



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on March 31, 2022

GOP Report: CDC Ignored Rules, Took Cues From Teachers Unions on School Reopening Guidance

America's second largest teachers union practically drafted major portions of the Biden administration's school reopening guidelines. Bypassing the customary scientific process of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), its director, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, granted the union "unprecedented access" to the decision-making process, according to the Staff Report of the U.S. House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis published Wednesday.

In the [interim report](#), Republican lawmakers who sit on the subcommittee wrote,



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Emails between the AFT [American Federation of Teachers], the White House, and the CDC show the AFT's cozy relationship with the Biden Administration's political leadership at the CDC positioned the union to impose line-by-line edits to the Operational Strategy on at least two separate occasions, despite the CDC's past practice to keep draft guidance confidential.

The lawmakers also quote testimony from Dr. Henry Walke, director of the CDC's Center for Preparedness and Response, who said that "this level of coordination between the CDC and an outside organization was 'uncommon.'" The report added, "In fact, according to Dr. Walke, the CDC does not typically share draft guidance outside the agency for any reason, even with other federal partners."

However, on February 11, 2021, just one day before the CDC publicly posted the school reopening guidance, AFT's senior director of health issues, Kelly Trautner, e-mailed Walensky, asking her to insert this line into the guidance: "In the event high-community transmission results from a new variant of SARS-CoV-2, a new update of these guidelines may be necessary." Walensky forwarded the e-mail to Walke, who then revised the guidance in accordance with AFT's request.

There was another edit proposed by the union that the CDC incorporated into the guidance practically word-for-word, and this one also concerned the "triggers" that would make schools more likely to shut down for in-person learning. The agency included the changes even after the guidance had already been reviewed for the media.

Another peculiarity: Apparently, CDC insiders are not allowed to discuss details concerning the most important part of the collaboration. Why did the nation's top healthcare agency take cues from a political union with neither medical nor scientific expertise?

The report notes,

Even though the Operational Strategy was released to the public in February 2021, and despite clear evidence that the ATF's [sic] edits were incorporated, the Biden



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Administration would not allow Dr. Walke to answer questions [of the committee] on this topic, citing concerns with the scope of the interview....

That secrecy raises additional questions about the motivation that drove the CDC to consult with the AFT so closely. According to the report, “Because lawyers for the Biden Administration prevented a key witness from explaining why the CDC allowed AFT to write key portions of its guidance for re-opening schools, there are still several unanswered questions. This matter should be investigated further.”

Republican Whip and Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis Ranking Member Steve Scalise (R-La.) and House Committee on Oversight and Reform Ranking Member James Comer (R-Ky.) issued the [following statement](#) when publishing the report:

The facts are clear: Biden’s CDC overrode routine practice to allow a radical teachers union that donated millions of dollars to Democrat campaigns to bypass scientific norms and rewrite official agency guidance. The damaging edits by union bosses effectively kept thousands of schools shuttered across the country, locking millions of children out of their classrooms. The Biden Administration abandoned medical science and replaced it with political science to reward one of their largest donors, harming millions of children in the process. They bypassed science to put union bosses ahead of children.

According to the election watchdog [OpenSecrets.org](#), in the 2020 election cycle alone the AFT doled out \$20,275,848, of which 99.64 percent was given to Democrats. According to Scalise and Comer, teachers unions, including AFT, donated more than \$43 million to liberal groups and candidates during that year.

The e-mails exposing the AFT lobbying the CDC and the Biden administration to adjust the school reopening guidance to make it friendlier to school closures became public in May 2021. The e-mails were obtained through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request by the conservative watchdog group Americans for Public Trust and provided to the [New York Post](#).

Walensky [defended](#) her involvement with the union, stating during a hearing before the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis that the draft of the guidance was shared with “over 50 organizations and stakeholders,” including school boards, the education department, and the National Association of School Nurses, as well as parent groups.

“We take feedback, we consider it, and we ultimately implement things that are consistent with our scientific underpinnings,” she said when answering a question about why the agency adopted the AFT’s language verbatim.

By early 2021, public health experts and non-establishment doctors were advocating reopening schools, as various metrics showed relatively low risk associated with in-person instruction. Those same experts have been warning about the negative effects of lockdowns on children’s development.

The AFT and other teachers unions, however, were resisting school reopening plans in various jurisdictions, arguing it was not “safe” to return to in-person education.

It is not just the school reopening policies that the teachers unions influenced. As reported in September 2021, America’s largest teachers union, the National Education Association (NEA), [pressured](#) the CDC to keep strict guidelines on school masking policies.



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