

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SCHOOL CLOSURES,
PART 2: THE PRESIDENT OF
THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS,
MS. RANDI WEINGARTEN

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS
PANDEMIC
OF THE

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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**THE CONSEQUENCES OF SCHOOL CLOSURES,
PART 2: THE PRESIDENT OF
THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS,
MS. RANDI WEINGARTEN**

Wednesday, April 26, 2023

4HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY
SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC
Washington, D.C.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:26 p.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Brad R. Wenstrup, (Chairman of the Subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Wenstrup, Comer, Malliotakis, Miller-Meeks, Lesko, Cloud, Joyce, Greene, Jackson, McCormick, Ruiz, Raskin, Dingell, Mfume, Ross, Garcia, and Tokuda.

Also present: Representatives Jordan, Gomez, and Frost.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Good afternoon. The Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic will come to order, and I want to welcome everyone.

Without objection, the Chair may declare a recess at any time.

The Committee welcomes the public to this important meeting. While you are here, I want to point out to the members in the audience today that House Rule XI provides the Chairman of the Committee may punish breaches of order and decorum, including exclusion from the hearing. All participants will be required to avoid unruly behavior and inappropriate language. Expressions of support or opposition are not in order. I expect all parties to these proceedings to conduct themselves in a manner that reflects properly on the House of Representatives, as has every one of the hearings that we have had thus far on the pandemic.

Pursuant to Rule 7(d) of the Committee on Oversight and Accountability and at the discretion of Chairman Comer, Mr. Jordan, a Member of the full Committee, may participate in today's hearing for the purposes of questions. Further, without objection, I ask for unanimous consent for Mr. Frost of Florida and Mr. Gomez of California, both Members of the full Committee, to participate in this hearing for the purposes of questions.

Without objection, so ordered.

I now recognize myself for the purpose of making an opening statement.

This is our second hearing regarding pandemic-era school closures. We are investigating the decision-making process behind school closures and the effects it had so that we can do better in

the future. Inherently, part of that investigation is evaluating if the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention followed science as they knew it or learned it or merely accepted outside guidance regardless of available data during its guidance, drafting, and publication process.

This is part of the reason that we are here today. To determine to what extent the opinions and suggested guidelines offered by, in this case, the American Federation of Teachers during the CDC guidance process were accepted and why they were accepted. Americans are curious to know if the AFT access was in line with CDC past practice and if their influence had a positive or detrimental impact on America's children. While it is reasonable for the CDC to seek outside opinions, were some opinions accepted and others not considered, and why or why not? These are questions that we need to ask.

To be clear, we are not here to attack teachers, the teaching profession, or suggest pandemic-era teaching was easy, because it was not, and we all know that. We are here to conduct an after-action report, establish lessons learned so that we can better protect our children in the future and protect our children's futures. During this process, honesty is non-negotiable, and the facts should be facts, not political statements.

Beginning in March 2020, in response to COVID-19, schools around the world began to close. Doctors and scientists didn't know a lot about the novel virus, and decisions were made based on whatever facts were known and at the time what was known to try and best save lives. However, it became clear, in fact, essential, long before the beginning of the fall of 2020 semester that schools needed to be and safely could be opened for in-person instruction. It was happening. My children have benefited greatly in every way academically, physically, and mentally from their schools being open since the fall of 2020. And when the facts become clear, our decisions must change with them. It is important for students, important for parents, and important for teachers.

Further, the facts and science supported the ability to safely reopen. While children could get and transmit COVID-19, it was rare. While children could die from COVID-19, that risk has been estimated as 1 in a million. Some estimates stated that children actually became 10 times as likely to die by suicide, a crisis exacerbated by school closures. And with a wide range of mitigation strategies, COVID-19 transmission in the school setting was low. Schools could have and should have reopened, and, again, many did. The baseline question should have been schools need to be open; are we doing everything we can to make that happen?

Unfortunately, many schools chose not to reopen, despite the science supporting safe in-person school practices. This all came to a head in February 2021 when the Biden Administration and the CDC issued its first school reopening guidance, entitled the "Operational Strategy for K through 12 Schools through Phased Prevention." According to reports, when this guidance was issued, its recommendations would keep 90 percent of schools, including almost all of the 50 largest counties in the country, from fully reopening. Why? Primarily because of three recommendations: the use of community spread rates to determine reopening, a requirement for rou-

tine screening/testing, and six feet of distancing instead of three feet, none of these based in sound science at the time yet all directly supported by the AFT.

Community spread does not reflect school spread. Data showed that it appeared safer to be in school than in the community in many, many cases. So, if the goal was to get kids in school, and it is essential for America as we determine things to be essential or not, then why was the recommendation to follow the community spread data and not the in-school spread data, which is actually the environment in question? The AFT is of course, allowed to have an opinion. I respect that, but opinion should fully explain how the opinion was reached. This is how science works and how science is debated. Teachers teach science.

In an email on February 11, 2020 to Director Walensky from AFT staff, AFT takes issue with the current CDC language that stated, “At any level of community transmission, all schools can provide in-person instruction.” Seemingly to weaken that statement, AFT proposed adding, “In the event high community transmission results from a new variant of COVID-19, a new update of these guidelines may be necessary.” The CDC obliged and added that edit to the final guidance. Why not, in the event of a high in-person school transmission rather than community transmission. They are two different.

In an email to the president of the AFT, the AFT staff prepared a document for the president for a February 1, 2020, phone call with CDC. AFT staff wrote that the CDC should support the adoption of screening testing. In notes provided to President Weingarten before the same February 1, 2020 call with the CDC, AFT staff wrote, “Emphasize six feet of distancing. The guidance is fairly good on six feet or more of distance. It could be made stronger by rebutting directly school systems that are using lower standards to keep students in school.” Let me say that again. Basically, AFT objected to schools using less than six feet of social distancing so the kids could return to school. AFT’s support for these unscientific mitigation policies calls into question why was offering scientific advice to the CDC in the first place. The scientific expertise of the AFT is called into question, and also called into question is the high level of access and influence the AFT was provided by the CDC.

In the AFT letter to this Subcommittee on April 19, lawyers wrote, “Releasing guidance on how to safely reopen schools without attempting to address the concerns of these educators would not only be irresponsible, but also futile”. Lawyers continue, “In short, the failure to consult would have been foolish and self-defeating.” To me, these statements sound like a form of intimidation. Is this more political than scientific? Of course, in the letter and prepared statement that President Weingarten submitted today, she mentioned former President Trump 12 times. As best that I can tell, President Trump had nothing to do with the crafting of AFT guideline recommendations. That is the topic today.

The purpose of this Committee is to examine the procedures followed to decisions made and why, what motivated decision, and what worked and didn’t work, and ultimately, I would hope that we can produce a product, bipartisan, that will guide future gen-

erations so that we may have the ability to predict the next pandemic, prepare for it, protect us from it, and maybe even prevent it, and, in this case, maybe even be able to successfully maximize our children's education, especially in-person education, not just for some of our children but rather all of our children across this country. I pray that today's hearing will produce some of the necessary facts and evidence that this Subcommittee may utilize going forward in order to achieve our altruistic goals.

I would now like to recognize Ranking Member Ruiz for the purpose of making an opening statement.

Dr. RUIZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a heavy toll on our Nation's students both inside and outside the classroom. Nearly 230,000 children nationwide lost a parent or primary caregiver to the pandemic. Adding to this loss, job loss, economic hardship, and food insecurity weighed heavily on families across the country. These stressors, in combination with the prolonged suspension of in-person learning, have had a profound impact on our Nation's youth, their mental health, and their academic performance.

According to a 2021 CDC study, nearly 45 percent of high school students suffered so severely from feelings of sadness and hopelessness that they were unable to engage in regular activities. Nearly 1 in 5 students seriously considered suicide, and 9 percent of surveyed teenagers actually tried to take their lives during the previous 12 months. These are alarming statistics, and as a physician, an emergency physician, and a father, I am deeply concerned about this growing mental health crisis among our youth. It is crucial that we address this as well as the startling declines in learning caused by the prolonged suspension of in-person learning and the psychiatric psychological trauma of the pandemic and losing a parent.

According to a January 2023 McKinsey Report, we have been set back 2 decades of progress and learning because of this pandemic, and it may take until 2050, for some students to recover. So, now is the time to give students the resources they need to live and learn healthily and safely, so that they can succeed now and into the future. The mental health crisis our students face and the acute learning loss they suffered demand a response that is driven by data informed solutions that put people above politics, not extreme budget cuts that threaten our children's health, safety, and well-being. You see, when we invest in education and prioritize our children's health, we see the results.

Under the American Rescue Plan and the Biden Administration's leadership, we have doubled the number of schools open for full-time in-person learning thanks to bold investments in education and school infrastructure. In fact, just 1 day after he was sworn in to office, President Biden issued a sweeping executive order directing a whole-of-government approach to get schools safely and responsibly open. This leadership, the American Rescue Plan's bold investments and strong guidance created with input from more than 50 organizations, including parents, teachers, nurses, and superintendents, helped get students back in the classroom sooner and protected our communities from a deadly novel virus.

It is because of these investments and this leadership that we were able to overcome the previous administration's COVID-19 response failures and inaction that left our Nation and our classrooms unprepared to combat a global public health threat, failures such as downplaying the pandemic, calling it a hoax, a political ploy by Democrats, not urgently acting to reduce transmission, not honestly communicating with the American public, and not effectively equipping our schools with the necessary resources to stay open.

These actions put high-risk communities in harm's way, led to an estimated 130,000 preventable American deaths, and resulted in the prolonged suspension of in-person learning. These failures should have taught us all a lesson about what happens when we leave our schools and our communities under-resourced, under-equipped, and vulnerable. And yet here we are holding this hearing today along the backdrop of the Republican extreme budget plan that makes reckless 22-percent cuts on critical education and healthcare programs that serve Americans, children's, and families.

The extreme Republican budget would have disastrous consequences for communities, such as removing 60,000 teachers from schools serving low-income students, eliminating more than 101,000 childcare slots, excluding nearly 1.2 million children and mothers from essential nutrition programs, and decimating life-saving mental health programs. This doesn't help our students suffering from mental health or struggling with their grades. It makes it worse for them and their parents.

Right now, America's children need our support. They need resources to make up for lost classroom time, overcome struggles with mental health, and live, learn, and grow in a healthy, safe environment. Ripping away critical funding and focusing on and prioritizing partisan allegations that seek to vilify our Nation's dedicated teachers will get us nowhere in addressing the challenges our Nation's children's face. Instead, let us cut the partisan allegations. Let's get down to business, and let's prioritize our children's health and well-being both inside and outside the classroom. And let's prepare our schools for the next deadly airborne pandemic to save lives, reduce transmissions, and keep schools safely and responsibly open. I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I thank the Ranking Member. We will be able to have these conversations again when that is the topic. That is why I appreciate you setting the stage now.

Our witness today is Ms. Randi Weingarten. Ms. Weingarten has served as the president of the American Federation of Teachers since 2008. In this role, she oversees a union that represents more than 1.7 million members, including teachers and other school-related personnel.

Pursuant to the Committee on Oversight and Accountability Rule 9(g), the witness will please stand and raise her right hand.

Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony that you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I do.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you. Let the record show that the witness answered in the affirmative.

The Select Subcommittee certainly appreciates you being here today, and we look forward to your testimony. Let me remind the witness that we have read your written statements, and they will appear in full in the hearing record, so please limit your oral statement to 5 minutes. As a reminder, please press the button on the microphone in front of you so that is on, and the Members can hear you. When you begin to speak, the light in front of you will turn green. After 4 minutes, the light will turn yellow. When the red light comes on, your 5 minutes has expired, and we would ask that you please wrap up.

