

White House doubles down on reopening schools as COVID-19 cases surge

Andre Damon
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The Biden administration doubled down Wednesday on its efforts to force schools to resume in-person education amid a surge of COVID-19 cases, with Education Secretary Miguel Cardona declaring “our priority must be” to “return to school in person.”

The White House’s statement came as COVID-19 cases continued to surge nationwide, with 155,000 cases reported Thursday, a more than ten-fold increase in the span of just two months.

In states throughout the country, hospitals were filled to capacity as the number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients hit 85,000, a six-fold increase since June.

And most troubling of all, 967 people died Thursday, representing a quadrupling of the daily deaths compared to two months ago.

Cardona opened his statement Wednesday by boasting that “more than 62 percent of students across the country will complete their first day of school” this week.

“As educators, we know in our hearts how important in-person learning is for student success,” Cardona said, adding, “The truth is that we know what works to keep students and educators safe: following the science-based strategies for preventing the spread of COVID-19 recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).”

In reality, the CDC, under political pressure from a White House determined to reopen schools at any cost, is directly contradicting public health guidance that has been used to successfully control the spread of COVID-19 in China.

In July, the CDC encouraged schools to reopen at any level of community spread and with any level of social distancing—even if they cannot guarantee three feet of distance between students.

The CDC took another step this month, encouraging

students who come into contact with infected students not to quarantine if both were wearing masks.

As Yahoo News reported, “Under many school systems’ quarantine protocols, spending 15 minutes within a six foot radius of an infected individual—sitting next to them in class, for example—can force students to stay home for up to two weeks. The new exemption allows schools to bypass that rule in cases where both individuals mask up.”

The practice of quarantine—practiced for millennia—is critical to stopping the spread of infectious diseases like COVID-19, and its abandonment effectively guarantees the uncontained spread of COVID-19 in classrooms.

The reopening of schools is already fueling a massive surge in cases. At least 5,993 Mississippi students tested positive for COVID-19 in the last two weeks, a case rate 30 times higher than in the previous school year. This has been accompanied by 1,496 teachers getting sick—a six-fold increase over the previous school year.

In Mississippi, only seven ICU beds were available in the state, and 96 patients needed them, the state Department of Health said Thursday.

Despite this disaster, Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves made clear that the state would continue its efforts to reopen as cases surge throughout the state.

Children’s of Mississippi, the only pediatric hospital in the state, said it was treating the largest number of COVID-19 patients during the entire pandemic.

“Today, Children’s of Mississippi and the University of Mississippi Medical Center reported 28 children with confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19, the highest number of pediatric COVID-19 patients at the state’s only children’s hospital since the beginning of the pandemic,” the hospital said in a statement on Facebook. “Of these hospitalized children, 100% are

unvaccinated. This number includes eight children in the ICU, including five who are too young to receive the vaccine.”

As cases continue to surge throughout Florida, the Florida Hospital Association said in a statement that hospitals will soon run out of capacity.

“While hospitalizations continue to increase, three out of four Florida hospitals expect to face critical staff shortages in the next seven days, an increase of nearly ten percent since last week, and half of our hospitals will no longer accept transfer patients from other facilities,” the FHA said in a statement.

The continued drive to reopen comes amid a torrent of new information pointing to the dangers of in-person instruction not only to children, teachers and school staff—but to the families of students.

Research published this week showed that children eight and under are 40 percent more likely to spread COVID-19 than the general population. Commenting on the data, epidemiologist Eric Feigl-Ding warned, “Kids transmit damnit. And younger kids transmit even more!!”

It is becoming clear that the ongoing reopening of schools amid a massive surge of the COVID-19 pandemic is a recipe for the preventable deaths of tens or hundreds of thousands of children, educators, family members and the general public.

The Biden administration, speaking for the entire political establishment and with the support of the pro-corporate trade unions, is determined to push ahead with the reopening of schools with the aim of getting parents back to work—increasing the pool of labor available to major corporations and pushing down wages to boost profits.

This absolutely criminal policy must be opposed by all educators and students—and the working class as a whole. Educators and parents must form rank-and-file safety committees in every school and workplace, independent of the unions and the Democrats and Republicans, to coordinate the struggle to stop the reopening of schools and put an end to the pandemic.

To coordinate this struggle, the *World Socialist Web Site* will be holding an online event featuring leading scientists on Sunday, August 22, entitled, “For a global strategy to stop the pandemic and save lives!” We urge our readers to attend and promote this critical event.



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