

Biden administration promotes fully opening schools amid surge of Delta variant

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The United States is in the midst of a massive surge of COVID-19 infections due to the spread of the highly infectious and virulent Delta variant of SARS-CoV-2. In the past month alone, the seven-day moving average of daily new cases has skyrocketed by over 500 percent to exceed 91,000 as of Monday.

Amid this deepening surge of the pandemic, the Biden administration released a document Monday making clear that the drive to fully reopen schools over the coming weeks will continue apace. This is despite the fact that as of July 29, only 28 percent of 12- to 15-year-olds in the US were fully vaccinated, while children under 12 years old will likely not be eligible for any vaccine throughout the fall semester.

In pushing to fully reopen schools, the White House is giving the green light to the criminal banning of mask mandates in schools, which have now been signed into law by Republican governors in Florida, Texas, Iowa, South Carolina, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Utah and Arizona. These states, each of which is experiencing a significant surge in daily new cases, provide public education to a combined roughly 12.7 million children who will be packed into poorly-ventilated buildings for hours each day.

The most extreme measure has been taken in Florida, where Republican Governor Ron DeSantis, an acolyte of former President Donald Trump, signed an executive order Friday which allows the cutoff of funding to any school district that issues a mask mandate. The order was signed into law on the same day that Florida set a single-day record of new cases, logging an astronomical 21,683 confirmed infections. The executive order prompted Broward County Public Schools to rescind its mask mandate on Monday, leaving roughly 260,000 students at heightened risk of contracting COVID-19.

Only eight states in the US are requiring masks in schools, serving another 12.7 million children, while the remaining 34 states, which serve roughly 25 million children, are leaving this decision up to local school districts. From the standpoint of public health, this haphazard and

uncoordinated policy is absolutely criminal.

The Department of Education (ED) document released Monday, titled, “Return to School Roadmap,” notes that under Biden, “America’s public schools have been steadily reopening for in-person learning, and students are returning to classrooms. We must continue that progress and provide every student, from every community and background, the opportunity to return to in-person learning full-time this fall. We must keep opening school doors and welcoming students back into classrooms.”

The document lists three “landmark” priorities: “Prioritize the health and safety of students, school personnel, and families,” “Build school communities, and support students’ social, emotional, and mental health,” and “Accelerate academic achievement.”

Each of these contains a subset of documents for school districts to refer to in justifying their school reopening plans, all of which will supposedly be fully funded by the \$125 billion allocated to K-12 schools through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). In reality, the ARPA funding is spread out over two and a half years, averaging to only \$50 billion annually, a drop in the bucket compared to the estimated \$200-300 billion funding that states require to stabilize their K-12 education budgets and meet even a portion of their additional costs over the next year and a half.

The Orwellian language of the “Return to School Roadmap” is meant to gloss over the horrific reality confronting parents, children and educators, millions of whom are terrified of the dangers that lie ahead.

Significantly, one of the bullet points of “proposals” by the Biden administration claims they promote “Investing in school infrastructure to rebuild schools in underinvested communities and address health and safety issues beyond ventilation.” Were the document honest, it would say “except ventilation,” as only a tiny fraction of the ARPA funding is going to upgrade the antiquated ventilation systems that are estimated to be in roughly 36,000 schools across the US.

An NPR article published to coincide with the release of

the document began, “U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona has a message for schools across the country ahead of the new school year: Students need to be in classrooms. ‘That’s where students learn best,’ Cardona told NPR’s A Martínez.” The article quotes Cardona as stating that schools can “hit the reset button,” but that what’s preventing them from doing so is “complacency.”

Cardona was picked by Biden to head the DOE because of his proven record of ruthlessly reopening Connecticut schools one year ago. In all essentials, Cardona implemented the Trump administration’s agenda of fully reopening schools long before vaccines were even available.

The current push to fully reopen schools amid the spread of the Delta variant has already proven to be disastrous in multiple districts that have reopened.

On Friday, news broke that in the first week of classes in the Marion School District in northeast Arkansas just west of Memphis, Tennessee, seven students and three staff tested positive for COVID-19, with 169 students quarantined due to possible exposure to the virus. On Tuesday afternoon, the district announced that by Monday there were already 18 total positive cases, leading to an additional 253 students in quarantine.

At Union Academy Charter School in Union County, North Carolina, southeast of Charlotte, more than 150 students and staff are now quarantined as a result of 14 positive cases of COVID-19. Only after this massive outbreak did the charter school decide to implement a universal mask mandate.

Within one week of classes resuming in Anderson, Indiana, over 100 students in at least six classrooms at four schools in the district went into quarantine due to possible exposure to the virus. Taylor Garrett, a mother of a quarantined child, told local news outlet WTHR, “I feel like on the fourth day of school, and you’re quarantining six separate classrooms, that should be a red flag.”

Coinciding with the school reopening campaign, there are growing reports of child hospitalizations across the US.

Local news station WFTV in central Florida reported Tuesday, “One week before school starts in Orange County, more than 30 children in the area are hospitalized and many more are very sick with COVID-19.” Dr. Federico Laham, the medical director for pediatric infectious diseases at Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children, told the news outlet, “Compared to the last prior two or three months, we’re seeing a tremendous increase in the number of kids coming in for medical care.”

WJHL News in Johnson City, Tennessee, reported Monday that Ballad Health has “four children [that] were hospitalized with COVID-19, with three of them in the PICU at Niswonger Children’s Hospital.”

At a press conference Tuesday, Dr. Mark Kline, the Physician-in-Chief at Children’s Hospital New Orleans, made an ominous warning on the dangers that the Delta variant poses to children. He stated, “I have practiced pediatric infectious diseases for more than 35 years. I’ve worked all over the world. I’ve studied pandemics and worked with epidemic and pandemic diseases for my entire career. And I have to tell you that I’m as worried about our children today as I have ever been.”

He continued, “This virus, the Delta variant of COVID, is every infectious disease specialist and epidemiologist’s worst nightmare. I don’t think as Americans, in our lifetimes, we have ever seen an organism that possesses the dual characteristics of the contagiousness that this virus has together with its virulence, its ability to produce disease.”

Dr. Kline concluded, “There was a myth that circulated during the first year of the pandemic that children were somehow immune. There were people who said children don’t get the disease, they can’t transmit the disease. We know that those were fallacies all along, but particularly now that the Delta variant has emerged, it has become very clear that children are being heavily impacted by this organism and by this pandemic at this point, perhaps more than ever before.”

Following in the footsteps of Trump, the most notorious promoter of the myth that children cannot catch or transmit COVID-19, is Biden, who in February told a second-grader at a CNN town hall, “You’re not likely to be able to be exposed to something and spread it to mommy or daddy.” He stated, “Kids don’t get ... COVID very often. It’s unusual for that to happen,” adding, “You’re in the safest group of people in the whole world.” Under far more dangerous conditions, the Biden administration is pushing the same pseudoscience to reopen schools everywhere in order to pressure parents back to work and boost corporate profits.



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