I now recognize Ms. Weingarten to give an opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF RANDI WEINGARTEN
PRESIDENT
THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS**

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Thank you, Chair Wenstrup, Ranking Member Ruiz, and Members of the Subcommittee. I thank you for the opportunity to discuss my Members' work during the COVID pandemic.

Teachers work creatively, often past the point of exhaustion to teach and reach their students, like Kara McCormick-Lyons from White Plains, who is here with us today. I am going to ask the three of them to stand in minute. School bus drivers drove their routes to drop off meals and learning materials, like Lisa Rogers from Albuquerque, and school nurses, like Beverly Scott from Cleveland, navigated the challenges and the uncertainty of the global pandemic. Would the three of you just stand to be recognized, and I appreciate what the Chair said about teachers and what they have done during this period of time.

[Applause.]

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Now, if you have, and I know it took some minutes, but if you have educators in your lives, you know that their priority is their students, to create a safe environment for all children and to prepare them for life, career, college, and citizenship. We know that kids learn best in-person, so opening schools safely, even as the pandemic surged, guided the AFT's every action, and I am grateful to set the record straight.

From the earliest days of COVID, the AFT knew that safety was a pathway to opening schools and keeping them open. We, along with parents, and administrators, and health officials, we needed clear science-based guidance to keep students and staff safe in school, and, yes, it made sense to consult with the CDC. And it was not only appropriate for the CDC to confer with educators, it would have been irresponsible for them not to, and the CDC conferred with more than 50 organizations about the guidance. But before the CDC and, frankly, neither the President at that time nor Betsy DeVos would confer with us, but we tried to do whatever we could. We released this report in April 2020, a commonsense science-backed plan to open school safely. That same month we worked with John King, the former Education Secretary, to focus and combat learning loss.

2020 was chaotic and terrifying. The previous administration downplayed the pandemic. Failure to protect Americans had unbearable costs. It is not just the 1.1 million Americans that died of

COVID. Black children died at almost three times the rate of White children. Two hundred forty-five thousand children were orphaned in America, and members of my union died as well. Gabrielle Gayle was a fourth grade teacher who was pregnant with her second child when she died. We lost Holly Ann Hoover, a nurse, Anthony Harrell, a school custodian, and so many more.

And this is what the AFT did. When the Strategic National Stockpile unstocked, we bought \$3 million of PPP for our nurses and for our teachers in schools. We ran vaccination clinics. We convened virtual town halls that brought parents and educators and mental health experts together. We spent \$5 million on a back-to-school campaign to get people back to school, everything from developing reopening plans, back-to-school fairs, door-to-door visits with parents, billboards, radio ads, et cetera. Our priorities were to open schools safely, to keep students and staff and family safe, to focus on students' social, emotional, and academic well-being, and to get the resources for this. We were fighting for better ventilation, yes, for COVID testing, and for the tools that we needed.

And the same was true with parents. When President Trump left office, 46 percent of schools were open for in-person instruction. Between the American Rescue Plan and the work done by the CDC and other agencies, and by Governors and education officials, parents and educators, including our union, we went from 46 percent of schools open for in-person instruction in January 2021 to close to 97 percent open in May 2021.

Now, teachers want what students need. Let's work together now to help kids recover and leap academically. Let's expand community schools. Let's increase experiential learning and career-connected learning. Let's address educator burnout. Together, we can overcome the effects of this unprecedented pandemic, and I welcome your questions. And my apologies for being 9 seconds over.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Quite all right. Ms. Weingarten, I want to thank you for being here today and providing your testimony. I now recognize myself for questions. And I sort of apologize in advance because for the sake of time, I am going to have some questions where I really just want a "yes" or "no" answer, and I would appreciate it because we are really interested in process here. So "yes" or "no," did the AFT consult with the CDC on its February 2021, operational strategy for school reopening?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. We consulted with the CDC—

Dr. WENSTRUP. It is "yes" or "no," please.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Mr. Chair?

Dr. WENSTRUP. Let me ask the questions, please.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Sure.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I am respectfully asking you just answer the answer "yes" or "no" as I am going through the process. My next question is since you did consult with them, what did that consultation look like?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Oh, I see what you are saying. I am sorry, sir.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Yes. What did the consultation look like? Did the AFT first engage the CDC or did the CDC reach out to you?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. So, what essentially happened, sir, was that we were talking to the Biden transition team before he was sworn into office.

Dr. WENSTRUP. OK.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. And we——

Dr. WENSTRUP. Did they reach out to you or——

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Yes, they reached out. No, the Biden transition team reached out to us, and——

Dr. WENSTRUP. OK. Did that include the next CDC director——

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Not——

Dr. WENSTRUP [continuing]. Or anybody who went to work for CDC?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. You know something? I don't want to speculate. There were lots of meetings with lots of people on Zoom.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Fair enough. Fair enough.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. So, I don't know. I just don't know.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I get that. I understand that.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. But what——

Dr. WENSTRUP. When was the first time you engaged with CDC in any way, shape, or form directly?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. The first time——

Dr. WENSTRUP. Yes.

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. Was when they asked us to do the Zoom. I think the first time. Look, I am 65 years old. I don't remember everything anymore.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Me, too.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I am sorry. I think the first time was, remember the President was——

Dr. WENSTRUP. I guess really the only question is——

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I think it was about——

Dr. WENSTRUP [continuing]. Did they reach out to you, or did you reach out to them because I know they asked for guidance from many organizations.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Right, they reached out. They reached out. My recollection is that they set up this January 29——

Dr. WENSTRUP. OK.

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. Half an hour conference call.

Dr. WENSTRUP. OK.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. That is my recollection.

Dr. WENSTRUP. And again, "yes" or "no," did that include any direct interaction with CDC Director Walensky?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Meaning, did I talk to her directly?

Dr. WENSTRUP. You or your staff?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. That day, we talked to her directly.

Dr. WENSTRUP. OK. And so that was via Zoom at that time?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Right.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Later on, were there emails, phone calls?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I think there were a couple of phone calls, but what there also were, and I wanted to just correct the record on this, sir. What you may not have asked us for is on March 23, 2021, we actually had several public letters with the CDC, including March 23, 2021, where we actually talked about how we understood their change in terms of social distancing to three feet. So, we had several public letters to the CDC because we wanted to be transparent of everything that was going on.

Dr. WENSTRUP. So again, "yes" or "no," but did AFT ever provide suggested revisions to the CDC's operational strategy regarding

school closures or re-openings? Did you suggest revisions to their operational strategy?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. What we suggested, sir, was ideas.

Dr. WENSTRUP. OK. Your letter to the—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. They asked us for ideas.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Your letter to the Subcommittee said that the AFT proposed a handful of edits to the operational strategy. Is that right?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. What happened was there was one particular edit that they accepted. There were several different ideas that we proposed. The edit that they accepted was in the, if I may explain or no?

Dr. WENSTRUP. Yes. Go ahead.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. They asked us in the January 29th meeting and, from your document request, as you know, we provided documents, including all the emails back and forth between and amongst staff, our staff. They asked us for—

Dr. WENSTRUP. Well, excuse me. I want to get to the point, I guess. We know, two of the proposed changes.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Right.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Work from home options for teachers with high-risk conditions, and that if a new variant arose, that the guidance may need to be changed.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Well—

Dr. WENSTRUP. So, with that, and again, “yes” or “no,” were these proposals accepted by the CDC?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Well, the one proposal that was accepted, if I may explain, during the meeting on the 29th, we raised several different issues. We had seen all the former—

Dr. WENSTRUP. Were they accepted or not?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. What was—

Dr. WENSTRUP. It is a simple question.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Right.

Dr. WENSTRUP. When you made these proposals, the two I suggested, were they accepted by the CDC?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. First off, the second proposal was not made on January 29th.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I didn’t say that.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Sorry. The first proposal about at-risk immunocompromised workers, and not that simply that they would work at home but there would be accommodations for people who are at risk. That proposal was accepted.

Dr. WENSTRUP. OK. Now, you have answered my question. Thank you.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Sorry.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Yes.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I am just slow.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Well, and then the other, if a new variant arose that the guidance may need to be changed, and then really like, what else did AFT propose? I mean, I mentioned those two that I know. Were there other proposals that weren’t accepted?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Yes, several.

Dr. WENSTRUP. And the proposal about a new variant arising that the guidance may need to be changed, was that accepted?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. So, what we asked for was because there were new variants that were starting to happen.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Right. I understand. We all know there were new variants. I am asking—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. So, we said—

Dr. WENSTRUP [continuing]. Was the proposal accepted?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Yes.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you. So, before the operational strategy was finished, AFT advocated for a school closure trigger. That is the word in your documents. On January 29, 2021, in notes prepared for you before a call with the CDC, your staff recommended pushing the CDC for a trigger, stating, “We need an objective metric for closure,” dot, dot, dot, “triggers.” Then on February 11, 2021, following the need to push on a closure trigger, a member of the AFT staff emails Director Walensky directly and says, “We must, however, urge inclusion of clear closure triggers in the imminent guidance.” Again, on February 11, 2021, in an email from your staff they state, “Our emphasis will follow Randi’s statement pushing on needing a closure trigger.” Then, in a February 12, 2021, email from you to Members, you mentioned the CDC did not install a trigger stating, “While the CDC guidance does not contain a closure trigger, the guidance indicates schools may temporarily close to in-person learning.” In that same newsletter in bold font, the CDC is not mandating the reopening of schools. Why was that in bold? Why was that to be emphasized?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. So, which of these questions do you want me to answer?

Dr. WENSTRUP. Well, I gave statements that we had documents on.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Right. Mm-hmm.

Dr. WENSTRUP. What I am asking is, why was that statement in bold? The statement that says, “The CDC is not mandating the reopening of schools.” Why would that be in bold?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I have no idea.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you. Usually, it means some type of emphasis, I would think, but you don’t recall. That is fine.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I mean, what—

Dr. WENSTRUP. By this point though, schools—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Sir, what I did was, if I may, the document I did write was our press release that day, which you are not referring to, where I said that the CDC has met fear with evidence, and that we were embarrassed of the fact that they had clear science-backed evidence so that we could actually reopen schools more forcefully than had happened before.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Yes. By this point, schools had been shown to not be a driver of community transmission. Children were not nearly as at risk as the elderly. Children rarely transmitted to adults. But despite all this science, AFT still wanted to install some way to automatically close schools, which deviates from the narrative of doing everything we can to get them open.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Well, actually—

Dr. WENSTRUP. I haven’t asked you question.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Sorry.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I am sorry.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I am sorry.

Dr. WENSTRUP. At any point in 2020, after science making clear, did the AFT push for a trigger to open schools rather than the clear push to have a trigger to close school?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Yes, I did, sir. In fact, at the Cuomo Commission, which was in my testimony, the only commission that I actually sat on myself, we had triggers in that commission. And the reason we were asking for triggers, which is what the WHO had, about nine percent, Cuomo Commission had five to nine percent. The reason we were asking for triggers was for the same reasons as you were complaining about the CDC's February 2022 guidance as well because we thought that what they had done with these three different tranches was confusing and confusing to people. We actually just wanted—

Dr. WENSTRUP. So, I thank you. Was this Committee—

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. We wanted a number, because most of us are not scientists, so we wanted a number. And then, let me just address, if I may, what you just said about community versus school. I assume—

Dr. WENSTRUP. No, let me—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I am sorry.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I appreciate that, and we have your 25 pages that you sent us and all of that.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. No, but—

Dr. WENSTRUP. And we have got a lot of people to get on both sides of the aisle.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. OK. But you just raised the issue, sir, about school versus community, and I think you are talking about the two studies. Are you talking about the Wisconsin study and the Massachusetts study?

