get COVID and be asymptomatic, but bring it home and kill their parents and grandparents!”

Another commenter wrote, “CDC’s integrity has been thoroughly corrupted.” One teacher commented that the only difference between Trump and Biden was that Biden is telling them to return to school with a smile.

The release of the latest CDC guidelines takes place just before the US passes the grim milestone of over 500,000 deaths from COVID-19 in the span of less than one year. New variants are spreading largely undetected throughout the country. Study after study has proven that children are often asymptomatic carriers of the disease and can readily infect others. Hospital systems have been overwhelmed repeatedly and health care workers are chronically exhausted and distressed.

Under these conditions, for Dr. Walensky to endorse sending school children and teachers back to classrooms while so many unknown variables are involved represents the complete subordination of science to the political aims of the Biden administration, which has repeatedly made clear its determination to reopen the majority of K-8 schools by mid-April.

Such disregard for public safety should disqualify Dr. Walensky as head of a scientific body. But it is precisely for her political subservience to the Democratic Party and financial oligarchy that she was selected for this position, not her adherence to scientific principles.

A review of the guidelines’ references indicates many of the selected studies are of limited significance and use biased surveys done in a specific school over a limited time frame. Many provide no concrete context or understanding of how the coronavirus passes through children and schools in the community settings.

The guidelines highlight studies conducted early in the pandemic, when schools globally were closed as an initial response to containing the spread, deriving conclusions that are no longer valid. They have uncritically accepted claims made in studies that children were not vectors at home, while ignoring the cautionary remarks made by their authors that their findings might be flawed as children rarely present with symptoms.

In some cases, updated information on the seroprevalence of antibodies in children has not been cited. This completely invalidates their claim of a thorough scientific review. They do not even admit that data exists that refute their conclusions, a crucial principle in scientific writing.

In an opinion piece published in the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, Dr. Delano-Wood, Ph.D., stated succinctly, “In order to analyze exposure and transmission in schools, you have to

actually be collecting data in schools. The best way to collect data would be to do surveillance testing for all students each week. ... Unfortunately, these types of data sets do not exist since almost no school nationwide do such testing, thus making inferences about the extent of COVID-19 spread in schools impossible to know. The vast majority of available studies show strong evidence of spread in schools throughout the world, and it’s disingenuous to say that this virus only spreads in homes.”

National contact tracing programs are abysmally limited, while local public health institutions are underfunded and understaffed. Accurate systematic data collection has been mired in corruption or willful sloppiness.

The CDC guidelines are offered as suggestions and are not binding. School districts will continue to have free rein on whether and how to reopen, and the guidelines will provide school boards and politicians with a modicum of “scientific” justification for their criminal policies.

Fundamentally, the crux of these guidelines is to ensure schools remain open during high community transmissions, in order to pressure parents to return to work in unsafe workplaces. The guidelines state, “K-12 schools should be the last settings to close after all other mitigation measures in the community have been employed, and the first to reopen when they can do so safely.”

Educators, parents and the entire working class must understand the line-up of forces that they confront, which includes the CDC under Biden just as before under Trump. The necessary conclusions should be drawn from the past year. Educators must organize independently of the unions and both big business parties through the building of rank-and-file committees in every district and state and prepare for a nationwide general strike to close all schools and nonessential workplaces.



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