

AFT President Randi Weingarten's town hall of death

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On Friday, October 1, parents, educators and workers internationally are planning a series of strikes and protests to oppose the homicidal reopening of schools, which has already infected millions of children worldwide with COVID-19. Last week's powerful call to action by British parent Lisa Diaz has won broad support across the UK, the US, Canada, Germany, France, Australia, Sri Lanka, Japan and a growing number of countries worldwide. Workers are increasingly taking up the call to eradicate COVID-19 once and for all through temporary lockdowns and the deployment of all public health measures.

While parents and rank-and-file workers throughout the world will engage in a powerful demonstration Friday, another meeting of a decidedly different character is taking place the day before.

On Tuesday, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the second largest teachers union in the United States with roughly 1.7 million members, announced that it will co-host a town hall meeting Thursday with the far-right parents group Open Schools USA. The event will give a platform to proponents of pseudoscience who oppose COVID-19 vaccinations, advocate the scrapping of mask mandates and all mitigation measures in schools, and seek to actively infect all children with COVID-19 in order to develop a mythical "herd immunity."

The event was announced the day after the American Academy of Pediatrics released its weekly report on child infections, hospitalizations and deaths in the US, which found that for the fifth consecutive week over 200,000 children were officially infected with COVID-19. Throughout those five weeks, an average of three children died from COVID-19 each day. The vast majority of these infections and deaths are the direct product of the full reopening of schools, which the Biden administration, the teachers unions, and Republican and Democratic state governments have pursued relentlessly over the past two months, either with the most limited mitigation measures or none at all.

Thursday's event will be co-moderated by AFT President

Randi Weingarten and Open Schools USA member Erich Hartmann. The opening remarks will be given by Open Schools USA founder Michelle Walker, a right-wing parent from Portland, Oregon.

On September 20, Walker tweeted, "Keep schools open. Eliminate mask mandates. Eliminate vaccine mandates. Prevent future vaccine mandates. Open our communities and country up." She is a vicious opponent of public education and advocates for parents to withdraw their children from public schools in order to starve them of funding.

Two of the "scientists" at the town hall are among the leading academic purveyors of pandemic misinformation, Dr. Jay Bhattacharya and Dr. Tracy Høeg.

Bhattacharya is best known as one of the authors of the Great Barrington Declaration, which the *World Socialist Web Site* characterized as a "manifesto of death." The central document of proponents of the "herd immunity" strategy, it advocates for the rapid infection of young people to create a so-called "human shield" around the most vulnerable. In practice, this leads to the mass infection of all of society and has prematurely killed millions worldwide.

Bhattacharya is a creature of the right-wing Hoover Institute at Stanford University and is promoted by Florida's fascist Governor Ron DeSantis. In August 2020, Bhattacharya served as Florida's expert witness in a trial over DeSantis's mandate that all schools fully reopen or lose funding, with Bhattacharya providing the pseudo-scientific justification for his policies.

Høeg is best known as a public opponent of vaccinating children. In a recent pre-print study, she falsely claimed that young men who get vaccinated are more likely to be hospitalized by the vaccine than by COVID-19. This study has been rejected from three different journals under peer review, but its falsehoods have spread through the media and been promoted by far-right parent groups like Open Schools USA, as well as fascist politicians like Georgia Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene.

The fact that Weingarten and the AFT have publicly affiliated with these far-right forces proves that all talk of

“mitigations” in schools has always been nothing more than a cover for the “herd immunity” policies of the ruling elites.

This event expresses the reality that the unions not only do not represent their members but are thoroughly hostile to them. After over 1,000 educators and over 250 children died from COVID-19 during the last school year, Weingarten has been the most vocal advocate for the full reopening of schools before the majority of children are even eligible for the vaccine.

The AFT’s Twitter post announcing Thursday’s event sparked genuine outrage among parents and rank-and-file educators, as well as reputable scientists.

Some of those who commented expressed the belief that Weingarten is the unwitting tool of far-right forces, and that this was simply a thoughtless event organized by the union. In reality, the alliance between the union and fascist elements is not accidental. The purpose of the event is to bring forward the most backward and anti-scientific fringe layers, give them an audience, and provide justification for the scrapping of the already limited mitigation measures implemented in Democrat-led school districts.

On Wednesday morning, Weingarten posted a defensive Twitter thread in which she sought to justify the AFT’s promotion of fascists. While claiming to be “pro vaccine, pro masking in schools,” she noted, “I’ve been talking with Open Schools USA for a while now, having conversations, listening to their concerns. And we decided to have a townhall together.” She added, “I still think having dialogue, getting to common ground about the importance of safe in person learning is vital.”

In other words, unbeknownst to rank-and-file AFT members, Weingarten has held secret meetings with a far-right parent group to try to find common ground on which they can coordinate their efforts to fully reopen schools. While “having dialogue” with fascists, Weingarten and the AFT bureaucracy have suppressed all opposition within the union, shutting down meetings and discussions with rank-and-file teachers.

In addition to the far right, Weingarten is also deeply connected to the Biden administration and the state apparatus. With an official salary of roughly \$500,000, she sits on the Democratic National Committee and personally identifies with the state and the financial oligarchy. She embodies the corporatist character of all the unions today, enforcing the interests of the corporations and suppressing any expression of opposition.

In February, she told the *New York Times* she was spending upwards of 15 hours each day on the phone with the White House, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and her union subordinates coordinating the Biden administration’s school reopening campaign in

the face of mass opposition among teachers. In a May 13 speech in which she demanded the full reopening of schools this fall, Weingarten made clear the economic motives behind this campaign, stating, “Parents rely on schools, not only to educate their kids, but so they can work.”

Weingarten also views the fascists as her allies against increasingly militant rank-and-file educators who are entering into struggle independently of and in opposition to the decrepit union bureaucracies.

The October 1 school strike is an initial manifestation of a growing movement of the working class fighting to put an end to the pandemic. Throughout the world, workers have formed rank-and-file committees independent of the unions and capitalist political parties in order to exert their own social interests. These committees are increasingly advancing a strategy to eradicate COVID-19, which requires the closure of all schools and nonessential workplaces, a globally coordinated mass vaccination program, universal testing, contact tracing, the safe isolation of infected patients, masking, and the deployment of all other public measures to cut the chain of viral transmission.

All those politicians, union bureaucrats and media talking heads who have driven the premature reopening of schools and nonessential workplaces before the pandemic is contained are implicated in a massive social crime for which they will be held accountable. The entire experience of the pandemic has made clear that only the mass mobilization of the international working class, armed with a scientific understanding of the necessary measures to eradicate COVID-19, will be able to put an end to the needless suffering and death of millions worldwide.



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