Mr. WENSTRUP. Well, we do have studies that we have documented.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Right.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I am not going to go into those right now, but the fact of the matter is in your communications that we have now, there is discussion to that regard. And so let me just say—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. May I clarify, sir?

Dr. WENSTRUP. Here is what I would like to do. You referenced the Cuomo Commission or whatever.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Mm-hmm.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I would like for you to present that to us because I could not find anything where teachers, or the AFT, at least in particular, through these communications with the CDC, and that is what we are talking about today. The communications with the CDC, not the Cuomo report.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. So, sir, you asked me the question about what the AFT did.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I am not asking you a question right now. Please. Please.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I am sorry.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I will let you finish. Today, I am asking you about your communications with the CDC. This is a process problem. This is a process concern. I didn't see anything in that that talked about opening. It was only metrics for closure. That is the

point. That is why I am asking those questions. So, if you did something later, not necessarily with the CDC, I would be glad to review that as part of the record for this body. I really would, and I think that that is fair.

So, at this point, I now recognize the Ranking Member, Dr. Ruiz from California, for his questions.

Dr. RUIZ. Thank you. Let me just take a step back as a public health expert, an emergency physician. The request to have vulnerable, immunocompromised workers have accommodation because they are at high risk from dying from COVID and we want to make sure that they live through COVID, seems reasonable to me. In fact, it is pretty good public health practice. The other request of keeping an open mind and not have a one-size-fits-all because we know how much that this virus changes, it could drastically change in its properties, and, therefore, we should be able to respond to new variants as they come also seems reasonable, seems pretty scientific in the sense that, you know, you don't want to have a one-size-fits-all because as we are realizing, these variants eventually may lead to a steady state, but they may also not.

And then, the third accusation here about wanting some kind of guidance to open or close, is the same thing that the economists were asking and all the other organizations in our society that didn't understand all these different nuances. They just wanted some basic help to understand when to open, when to close. Help us understand this. That was asked by so many in so many different sectors, not just for schools. But at the end of the day, the CDC didn't even accept that one. The CDC didn't even put triggers into opening or closing. So, what are we doing here?

So, we all agree that the pandemic took an enormous toll on our Nation's kids. Learning loss and the mental health crisis facing America's youth are serious issues caused by multiple dimensions of the pandemic, like a parent dying from COVID, and the suspension of in-person learning, done to slow the spread of a deadly novel virus, especially in high-risk communities. And as a father and a physician, I have a profound appreciation for the magnitude of these challenges and the importance of working together to address them through forward-looking policy solutions.

Instead of discussing policies that can help our students overcome learning loss or bring relief to the millions of kids and teens struggling with their mental health, we are here to examine partisan allegations by House Republicans seeking to vilify our Nation's dedicated educators. These incredible allegations will do nothing to prepare us for the next deadly airborne pandemic and keep our schools safely open while reducing its transmission.

Ms. Weingarten, the American Federation of Teachers represents 1.7 million teachers, nurses, and staff members, who keep our Nation's schools running. What steps have you and your members taken to accelerate learning and support students' mental health, which is what we need to be focusing on following the pandemic?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. So thank you, Dr. Ruiz. We have done many things over the course of the last 3 years to do that, and I would be happy to give you many of them. But my most recent speech on March 28th talked about two things that we have to do. No. 1, we have to meet the social and emotional needs of children. Children

are really suffering right now and have been for a very long time, but it has been escalated because of the pandemic. So, what we thought was, if we do things like we have done at Wolfe Academy in Baltimore, where we wrap services around schools, and as a result, this academy is now the second highest-performing school in Baltimore. If we do more of those kinds of community schools with wrapping services around—my understanding is that one of your witnesses in the last hearing talked about all of those things—we can actually accelerate learning by meeting the needs of kids.

And the second thing is, we have to bring joy back to schooling, and things like experiential learning. I started as a high school social studies teacher in a career tech school, Clara Barton High School in Brooklyn, New York. What we now know is that 94 percent of kids in career tech ed, graduate from high school. Seventy percent go to college. What is the difference? It is hands on. It is robotics. It is debate. It is all the things that we need to do in this new economy. Let's do more of that kind of experiential learning and do things that—

Dr. RUIZ. Thank you. Although, I know the Chairman is going to give me the same allotted time that he has, I just want to be more efficient in the questions.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Sorry.

Dr. RUIZ. While we sit here today under the false pretense of needing to protect kids from teachers' unions, House Republicans are trying to pull the wool over the American people's eyes. Look, as we speak, Speaker McCarthy is holding America's full faith and credit hostage so that he can jam through a budget with draconian cuts to programs that kids in each of our districts rely on for mental health and academic success. For example, House Republicans' extreme budget cuts would slash funding for the 988 Suicide Lifeline, leaving nearly 1 million people facing a suicide or mental health crisis unable to access support and stabilization services. House Republicans proposed this cut at a time when suicide is the second-leading cause of death among kids ages 10 to 14, and the third-leading cause of death among adolescents ages 15 to 24.

Ms. Weingarten, how would cutting funds for resources like the 988 Suicide Lifeline hamstring efforts to address the mental health crisis facing America's youth?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Look, we need these resources. Kids feel so anonymous right now, and they focus too much on their devices. We need places for kids to be able to talk, and these suicide lines—

Dr. RUIZ. So, removing that—

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. Are very helpful for kids.

Dr. RUIZ. Yes, in fact, it will make it worse. It will take the help away, and it will hurt our kids. House Republicans are also proposing a 22-percent cut to the Health Center Program, which would cutoff services to roughly 2 million of our Nation's most vulnerable patients and families, especially those who receive services through school-based health centers. For kids with less access to care, school-based health centers are a critical lifeline to primary care services, tooth and eye exams, mental and behavioral health counseling, and so much more. So, Ms. Weingarten, how does gutting funding for community health centers, including school-based

health centers, undermine children's health and educational outcomes?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Look, I very much appreciate, Dr. Ruiz, that I was asked to speak today and talk about what kids need, and talk about it in the context of what happened in COVID and going forward. All of what you said, we need these services for kids. Schools are centers of communities for our kids and our families, so we need these services connected to schools.

Dr. RUIZ. Well, you know, I totally agree, but while House Republicans continue to push an extreme agenda through hyper partisan investigations, Democrats will continue to put people over politics and develop meaningful solutions to the challenges facing America's kids. They need our help now with policies that will help improve their mental health and their academic success. Thank you. I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you, Dr. Ruiz. As Chair, I do have to comment. I am a physician also, and there were no partisan questions that I was asking you. I was asking you about process. That is what this hearing is about. This Committee is to address some of the many things that Dr. Ruiz was talking about. That is not what today was about. That is fine. If that is what you want to spend your time and maybe the whole dais on that side is going to talk about policy, politics, and things that we may debate. I didn't disagree with the guidelines that you recommended, as you inferred. That was not the case. I didn't disagree with them. I just asked about the process. These were guidelines you recommended. These were guidelines that were accepted.

I am just trying to go through the process so that we have a good process—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Mm-hmm.

Dr. WENSTRUP [continuing]. So that your voice is heard in the proper way and that we are using science and that the process is very clear from the beginning so the next time—the next time—we can do a good job. So, you can continue the policy debates, which we will have, but that is not what today's hearing was about.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Dr. Wenstrup—

Dr. WENSTRUP. And so, you will see from our side, we are going to ask about the process.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I am just trying to answer just like you want me to answer the questions you have asked—

Dr. WENSTRUP. I don't mind you answering his questions.

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. I was just answering questions Dr. Ruiz asked.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I don't mind you answering his questions. And he is right, I will give him the time that I took, and that is fair, and that is what I am trying to do, conduct a fair hearing. But this is about the process we are trying to understand because school closures had such a tremendous effect on our children. And so can we move forward some day and have a process that is very efficient, and that we can do it better because, let's face it, on both sides of the aisle, a lot of mistakes were made along the way.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I don't know if you have seen this book yet, Dr. Wenstrup.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Chairman Comer of the full Committee for his minutes of questions.

Chairman COMER. Thank you. On February 12, 2021, the Biden Administration released its first school reopening guidance, which, frankly, might be better described as school closing guidance since it recommended keeping 90 percent of America's schools closed. Documents and testimony gathered by this Committee show the CDC and AFT, American Federation of Teachers, worked closely on this guidance. Some of the AFT's suggestions were included nearly word for word by Director Walensky herself. In a transcribed interview, a career CDC official testified that this level of coordination was "uncommon." That is what we are here to find out, as the Chairman said. Why did AFT get uncommon access to the CDC and the Biden Administration? According to documents we reviewed, AFT first received a copy of the draft reopening guidance on January 27, 2021. Is that correct?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. No.

Chairman COMER. Do you know when you first got a copy of the guidance?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. According to the documents that we sent to you, we believe is that we got the draft guidance from NIOSH, which is a Committee within the CDC, as well as the CDC themselves—

Chairman COMER. OK.

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. After the conversation we had on January 29.

Chairman COMER. OK. And NIOSH is part of the CDC?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Correct.

Chairman COMER. All right. So—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I think you are looking at a document. Can I see the document you are looking at?

Chairman COMER. Well, we will get them to you. The draft guidance—

[Cross talking.]

Chairman COMER. No, listen. I am talking. I run a committee, too.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Sorry.

Chairman COMER. We are trying to work together. We have 5 minutes, so we are trying to get as much out as we can. This is very important. I have kids in the public school system, in a school system that was shut down longer than average in the state of Kentucky. It is bad. Parents are mad. Our kids are behind. We are trying to find answers. We want to prevent the problem in the future.

The draft guidance is marked pre-decisional and says please do not distribute, yet it was provided anyway. Now, do you know if any other groups the CDC consulted with received a copy of this guidance at the time?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I have no idea.

Chairman COMER. Do you know when the guidance was finally published?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I believe the guidance was published on February 12th.

Chairman COMER. When asked, is it common to send deliberative or pre-decisional guidances outside of the government to CDC partners? A career CDC scientist responded, “We may send summaries, like, the day before we are going to release something.” But the American Federation of Teachers got a full document, and you got it 2 weeks before according to our record. And——

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Do you want me to respond, sir, or no?

Chairman COMER. I will ask a question. Did AFT provide any draft language to the CDC for inclusion into this guidance before it was published?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. So, we had the meeting with the CDC on January 29. My recollection is that we got a draft of the guidance after that, even though I think the document that you are reading has another date on it.

Chairman COMER. Is it common for outside groups to send draft language to the CDC?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. What we did was we went through the areas that we raised because the presumption was, how do we reopen and keep schools open, and we talk about issues of immunocompromised adults, and the CDC says——

Chairman COMER. So, did the CDC accept any of the edits that you all proposed?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. The CDC asked for language on that, which we provided. So that one piece of language——

Chairman COMER. So, they accepted it. OK.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. So, they asked us for language on immunocompromised workers, and we presented that language to them.

Chairman COMER. So, during the interview with the CDC career employee, it was asked if between 2001 and 2021, had he ever incorporated edits or additions that came from an outside group, and the career scientist responded, “I don’t remember any assistance.” So, to summarize, AFT was provided with a full draft copy of the guidance 2 weeks before publication, suggested line-by-line edits.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. No, we did not, sir.

Chairman COMER. You did not?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. We did not suggest line-by-line edits to the document.

Chairman COMER. Well, do you remember how many edits that you suggested?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. We suggested concepts, sir, which we have submitted as part of the document request you asked. We suggested concepts, including robust testing.

Chairman COMER. Do you know how many edits were included?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. One. One.

Chairman COMER. Do you remember what that edit was?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. The reasonable accommodation issue. And then, in addition, about a week later when we were going back and forth with all of the groups, there were several other meetings with different groups and things like that, you saw and the Chairman just said this, the issue about having a review if there was a new variant. Someone had leaked language to either the *New York Times* or *The Washington Post*, and so that is when we suggested that if there is a new variant, there should be a review. And there

were variants. My recollection is there were variants at that time. So, those were the two things that we suggested in the 38 pages that showed up in the guidance.

Chairman COMER. Well, I will yield back, Mr. Chairman, and say that it is unusual for a political union to have such a role in scientific guidance process, and hopefully we can find more answers in this hearing. I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize the Ranking Member of the full Committee, Mr. Raskin, from Maryland.

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Chairman, thank you. COVID-19 is the deadliest, most disruptive public health crisis we have seen in more than a century. It has already killed 1,129,573 Americans and remains the third-leading cause of death behind heart disease and cancer. Five people in my family have COVID right now—two sisters, two brothers-in-law, and a 5-year-old nephew—And yet, this default on America's debt plan would actually try to claw back money that has already been appropriated for combating COVID-19 and promoting public health. So, I have been to some weird hearings in this Congress, Mr. Chairman, but this one might be the weirdest because it is convened in order to accuse a Federal agency of the crime of consulting with American citizens.

Ms. Weingarten, you are the elected president of 1.7 million members of the American Federation of Teachers. You represent double the number of people any of us do and definitely a lot more teachers, and I need some enlightenment right now because I am baffled. As a Member of the Select Subcommittee on COVID in the last Congress, I was involved in trying to address this plague when it started, and I remember this specific debate very precisely.

So, let's talk about process. No leader was more outspoken or more forceful than you were, Ms. Weingarten, in not only demanding but developing specific strategies to safely reopen America's schools. I remember your school reopening plan developed with health and education experts released in April 2020. I don't know if that is the one I remember. It is the first one I ever saw. It was in the middle of all the terror and panic when Donald Trump had no plan at all and was still spreading disinformation about COVID-19 disappearing by Easter, and encouraging people to try quack medical cures and aggressively defending his friends in the Chinese Communist Party.

In July, I remember the effort you led with the NEA, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the school superintendents to advocate for safe resumption of in-person school at the start of the 2021-2022 school year, and you gave a specific blueprint to reopen schools in November. And you continued all of this even after the CDC released its operational strategy in February of the next year.

And when I went back to Google this to confirm my memory, I found nothing but a bunch of op-eds you wrote demanding school re-openings across the country, countless speeches and articles about your advocacy. Here is one I found in *New York Times* about you with a headline, and I would like to submit it for the record, "The Union Leader Who Says She Can Get Teachers Back Into the Schools." I don't know if you remember that one from February 8, 2021. It is about how you were on the front lines of saying let's get

the kids back into schools. So, I would like to submit that for the record, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. RASKIN. Look, my question for you is, why are you of all people being scapegoated today by the Republicans for doing the exact opposite of what you were actually doing during all of that time? How did you get my friends mad?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Look, maybe it is because we tried to do something that nobody else was trying to do. We asked the President of the United States, the then President. I am sorry, Congressman Raskin. We spent every day from February on trying to get schools open. We knew that remote education was not a substitute for opening schools, but we also knew that people had to be safe. And maybe it is because I live in New York City. I live near a hospital. Every other minute there was an ambulance. There was terror.

Our members were terrified, others were terrified, and what we were simply looking for was clear scientific guidance. And when we couldn't get it, we did it ourselves and we worked with doctors, and we worked with others, and we just tried to get it out there—

Mr. RASKIN. OK. Now, all of your efforts took place without any support from the Federal Government.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. None.

Mr. RASKIN. On the contrary, President Trump never produced a school reopening plan while he did produce the worst record of per capita civilian deaths of any developed country in the world. Education Secretary DeVos never offered any guidance—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. None.

Mr. RASKIN [continuing]. For a safe return to school and continued to undermine public schools in countless ways. So, how did the chaos and recklessness in the Trump Administration undermine your efforts to advocate for a safe nationwide reopening of the schools?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. What essentially happened was that because it was such chaos and such conflicting information, and because at the beginning of the pandemic so many of, frankly, our activists who were in schools had died, people were fearful. And so, what we thought to do was, how could we make very tangible layered mitigation so that people saw ways of reopening schools. I agree with Dr. Wenstrup that when schools had layered mitigation, they were safer than in the communities, but we were looking for that layered mitigation to keep our kids and their teachers and their bus drivers safe, and that was what we were trying to do. We knew that remote education was not a substitute. We knew that kids were not eating the way they needed to. We knew that adolescents were not developing the way they needed to. That is why we need to do it.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you very much. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you. I now recognize Ms. Malliotakis from New York for 5 minutes of questions.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the teachers, the bus drivers, paraprofessionals, who have joined us today. And speaking with the teachers, the principals, and the parents in my district, they think it was a grave disservice that schools were closed for as long as they were, in some cases up to 2 years. Your union, as we have found through the Committee's investigations, undoubtedly played a role in ensuring that these

schools would remain closed for longer than they should have. And we saw indoor dining and bars operating at 50-percent capacity. Schools were still closed. We saw private schools open. The public schools were still closed. While countries in Europe, such as Sweden and Germany, would reopen their schools just months after the virus pandemic began, it would take almost 2 years, as I said, including my district in New York City.

We now know that in February 2021, the CDC would allow for the American Federation of Teachers unprecedented access to help draft guidance and would adopt, in some cases, almost line-by-line AFT edits, including direct language to install a trigger, which was mentioned earlier, ensuring that schools remain closed and making it more difficult as possible to resume in-person learning. It is no secret that your union, your local affiliates spent \$20 million on political donations with nearly all of the funds going to Democrats and liberal groups in the 2021 cycle as the debate about reopening schools raged.

And I think a question that we have is whether you had this type of access because of those contributions. We don't see the parents being asked their opinions or the private schools being asked their opinions on school reopenings. In fact, I know my Principals Union also was supporting schools to reopen after a reasonable period of time. But after lobbying for and securing \$122 billion in the American Rescue Plan to safely reopen schools, after \$60 billion had already been allocated through the CARES Act, the AFT still continued to push for schools to be closed.

Private schools opened a year earlier than the public schools did in New York City. We got \$190 billion to reopen schools safely, but guess what? As of November, do you know what percentage of that funding was actually used—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I know—

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS [continuing]. Of that \$190 billion?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I know that in New York, in September 2020, because as you know quite well—we both are from the same city—

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Mm-hmm.

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. That we opened, and the AFT and the Principals Union, and the then mayor did open every single school in 2020. I don't know how much money—

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. But in the fall of 2020, yes, in the fall of 2020—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. No, no, no, in September 2020, every single school was opened.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Yes, but the triggers were put in place that, you know, you had a couple of cases and the whole entire schools were shut down. But my question is, you lobbied for the \$190 billion in the CARES package. You actually blame Republicans for voting against the American Rescue Plan because you needed that money so badly to reopen the schools, but guess what? Only 15 percent of that money was spent as of November. So that means you didn't need that money, and Republicans actually had been vindicated in the sense that we were right. All this inflationary spending, it actually didn't even go to what it was supposed to go to. But I will say this, the damage has been irreparable to our children,

right? And in New York City, which you and I care about very much, 50 percent are now failing their reading exams. Seventy percent are failing their math exams. One in three children, K through three, can't read at their grade level. New York is now lowering their test standards as a result, all right?

And this is, by the way, a state where we spend more per student than any other state in the country, over \$25,000 per student, and we are seeing these horrible results, and I think the school closures had a lot to do with it. Obesity is another problem we are seeing, mental health. You know the suicide statistics. This tweet, you even acknowledged that remote learning—I can see you squinting. You can't see—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Sorry.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS [continuing]. But that is all right. And you tweeted out in 2023, "What we have seen in public education is that technology can't replace teachers. Remote education didn't work in part because you have to have relationships. You have to build trust."

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Yes.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. But yet your union continued to advocate for these schools to have triggers to close, to keep them closed unlike private schools. And by the way, some of that money, that 15 percent that was spent from that \$190 billion, it was not spent to reopen schools. It was spent for CRT, for implicit bias, for anti-racism training, for restorative justice programs, especially in cities like ours in New York City. Are you disappointed that the funding that was meant to reopen schools was spent on programs like that instead?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Well, first of all, let me just say that I, over and over again, as Representative Raskin said, wanted schools to reopen and wanted them to reopen safely, and there were moneys that we used in terms of that. We needed far more money in terms of testing and moneys that were used in terms of that. The guidance was about the presumption and the guidance, both the Cuomo Commission guidance as well as this, because the Cuomo Commission guidance was what governed New York City, and that guidance was about reopening schools. As to the money spent for programs, my understanding is that under the American Rescue Plan, 20 percent of that money was for programmatic work, and one of the pieces of programmatic work was curriculum, and another piece was how do we help address the emotional and social needs of kids. And that is what the money was used for.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. OK. So, you still to this day believe it was a good use of money to use that COVID that was supposed to be meant for reopening schools for CRT and other type of training?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Well, Congresswoman, I don't—

Dr. WENSTRUP. The gentlelady's time has expired.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. We don't teach CRT—

Dr. WENSTRUP. The gentlelady's time has expired.

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. In elementary or middle schools.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Mrs. Dingell from Michigan for 5 minutes of questions.

Mrs. DINGELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witness for her attendance today. I am concerned about this hear-

ing. I, quite frankly, am here to learn. I share all my colleagues' concerns on both sides of the aisle about the impact of this pandemic on our children. I just do not believe we should be scapegoating unfairly. We all support our teachers, and I think that there is very unfair scapegoating going on here.

I regularly met with teachers throughout my district, both private schools and public schools, and to a person, while many of them were fearful about not infecting their kids, the teachers wanted to reopen the schools. And I want to remind this Committee that Director Walensky was questioned regarding this topic at a March 2022 hearing before the Subcommittee under Mr. Clyburn. In response to questions from then Ranking Member Steve Scalise, Director Walensky noted that the CDC consulted with over 50 organizations prior to releasing the school reopening guidance, and that this ranged from parents groups to superintendents to boards of education as well as AFT. And my understanding is that responses received thus far from recipients, the Chairman's March 28 letters confirm this assertion.

Director Walensky also explained that the CDC allowed the groups more time than usual to offer feedback due to the importance of schools reopening safely. She noted that within months of the guidance being issued, the percent of schools that safely returned to in-person learning rose from 46 to 60 percent. And I will remind my colleagues that in January 2021, roughly half of school districts were open—that is when President Biden took over—and by the end of May, over 95 percent of schools were offering in-person learning.

And candidly, I don't personally think the input provided by AFT and that was adopted by the CDC was unreasonable. The first proposed edits sought to address an issue that the CDC's first draft did not mention at all, which was how to accommodate immunocompromised teachers when returning to in-person learning. My colleagues' accusations aside, I struggled to see how that was unreasonable. Our Nation had entered a new phase in the recovery of the pandemic, or we have now. Look around. We are in this Committee room without masks, largely thanks to the efforts of the Biden Administration.

But remember where we were then. We have to keep in mind that it was January and February 2021. The first vaccines had only been authorized for emergency use a few weeks prior. At this point, there was not enough vaccine supply to meet demand, and only 23 million doses had been administered in the United States. Meanwhile, the death toll was over 400,000. Under these conditions, to suggest that immunocompromised teachers might require some degree of workplace accommodation not only does that not seem offensive. It seems compassionate and fair as anyone who is immunocompromised with loved ones can attest.

And the second edit that they proposed, I think is a matter of common sense. They suggested that if a new variant were to emerge and cause high community transmission. Mr. Chairman, I know that there is a difference for you between school and community, but communities do impact what is happening in the schools, and if it was more deadly, that we would want to revisit our public

health guidance. It didn't say close the schools again or keep the schools closed. So, I don't think that that was unreasonable.

And I am also going to remind people that at the time in late 2020 and early 2021, schools had a lack of resources. I was on the phone every day finding masks and gloves and tests for my teachers. There was chronic underinvestment in schools and education that resulted in overcrowded classrooms. There were windows that wouldn't open, poor ventilation systems that were incompatible with COVID safety measures, and the rollout of the vaccine was just beginning. So, you know, and I am going to remind you what Dr. Scott Gottlieb, who was the former commissioner of FDA under President Trump said. Kids are less susceptible to the infection and less likely to transmit it, but less susceptible doesn't mean they are not susceptible. And at that time, he agreed that the country needed to take measures to make sure that the coronavirus didn't become an epidemic in children.

So, can I ask one question or am I out of time, Mr. Chair?

Dr. WENSTRUP. Go ahead.

Mrs. DINGELL. So, despite knowing the challenges teachers were facing and acknowledging the pandemic's health risks, especially in hotspots, Ms. Weingarten, were you ever given guidance by the Trump Administration on how to safely return to in-person learning?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. No, and that is part of the reason why we kept on pushing at it. And, frankly, between the Rockefeller Foundation, Dr. Shaw, who I penned an op-ed with about the need for surveillance testing, that we could reopen schools with surveillance testing even before the vaccines and with the work with the Cuomo Administration, then Governor Cuomo, and actually worked with Larry Hogan, then Governor Hogan. We were working with Governors; we were working with superintendents because no one at the Trump Administration would work with us in terms of how to reopen school safely.

Mrs. DINGELL. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Dr. Miller-MEEKS from Iowa for 5 minutes of questions.

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me just remind everyone in this room in this Committee that the vaccines that we have touted numerous times on both sides of the aisle were developed under the Trump Administration and were available in November 2020. Let me also say, Ms. Weingarten, on April—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Not for teachers.

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. Ms. Weingarten, I recall—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I am sorry.

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS [continuing]. Very distinctly and was in those hearings as the teachers union lobbied in order to get teachers moved to the front of the line for vaccines. On April 19, 2023, your council on your behalf sent the Select Subcommittee a 10-page letter attempting to rebut previous work on this Subcommittee and statements made in previous letters. I am sure other Members will touch on various aspects of these claims, but I want to focus on one in particular.

On page 4 of your letter, you roundabout say that the American Federation of Teachers has scientific expertise and is, therefore,

well-positioned to opine on science-based school guidance. So, on your science-based expertise, can you tell me, were you aware of publications by the American Journal of Pediatrics in the summer of 2020 that indicated that children had very little to no transmission of COVID-19? I presented that to our state legislature as a State Senator for us to reopen schools in Iowa, which we reopened half and half in the August 2020. Did your scientific experts present to you that, as June 2020, among 1.8 million children in this age group, do you know how many died from COVID?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. So, sitting here right now today, Doctor, I don't have that number in my head.

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. Zero.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I do know—

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. On July 20, 2020, Swedish and Finnish public health agencies issued a public report comparing the two countries, concluding that closure or not of schools has little, if any, impact on the number of laboratory-confirmed cases in school-aged children. Did your scientific experts provide that data to you?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Well, Doctor or Representative, what we were presented with was documentation, including from the Pediatricians Association, and including from doctors like Dr. Kelly Henning, who worked—

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. So, did they present you data that showed children were a very low transmission, very low risk of death?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. We knew that children—

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. Did they present to you data from other countries that showed continuing in-person schooling was, in fact, safe for children and save for teachers?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Well, we were presented with data, thank God, that showed that kids had less COVID and have less—

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. Yes, COVID was not influenza, and I can certainly understand education—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. But no, no, we totally know it was—

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. I reclaim my time, ma'am.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I am sorry.

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. I understand that, you know, the education system has a great deal of expertise with influenza, and the challenges of influenza, and the contagiousness among children. However, influenza is not COVID. Did your experts present to you August 7, 2020 the CDC published an MMWR study on COVID-NET data from March 1, 2020 through July 25, 2020, which clearly established the low risk to American children? In the analysis, children comprised less than 0.1 percent of hospitalizations and 0.0005 percent of associate COVID-19 mortality.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. The data—

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. Did your experts present that data to you to be able to develop your assessment for whether or not schools should reopen?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. So, may I answer?

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. I am waiting.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. So, what our experts showed us, and that is why I was giving the names of our experts, is that they showed us the two reports, the one from Massachusetts and the one from Wisconsin, and we also saw the reports from the other countries—I

don't know if I saw all of them that you saw—that showed that when you had this layered mitigation, there was much less transmission in schools—

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. I think—

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. That we saw. And that is part of the reason why we were confident that if we had the layered mitigation—

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. The layered mitigation was in relationship—

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. That we could do this.

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS [continuing]. With influenza, and I would say that—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Well, there was a Wisconsin study—

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS [continuing]. Perhaps in the future we could get different experts, because what I am doing is, as a physician, as seven physicians on this panel, challenging what your experts said.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Well, look—

Dr. Miller-Meeks . And as we continue to learn from COVID-19—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Doctor, I—

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS [continuing]. What the medical facts were.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. OK.

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. You know, these facts are non-negotiable, ma'am. The fact is, schools were relatively safe places for both students and educators.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Well, they were—

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. These are scientific questions that a scientific organization should be able to study and answer, and the AFT is not a scientific organization. Not only am I doctor, I am a former director of the State Department of Public Health, and I know how important it is to work with stakeholders to bring people to consensus, but I would say that the AFT was out of its league in this regard. The effect on children has been vast and to have no remorse on closing schools and keeping them closed for the length of the time is unconscionable. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Mr. Mfume from Maryland for 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. MFUME. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I want to thank Ranking Member Ruiz for having us here. My thanks to you, Ms. Weingarten. On a point of order, let me just point out the fact that we claim to love teachers, we claim to care about teachers, but we don't really embrace teachers. We talk the talk, but we never walk the walk. And this Congress and previous Congresses are replete with instances where that has been shown to be true.

Now, I just want to point out the presence of a teacher who is here before she slips out of this door, and some of you will recognize her. She was the 2015 JFK Teacher of the Year. A year later, she was selected as the National Teacher of the Year from Connecticut, and we are happy that she is a member of our ranks and a representative from Waterbury, Jahana Hayes. Thank you very much for being here.

[Applause.]

Mr. MFUME. So let us not get it twisted. If teachers are important, we ought to act like it, and we ought to stop all of this castigating, finger pointing, accusations, innuendo about what went wrong. All kinds of stuff went wrong during the pandemic. Nobody got it right because we were moving in real time. I serve as a member of the business committee, the Small Business Committee. Do you know how many loans went out that shouldn't have gone out and we are trying to reclaim them now because people just in real time weren't doing what they had to do and how many accusations come out of that? We just can't continue down this track.

And, you know, I just don't like angry people who use bully pulpits to make other people look small. If there are some issues and there are some complaints, that is fine, but the way we present what we are doing underscores really who we are, or, more importantly, who we are not. Now, my teacher taught me do unto others as you would have them do unto you. I wouldn't want to be a witness that just got the you-know-what smacked around out of them for coming here to testify to this group.

Now, this pandemic has had a real and lasting consequence, we all agree, on our students, on our teachers, on our Nation, and there is still a lot that needs to be done to make sure and ensure that we are making up for lost classroom time. That is really the bottom line here. How do we make up and catch up, and how do we stop pointing fingers. Getting families the support they needed then and need now is important, and then helping schools to recover, and to rebuild, and to help students get back on track. But the solution to these issues does not lie in politically charged hearings that mislead the American people and have nothing, nothing to do with advancing the protection of children's health, their well-being, or their education.

So, I want to go back and reiterate and be deliberately redundant of what my colleague Mrs. Dingell brought out and correct, again, this testimony by reminding us that the transcript of the hearing that took place 1 year ago in this Committee, when Ms. Walensky came and testified under oath to this Committee and was questioned by Members of the Committee about consultation. She said they consulted with over 50 organizations, not just with the American Federation of Teachers, 50 organizations, dozens of stakeholders, including dozens of parent groups, and school boards, and superintendents, and National Associations of School Nurses, and others to come up with the guidance that we are here talking about today. They didn't just go to AFT and say, what do you think. If they had done that, everybody would be correct here in lambasting what took place. They sought to get the broadest amount of information they could, and that is reasonable, very reasonable. In fact, it is something that we expect will happen because we want great input.

It is also startling to me that even as this Committee is holding this hearing today supposedly—well, let me take that back because I don't want to judge their motives, anybody's motives—but as we are holding this hearing today out of concern for America's children, some on that committee are threatening to defund the American education system in the upcoming budget. Now, I don't understand that. Is that a sleight of hand or is that deliberate? Budget

cuts, 22 percent totaling \$3.1 billion in different areas of education that will affect children are all under assault.

So, I am glad that you are here, Ms. Weingarten. I suspect that you know that nobody is going to sort of treat you with kid gloves, but continue to tell the truth over and over and over again, and in the end, we hope and pray that the truth will win out.

Dr. WENSTRUP. The gentleman's time has expired. I now recognize Mrs. Lesko from Arizona for 5 minutes of questions.

Mrs. LESKO. Thank you, Mr. Chair. First, I do want to thank all the teachers throughout the United States for their work educating our children. It is really important. I remember some of my teachers very vividly that taught me things. I think what we are here for today is to try to analyze what we did right, what we did wrong. I am very thankful that we are all here today. We don't have masks. We are not sitting apart, you know, six feet apart from each other, so I am thankful for that. But I do think that we did some things wrong, and one of those things that I believe we did wrong was keeping schools closed for too long. I have grandkids. I remember when they were sitting in front of their laptops at home, and my daughter was trying to work remotely and help teach the kids remotely. It was insane, quite frankly. It was a very difficult situation.

The thing that I don't understand, it is confusing to me, and so some of my questions are going to relate around this, is in many states, like the state of Arizona, the schools opened up, and they had not teachers there in the schools, but they had lower-wage school employees that would watch the kids on their laptops being taught by teachers remotely. And that really puzzles me because I am, like, well why would it be that these employees are less susceptible to COVID-19 than teachers? Maybe you can help me understand that Ms. Weingarten.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. So, thank you, Representative. First off, that puzzles me too. We don't represent every jurisdiction. We have 3,500 locals, and one of the things that has not come through in my testimony yet is we represent 200,000 nurses and healthcare practitioners in hospitals. I think we are the fastest-growing healthcare union as well as the teachers union. And so, one of the things that we tried to do in the jurisdictions that we were in, and you saw me recognize a bus driver and a nurse, was it was about all of us and trying to make sure that we were all going to either be opened and try to get more and more kids, or, you know, what was going on, not to separate out two classifications of people. So, I saw that in remarks that you had made earlier, and it didn't happen in the jurisdictions that we were in.

Mrs. LESKO. It didn't make any sense to me, yes.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. And I completely agree with you that the work that people tried to do in terms of juggling remote was terrible. And that is part of the reason from April 2020, we were trying to find what we needed to do in terms of safety guidance to reopen schools.

Mrs. LESKO. Thank you. I just have to—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Sorry.

Mrs. LESKO. I only have a minute 44 seconds left. The other thing that puzzled me is that a lot of other establishments were

open. Grocery stores were open. Walmart was open. I assume that teachers went to grocery stores, and they went to Walmart, so why could they go there and not go to the classroom? That I don't understand.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Well, part of the problem was, unlike in Europe, and I wish I had the moment to answer this question. Unlike in Europe, the economy was prioritized in so many different places in America—gyms, bars, restaurants—and look, was a Hobson's Choice. I think the Congressman Mfume said it. It was a Hobson's Choice. But the difference between schools and a Walmart is that kids were in school all day.

Mrs. LESKO. Yes, it still mystifies me. The other thing we have already brought up is about the science. Were you aware that Sweden, they had no closures of daycares or schools and that zero Swedish children died?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. What I am aware of is that Sweden and Denmark and other places in Europe prioritized the reopening of schools and had the layered mitigation that we were championing. So, they prioritized over ours—

Mrs. LESKO. I have one last question in the 14 seconds I have left. I am a Member of Congress that sits on two committees that deal with the CDC. I don't have a direct number to Director Walensky. Do you?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I do not talk to representatives—

Mrs. LESKO. Do you have a—

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. Of the government.

Mrs. LESKO. Do you have a direct number to Director Walensky?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Do I have Director Walensky's direct number?

Mrs. LESKO. Yes.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Yes, I have Director Walensky's direct number.

Mrs. LESKO. Well, hopefully she will give it to me, too. Thank you, and I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Ms. Ross from North Carolina for 5 minutes of questions.

Ms. ROSS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Instead of using today's hearing to meaningfully examine the challenges facing America's kids in the wake of the pandemic, this Select Subcommittee is continuing a partisan crusade against our Nation's educators. Allegations here are just not credible, and they polarized pandemic oversight and don't do anything to help overcome learning loss, bring relief to kids struggling with mental health issues, or better prepare us for future health crises. Ms. Weingarten, my colleagues have leveled some mischaracterizations against you and your organization. Is there anything you would like to say to correct the record?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Thank you, Congresswoman. No. 1, the guidance that the CDC did in February and that they then revised in March, and they, again, continued to revise, the presumption of that guidance was to reopen. There was not a presumption to close. The presumption was to reopen with those safeguards. And what has happened in a lot of places, and that is why I raised the Cuomo Commission because that was the only commission that I served on personally, was that there were ways of trying to have this layered

mitigation, which is why schools had a lower transmission rate than communities.

That is what we saw in the Wisconsin study. That is what we saw in the Massachusetts study. That is what we saw in San Antonio. That is what we saw in New York City when it had surveillance testing. We were trying to see what was an invisible disease and where people were still getting hurt and killed. And so ultimately, our goal was to have clear guidance so that teachers in classrooms, bus drivers—the school nurses knew—but most of us did not know what this meant, and we needed clear guidance from the scientists that we could follow because what we also saw, and I will stop here, is that the more people we got back into school, the more they were comfortable doing it.

And so from June 2020 poll to our February 2021 poll, we saw an increase of about 20 points of our members. The more they were there, the more they were comfortable with the layered mitigation, the more they were comfortable being in school teaching because they wanted to be in school teaching. They knew that remote was not right for our kids. We knew we had to be in school. We just wanted to be safe. So, thank you.

Ms. ROSS. Well, thank you, and I also want to note that in some of the Scandinavian countries that have been mentioned, there was also universal childcare—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Correct.

Ms. ROSS [continuing]. Universal healthcare—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Correct.

Ms. ROSS [continuing]. Paid sick leave, and many of the things that our teachers do not have in this country.

I would like to enter into the record a letter the Select Committee received from the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights condemning today's hearing and the efforts to smear Ms. Weingarten while ignoring the real challenges that we are facing post-pandemic, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. WENSTRUP. No objection.

Ms. ROSS. Thank you. This hearing has been way too partisan under the guise of protecting children. At the same time we are having it, we are talking about a debt limit bill that would have dangerous cuts to programs that protect the health and well-being of some of our Nation's most vulnerable kids. For example, Speaker McCarthy's budget proposal includes a 22-percent cut across the board for domestic and social programs, including Head Start, which promotes school readiness for tens of thousands of underserved infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. My mom was a preschool teacher. North Carolina is a leader in early education.

With the 30 seconds that we have left, Ms. Weingarten, what kinds of services does Head Start provide that is so crucial for the next generation?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Separate and apart from the custodial issues that are so important when so many women are going to work, separate from that, development of kids. Kids' minds are so nimble when they are 3, 4, and 5 years old, and what Head Start does is Head Start helps create that development and helps create confidence for kids to be able to actually make those connections and

start applying knowledge and being confident about themselves and their well-being.

Ms. ROSS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Mr. Cloud from Texas for 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. CLOUD. Hello. Thanks for being here. I want to just first echo the Chairman's statements from the beginning and just the general sentiment of this Committee that, of course, we support and are so thankful for the teachers throughout our Nation, who, through a pandemic, worked very hard to get kids and to keep kids going. Now, we have learned a lot of course since, and my wife is also a teacher, and whether pandemic or not, there is a lot of work that gets done. I have seen the late hours. I have seen the papers being graded, and we are so thankful for teachers.

I do want to talk about the concern that some of the guidance was politicized. Very early on, we knew that COVID-19 didn't have the same effect on children as it did as adults, especially vulnerable populations. Early data said that children were unlikely to suffer serious illness or death as a result of COVID-19. Children comprised, I should say, 0.01 percent of hospitalizations and 0.0005 percent of COVID-19 deaths in a study published by the CDC. And we are talking about data as early as March through July 2020.

In June 2020, the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommended that all policy considerations for the opening school year should begin with the goal of having students presently in school. When former President Trump similarly pushed for schools to be reopened in the fall of 2022, the ATF activated their membership, and I believe you said that it was too little too late at the time. In February 2021, the AFT celebrated the CDC's release of the final operational strategy, and it was said, "For the first time since the start of the pandemic, a rigorous roadmap based on science that members can use to fight for safe reopening." And Director Walensky assured the public that the operational strategy was developed by medical experts and free of political meddling.

Just before the guidance came out, of course, you had communication and provide guidance when it came to some of the logistics of reopening. I don't take issue with that. I do find it odd that part of the communication was scheduling the communication and the concern that the union and the Biden Administration might stand apart from a messaging standpoint, and the need to make sure that you are coordinating—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I don't—

Mr. CLOUD [continuing]. In regards of a political statement.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I don't—

Mr. CLOUD. Are you a medical expert?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I am not a medical expert.

Mr. CLOUD. And I wanted to bring your attention to this because I found this enlightening as well. This is your State of the Union report?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Which one? Which year? We do many.

Mr. CLOUD. 2020 to 2022.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. OK.

Mr. CLOUD. So, I am sure you are familiar with this. It reads with all the passion and gusto of a political manifesto. There is ev-

everything in here on thoughts from promoting government-run healthcare, inflation, immigration, abortion, voting and election law, efforts to promoting unionization, not just for teachers, but for all industry, Second Amendment issues, weighing in on the war of Ukraine. I was also struck by what wasn't in here. The word "political" appears 29 times and almost always in the context of dollars spent on campaigns. "Reading" only appears 16 times and usually in the context of promoting books that many parents are concerned about being in their schools. "Science" only appears 5 or 6 times and related to COVID. "Math" only appears once, and it was at a time when the American Federation of Teachers was advocating against a community that wanted to streamline and focus funding on math, reading, science, and social studies.

It went on to talk about how some of the money is being used. Colorado used solidary funds to maintain the Democratic majority in the Colorado House of Representatives, the Florida Education Association, and went on to say, "For the first time in Florida, Republican voters outnumber Democratic voters." And it went on to talk about the efforts to reverse that trend that the Union has. Georgia Federation of Teachers contributed to the school board race and state Democratic causes.

All that is allowed and fine, but the concern I have is when the White House comes and says that there was no political input, that what we constantly see is an organization, that you are not an education organization, while though you have education, you are not a medical organization. You are a political organization, and you are weighing in on the guidance. Are you still a super delegate to the Democratic Party?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I am still a delegate to the DNC, yes.

Mr. CLOUD. OK. Which, again, you have all realms to do, and you should participate. I have a concern when the White House is making decisions based on political science versus real science. I think my time is up, and I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Mr. Frost from Florida for 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. FROST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. During today's hearing, Republicans on this Committee are attempting to paint the American Federation of Teachers as a destructive specialist interest group out to harm students. They are not. AFT represents our talented, generous, and compassionate educators who are the backbone of this Nation's childcare in in our children's home away from home. This is personal for me. My mother has been a public-school educator for 37 years teaching special education. She actually retires this year. And this is rich. It is ironic, and it has no one fooled. This is to distract from the real special interest group that is the real threat to children all across this country, the NRA.

And look, I recognize that the pandemic has had real impacts on American children, but make no mistake, for a brief time in this country, children didn't have to memorize emergency exits. Children didn't have to practice active shooter drills more than they are doing fire drills. Children didn't have to walk around with a Kevlar backpack or figure out what they have to do if a shooter were to come into their classroom. Students are begging for Congress to have the courage to act on gun violence. If you care about students,

if you care about schools, fight for a world where students are not dying in a pool of their own blood in the classrooms that they are supposed to be learning in.

If Republicans gave a damn about America's children, they would pass legislation to end gun violence to keep students safe, to keep teachers safe, to keep administrators safe, and the staff of the schools. If Republicans gave a damn about the next generation, they wouldn't be actively trying to cut funding for your kids' school and turning a blind eye to the gun violence that is killing children every single day in this country. If they give a damn about gun violence, they wouldn't be going after teachers over some emails about school safety from 2 years ago.

Let me tell you what people are actually going through. My friend, Manuel Oliver, lost his son, Joaquin, in the Parkland shooting, Joaquin Oliver, in Parkland, Florida. And when I think about what our children are going through and the real threat to them, I think about the autopsy of Joaquin Oliver, "a significant amount of bleeding. The bleeding went into his right chest cavity and started compressing his lungs. By basically drowning, he died in a pool of his own blood." That is what happened to Joaquin Oliver. That is the threat that our students are going through. Five hundred and forty-nine children and teens have already been lost to gun violence this year alone, and yet, here we are, burying our heads in the sand, ignoring the problem, and refusing to put legislation on the floor.

Ma'am, thank you so much for being here today. What impact does a child living through mass shooting or other gun-related events have on their development, mental health, and ability to learn?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Look, it is terrible. I mean, we represent the educators in Parkland and the educators in Sandy Hook, and gun violence is the No. 1 cause of deaths of kids. And yes, obviously, we should be doing a lot more about that, and I just hope that this caring that I have heard all day long about kids on both sides, it will translate into what we do today and going forward about helping our kids.

Mr. FROST. Yes.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. That this sentiment that I have heard is actually taken to help our kids and not just questioning me about when I talked to Dr. Walensky.

Mr. FROST. Yes. I mean, if we held an oversight hearing on this and invited survivors, teachers, students, parents, do you think that the Committee would find that inaction in Congress on gun violence to be appropriate? How do you feel like the parents and the students would feel?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Look, I hear from teachers and kids all the time. What this Committee hasn't asked me is, I have been in, I think, 147 worksites or 150 worksites between April 2021 and April 2023. I walked the walk with parents and teachers and children, and they are scared about gun violence and about the ready access of guns. They are scared. I hear it all the time.

Mr. FROST. Yes, thank you so much. Thank you for your work, and thank you for your perspective on children, their overall health, well-being, and development. This is one of the greatest

threats to kids in schools. This is one of the greatest threats to teachers and our families in the school system, not whatever they are talking about right now to score political points, but the fact that our kids are being shot, that if your child, and I am speaking to the parents of this country. God forbid if your child were to die before the age of 18, the most likely reason is because they were shot to death. I find that unacceptable, but Republicans on this Committee do not, and that is why we are here today. Thank you. I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Dr. Joyce from Pennsylvania for 5 minutes of questions.

Dr. JOYCE. Thank you for yielding, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for appearing here today in front of us, Ms. Weingarten.

Throughout the pandemic, we all heard “follow the science.” In guidance released back in June 2020, the American Academy of Pediatrics called for a return to in-person learning, and they further stated in their guidance for safe schools and the promotion of in-person learning, “Remote learning exacerbated existing educational inequities, was detrimental to educational attainment and drastically worsened the growing mental health crisis among children and adolescents.” Ms. Weingarten, do you agree that in-person learning provides the best educational opportunity for students?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Yes.

Dr. JOYCE. Do you agree that remote learning may exacerbate educational inequities, be detrimental to educational attainment, and worsen a growing mental health crisis in children?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Yes.

Dr. JOYCE. One of the worst side effects of prolonged school closures has been learning loss. Is the pandemic associated with learning loss? Is that real?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Well, yes, of course, it is real.

Dr. JOYCE. I agree with you it—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. But what we also saw, sir, is that, in places, and this is what I think the LCCR was getting to in the letter that they sent to the Committee. Take a place like L.A., which actually was closed for the whole 2021 school year, and yet, its NAEP scores for English increased. And—

Dr. JOYCE. But overall—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Wait, wait, wait. So, what they did—

Dr. JOYCE [continuing]. You have acknowledged—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. No, no, no—

Dr. JOYCE [continuing]. The pandemic is associated with, not one instance—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. But what they did—

Dr. JOYCE. My time is limited.

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. The work. They did the work.

Dr. JOYCE. The pandemic is associated with learning loss and that is real, correct, overall?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. But what I am saying is equity and poverty and other things are associated as well. This is what was so interesting about their results. They did a lot of this work. They fed kids. They made sure that kids had reading instruction. They made sure that kids had internet access. They actually did the equity

work that the LCCR has been asking for and that we have been asking for. And what happened was——

Dr. JOYCE. And yet in face of that——

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. They did OK.

Dr. JOYCE. Please, I am on limited time. In the face of that, the pandemic is associated with real learning loss, correct? “Yes” or “no.”

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Look, kids need to be in school——

Dr. JOYCE. Thank you.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. And they learned——

Dr. JOYCE. Thank you. Let us leave it at that. Kids need to be in school.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. And they——

Dr. JOYCE. And their learning is better in school.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. And their learning is better in school, of course.

Dr. JOYCE. Thank you. We agree on that point. The goal now has to be doing everything that we can do to provide students with the ability to recover these losses.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Completely agree.

Dr. JOYCE. Do you support adding additional time to the school day to help students get more in-person instruction time?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. We are actually doing additional time during the school day, and——

Dr. JOYCE. Great. I think that students need that. Do you encourage your members to teach during expanded summer school to help the students get that necessary, what you just described——

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Yes, sir.

Dr. JOYCE [continuing]. That needed in-person instruction?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. In fact, John King and I made that proposal in an April 2020 op-ed to have summer school even back then because we knew the importance of kids being together. It is not just academic. It is the adolescent’s development, and it is the relationship building, so we knew that.

Dr. JOYCE. I think that is so important. So, to be clear, you do not support increasing access to additional educational services to correct for learning loss that occurred as a result of the school closings that your organization has advocated and supported. You are in favor of additional time in the classroom and expanded summer programs. Is that correct?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. We are in favor of that. That is why we are calling for community schools and things like that. We are in favor of wraparound services and community schools and having additional time available for kids.

Dr. JOYCE. Additional time, summer training, I think that is awesome. The AFT though, is inherently a political organization. In fact, political activism is in your mission statement. Is that correct?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Academic achievement, welcoming and safe environments. There are many——

Dr. JOYCE. Is political activism in your mission statement?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. There are many things in our mission statement, sir.

Dr. JOYCE. Including political activism?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Including political——

Dr. JOYCE. Political activism.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Including ensuring that people have a voice, yes.

Dr. JOYCE. So political activism is part of who you are. CDC guidance, especially guidance based on complex immunology and epidemiology, requires scientific expertise, and earlier in your testimony with us here today, you said most of us aren't scientists. Does the AFT employ any epidemiologists?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Yes, we actually consulted with epidemiologists.

Dr. JOYCE. Does the AFT employ immunologists?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Yes, we consulted with immunologists.

Dr. JOYCE. In-house, do you employ any infectious disease specialist?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. We have people who are industrial hygienists, yes.

Dr. JOYCE. Do you have any board-certified pediatric infectious disease specialist on your payroll?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. In consulting with them, yes.

Dr. JOYCE. Do you have anyone with experience with treating novel coronaviruses?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Well, to the extent that there was any expertise in the country, yes.

Dr. JOYCE. Wow. I am a physician, and I knew of no one who had any experience treating novel coronaviruses. If you don't have the ability——

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Sir, I just said to the extent that it was available. I can give you——

Dr. JOYCE. There was none available.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I could give you——

Dr. JOYCE. There was none available, and yet you——

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I can give you the names of the people that we relied on.

Dr. JOYCE. Great. Forward those to us, please.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Would you like me to say them publicly so that you hear them?

Dr. JOYCE. No, I would like you to forward that because my time is limited.

Mr. JOYCE. You also talked about over reliance of kids spending too much time on electric devices, and you put up your phone just like I am pulling up my phones, but they need to be connected person to person. And I think we can all agree that removing students from in-person learning has really accelerated the issues affecting mental health that you, Ms. Weingarten, have mentioned repeatedly throughout this.

And the only conclusion that I can make as a doctor, as a parent, and as a legislator, is that the AFT recommendations harmed so many children. And I think we have to learn, we as a Select Subcommittee, have to learn, and we have to move forward when faced with a crisis like the pandemic was, we have to understand that those who are not susceptible to this must remain in school. Those students have suffered, and we are making up time, we are making

up that lost time, and we need to do that in a conjoined effort. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Ms. Takuda from Hawaii for 5 minutes of questions.

Ms. TAKUDA. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Ms. Weingarten, thank you for being here today. As a mother that has two boys that attend our public schools, I experienced firsthand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on my children's education, their learning, their mental health, their social-emotional development. We witnessed, all of us, we witnessed a lot of loss during this pandemic. You talked about it. But students didn't just lose academic learning. As you mentioned, we lost family members. Others lost a caregiver, a parent, a classmate, a teacher, a friend.

I am glad to see my colleagues across the aisle talk so much about how they care about our kids, their learning, their mental health. However, I find it ironic that we are once again talking about school closures, closures, by the way that were done to keep children safe when the last administration had no plans in place to safely reopen them, while Republicans have proposed a 22-percent reduction to non-defense spending to deal with the debt limit, once again closing doors to our children and their education. Today, we are talking about the impact of the last pandemic on learning loss, yet I will be clear. I am worried about the pandemic being created by House Republicans. Cuts of these proportions will make learning loss and impacts to everyday life for everyday Americans from COVID-19 pale in comparison to what they will soon experience. I personally struggle to understand how anybody who cares about our children genuinely could advocate for these kinds of cuts.

Ms. Weingarten, perhaps you could offer your view on this. How might Republicans' proposed budget cuts to childcare funding, educator supports, nutrition, feeding programs, among other critical safety net programs, contribute to a whole new generation of children experiencing devastating learning loss?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. So, thank you for your comments, and I hope your kids are OK. The work that we need to do now is how we engage kids and how we meet them socially and emotionally, and how we meet the whole child. There were colleagues here who talked about obesity. One of the things we need to do when we feed kids in school is to give them nutritious programs. We need to have that. We need to have the social workers and the guidance counselors that meet kids' needs and families' needs. That is why we are proposing a big expansion. So, we need more funding, not less, for an expansion of community schools and wraparound services so the services that all these doctors have been talking about, we can do in school with kids and families.

Ms. TAKUDA. I agree. I completely agree. We are looking at a whole-of-child, whole-of-family approach—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Correct.

Ms. TAKUDA [continuing]. When we look at education and how we are supporting our kids. Many of us here in Congress in this room right now represent small towns, predominantly rural communities, like mine in Hawaii. Rural school districts and rural students suffered greatly during this pandemic. How might the Republican cuts that we are looking at right now disproportionately im-

pact, again, our ability to overcome learning loss, address mental health issues, impact academic achievement in our rural communities across our country?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Look, if you already don't have a guidance counselor, if a guidance counselor is there for about 400 or 500 kids, and you start cutting Title I and cutting IDEA and funds for special needs, that means we are going to have fewer and fewer of them, and it means it is going to get worse and worse. So, at the very moment that everyone, I think, seems to agree that our kids matter and should be a priority, then the funding for them should be a priority.

Ms. TAKUDA. Absolutely. If the Republicans' proposed cuts are implemented, it would have a significant impact on critical programs and resources available to all of our children. In particular, I am looking at childcare. A 22-percent cut would mean 200,000 children lose access to Head Start slots, and another 100,000 children lose access to childcare. Now, this undermines our children's basic foundations for education and how they will articulate through the system as we know, making it more difficult as well for parents to rejoin the work force, contribute to our economy.

Access to affordable, high-quality childcare is a critical component, I think as many of us in this room agree, to a child's growth and development. Again, if we are truly looking at learning loss and staving off learning loss, childcare is critical. It affords substantial benefits for these children as they grow and age into adolescence and adulthood. I should also note that childcare boosts the economy by allowing parents, as I mentioned, to once again rejoin the work force.

In contrast to Republican draconian cuts to programs that support working families, we have, as congressional Democrats, taken decisive actions to put Americans on firmer footing as we emerge from this pandemic. The ARPA funds to the state of Hawaii, nearly \$80 million, actually helped to keep childcare centers open, prevented these children from experiencing learning loss in Hawaii, and we know this took place across our country, especially our rural communities. I know that my time is up, but, Ms. Weingarten, thank you for being here, as we talk about what could be the next pandemic if these cuts are actually taking place.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Thank you.

Ms. TAKUDA. I yield back, Chair.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Mr. Chair, I did say to you before I am—

Dr. WENSTRUP. You are not recognized.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. No, no, no. Can we take a break so I can have a bathroom break?

Dr. WENSTRUP. Yes, we can do that.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Thank you. Sorry.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Five minutes—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. OK. Fantastic.

Dr. WENSTRUP [continuing]. Because we are pressed for votes coming up.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Sorry. I am sorry.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you. Yes.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Thanks.

[Recess.]

Dr. WENSTRUP. The Committee comes back to order.

I now recognize Dr. Jackson from Texas for 5 minutes of questions.

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Ms. Weingarten, thank you for coming today. I don't honestly know if I even have a question for you, to be honest with you. I feel like I don't know what the point is at this particular point. I think most people know what happened at this point. I think anybody that has watched what is going on for the last few years knows exactly what happened. I am just going to make a statement.

I just want to say that, you know, this is how most people view this. Early on, the data showed that children were unlikely to become infected, spread the infection, become ill or die from COVID-19. That is a fact. Data also showed that school closures, social distancing, masking, and testing provided no benefit to the students or their adult educators. That is also a fact. Data also showed that those very actions that I just described were highly detrimental to the academic achievement, the mental health, and the physical health of our children. Since the science, the actual science, never supported closing schools, we must examine why and who was behind these detrimental efforts to promote school closures without any scientific support for doing so.

We now know that you and your organization—it has been documented at this point—edited the draft of this “scientific-based guidance on school reopening from the CDC,” the document that was used to keep most public schools are all around the country closed, in fact. I don't think you were to blame. I think the Biden White House and the CDC are the ones that really failed our country. The Biden White House and the CDC should have completely disregarded any suggestions from your politically motivated and corrupt organization, in my mind.

But I guess considering your organization gave millions and millions of dollars to Democratic candidates and their liberal campaign committees, you and your organization got anything you wanted from the Biden Administration. That seems to be how it works. This is what corruption in the Federal Government looks like. The American people have seen it, and they don't like it. Teachers unions are supposed to exist to protect their members and to advocate for students. However, your organization, the AFT, has demonstrated that what you actually care about is gaining and exerting political influence and lining your pockets with taxpayer money, even if that is at the expense of our own children.

Since 2020, Congress has allocated more than \$190 billion to schools across the country through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund to enable schools to stay open. Much of this money has been unaccounted for, and much of it was spent on woke social garbage, racist CRT programs, and other leftist programs. Much of it was provided to increase the salaries of teachers, teachers that were paid to stay home, thanks to your strong advocacy.

So big win for you and big win for the organization. Keep the schools closed, let people stay home and draw paychecks, demand money from the Biden Administration to reopen schools, use that

money to promote horrible social programs in our schools once they finally reopen, provide pay increases to your members with Federal taxpayer money, and last, use the dues from your members to pay off the Democrats that make it all possible. This is what happened.

I cannot believe that you still have a job after the role that you and your organization played in the destruction of our children over the last few years. I think it is disgraceful, and I think you should be ashamed of what happened over the last few years, and you should take some responsibility for it. With that, I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Dr. McCormick from Georgia for 5 minutes of questions.

Dr. MCCORMICK. Thank you, Mr. Chair. First of all, I want to state that I have great respect for teachers. I mean that sincerely, the most influential people in my life, other than my parents and maybe my Marine buddies. I truly appreciate what they have done for me over the years. I spent 4 years as an associate professor in both private and public schools. I have seven kids, so I have a little street credibility when it comes to educational experience, and I spent about 20 years in youth ministry, so I understand the importance of what teachers do, and I sincerely appreciate the efforts.

With that said, I just wanted to go over something that you have already affirmed, which is your tweet at one time, “What we have seen in public education is that technology can’t replace teachers. Remote education didn’t work.” You did tweet that, correct? OK. Thank you.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Yes, I did.

Dr. MCCORMICK. Thank you. I totally agree with you. My son—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I have tweeted about 200,000 times, so—

Dr. MCCORMICK. No, I get it. That wasn’t controversial, so we just continue. I am not trying to corner you, believe it or not. I agree with you. My son actually was having problems during this educational experience where he couldn’t get a teacher to meet with him well into the pandemic where he was remotely learning. He doesn’t do math so well. He is like his dad. And he needed help in-person and even with precautions wasn’t allowed to come in, so it really affected his educational experience. And then he went to a point where he had to drop out of a class. It was harmful to him, that educational experience, just like many other students.

We have seen it with countless families across the spectrum. We have seen a 5-percent dip in White students, 13 percent in African Americans, 8 percent in Hispanics, a great educational disparity that happened because of this educational experience that we experienced because of COVID. Would you agree that public education is an essential service? “Yes” or “no.”

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Yes, absolutely.

Dr. MCCORMICK. Thank you. Me, too. I was on the frontlines of the ER during this pandemic. I treated thousands of patients. First line, from the beginning, when we didn’t have any vaccinations all the way to December 28th, my last shift. Would you agree that an emergency room doc is also an essential service?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Of course.

Dr. MCCORMICK. Thank you. Me, too.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I mean, sir, you may not—

Dr. MCCORMICK. No, it is a simple question. No, I am not—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. You may not know. We represent about 200,000 persons—

Dr. MCCORMICK. I get you. I get you, and I represent a lot of ER doctors, too, I get you.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Yes, and my sister is an intensive care pediatrician—

Dr. MCCORMICK. Thank you. Thank you for her service.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. So, I will tell her.

Dr. MCCORMICK. And of course, we couldn't do our job remotely, correct, as ER physicians, right? I couldn't do my—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Well, we had over 200,000—

Dr. MCCORMICK. No, I get you. I get you.

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. Nurses who we represent—

Dr. MCCORMICK. I get you.

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. Who did not do their jobs remotely, and we believed in being in school. That is why I said earlier—

Dr. MCCORMICK. Yep. No, I get you.

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. We tried from—

Dr. MCCORMICK. Same as firefighters. Same as law enforcement. Everybody has their jobs that are essential services that they can't do remotely. And as you said, there are people who came in during some scary times that couldn't work remotely. I don't think we are trying to argue about what is essential services. I think we all agree on what those are, whether it be a clerk that actually helps you get your meals or your groceries, or somebody who is serving you in very real ways and required ways. I think we all agree on those things. And I get that it is scary, and I get that at the very beginning, there was definitely a reason to be overly concerned because we didn't know how this is going. It is a novel virus, I get it.

And as we started developing things, you guys got the wrong information a lot of times. So did we because it was politicized. And some people who were "experts" told us things that were wrong, even though they probably hadn't seen patients since the 90's, and people like myself, who were seeing thousands of patients, were censored by the way, so you couldn't get the truth a lot of times. So, I understand why teachers would be scared to go back to school. I do get that.

But as this developed and as the evidence became more clear, my concern is that we learn from these committees because that is what we are here for. I don't think anybody disagrees that the whole reason we are here for this Committee is so that we don't repeat our mistakes. We have to admit that we made mistakes. We all make mistakes. Doctors made mistakes. We used to not use NSAIDs. We didn't use steroids. We intubated patients. People died because of mistakes we made during the novel coronavirus that we learned from. But would you, as the head of this union, admit that teachers maybe should have gone back to school earlier with retrospective information, so we don't make the same mistakes in the future and leave so many kids behind?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Look, I regret COVID. I regret what has happened here.

Dr. McCORMICK. So, I am just asking a simple question.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I regret—

Dr. McCORMICK. I want to learn from this.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. You know what? I regret—

Dr. McCORMICK. I don't want you to regret.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I think you would be—

Dr. McCORMICK. I have 20 seconds left.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. If you would let me answer—

Dr. McCORMICK. Sure.

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. I think you would be surprised with my answer.

Dr. McCORMICK. OK.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. You know, I regret the fear that was there, and part of the reason we wanted clear information was because we had a role in terms of overcoming fear. I think this book that just came out yesterday actually gives us a roadmap for what we need to do going forward because I do think we didn't get it right. I think the ventilation issues, the testing issues, actually were more important than the social distancing issues. I agree with you. There were things that we really didn't get right.

Dr. WENSTRUP. The gentleman's time has expired. I now recognize Mr. Garcia from California for 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. GARCIA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ms. Weingarten. I appreciate all the work, first, that you do, that our teachers do across the country. I am an educator myself.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Well—

Mr. GARCIA [continuing]. I am married to an educator and so I appreciate the hard work. You know, I just want to recenter ourselves and remind us that we went through a massive disruption to our country, to lives. We lost over a million Americans. My city alone lost 1,300 residents within my community when I was mayor just right before I got elected to Congress. And this was a traumatic, horrific event, and the largest loss of life event of the modern era. And so, this idea that there aren't going to be mistakes made in our institutions or organizations, of course, is ridiculous. There are going to be lessons learned. Whether it is in our education sector, whether it is in public health, whether it was in the way the government managed on the vaccine rollout, we are going to learn how to make things better.

And I want to just uplift the fact that teachers were working under terrible conditions, a situation where they also have family. I want to remember that teachers also have family at home, also have sick parents at home, were also trying to protect themselves, their loved ones, and their own children outside of the classroom. And so, I just want to take that moment that everybody was scared and trying their absolute best. During the pandemic, the Long Beach Unified School District, it was the largest school district to reopen schools when we reopened because teachers were vaccinated, because we vaccinated teachers early on and gotten the supplies that they needed and the resources that they needed.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. We often looked at your school district as a model for what to replicate.

Mr. GARCIA. Thank you. And a big part of that was because we made the decision early on to double vaccinate all of our teachers

and to ensure that everyone had access to the vaccine early. We actually were the first school district, the first city to actually vaccinate teachers in the entire state of California, and vaccinations led to reopening schools first and faster. And so there needs to be more emphasis on that vaccine access.

I also just want to note, and, you know, it had been mentioned a few times that, you know, it was President Trump and his Administration that was really facilitating the closures and trying to get us reopened, and it was a total disaster. There was very little support early on from the Trump Administration to actually get us support to support our schools. We worked directly with our schools, essentially sidelined the Federal Government, and tried to get as much support, whether it was materials, whether it was PPE, whether it was vaccines, directly to our schools. Now, I appreciate you mentioning Long Beach. In fact, President Biden, also named Long Beach and our school system as the national model reopening schools, and we appreciate that.

I want to ask you, the American Rescue Plan was a lifesaver, as you know, for schools, for school districts. Beyond the American Rescue Plan, what else should Congress be doing to assist schools to ensure that in the future this doesn't happen again and that we can reopen schools even faster?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. So, several things. No. 1, what we learned through the end of this pandemic, and I know that, you know, there are some issues in terms of, you know, vaccination or not. But 90 percent of our members voluntarily vaccinated, and we took a position, and, you know, some people disagreed, and some teachers were fired because of it. We took a position that we needed to work with our members, work with school districts to get as many people vaccinated, and our members vaccinated even on a mandatory basis as possible to open schools, but—

Mr. GARCIA. And on that point, and I support that, by the way. I think you have made the right decision.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. And look, you know, there is someone in this audience here today who disagrees with me about it, you know? And so, what I am saying, though, is that in a pandemic, we need clear information. We need clear guidance. Most of us who are not scientists need to trust the scientists to give us clear guidance and the mitigating circumstances.

Mr. GARCIA. Absolutely. And let me—

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. Including ventilation and testing.

Mr. GARCIA. I agree completely. And vaccine hesitancy, which we know, in fact, Members of this very Congress are some of the largest, most vocal vaccine deniers in America. Would that have hurt the reopening of schools? Did that actually cause any concerns for teachers on the ground?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Well, look, so Dr. Shah from Rockefeller and I did an op-ed in January 2021 that said we could reopen schools even without vaccination if we had the testing. And I think during the Omicron variant, we saw that testing really helped us keep schools open, just like it helped the NFL and just like it helped the NBA. And so, I think that there is a combination of things that we need to know in terms of what is the measure to keeping people safe—

Mr. GARCIA. Absolutely.

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. And keeping people open.

Mr. GARCIA. And finally, I just want to say if we really want to focus on ensuring, because there will be future pandemic, ensuring that schools today have the resources that they need—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Correct. Absolutely.

Mr. GARCIA [continuing]. That teachers have the resources they need, that we are actually in reinvesting in our schools, that is actually going to help to ensure that if there is a future pandemic, we can solve it—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Absolutely.

Mr. GARCIA [continuing]. Even faster and learn from our mistakes. Thank you so much.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Ms. Greene from Georgia for 5 minutes of questions.

Ms. GREENE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Weingarten, are you a medical doctor?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I am not.

Ms. GREENE. Are you a mother?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I am a mother by marriage.

Ms. GREENE. By marriage, I see. And—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. And my wife is here with me, so I am really glad that she is here, Sharon Kleinbaum.

Ms. GREENE. Ms. Weingarten, and you haven't taught school since the 90's, so you are not a teacher anymore.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Representative, I am actually on leave from my teaching position. And this fall, I will be teaching as a guest teacher at Cornell, my alma mater.

Ms. GREENE. When was the last year you taught, 1997? Is that correct?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. The last time I taught a full class was June 1997.

Ms. GREENE. OK. That has been quite a long time, approximately 26 years ago. Do you believe in the First Amendment, Ms. Weingarten?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I believe in the Constitution, including the First Amendment, of course.

Ms. GREENE. Oh, great. Well, I would like to remind you of one of your tweets here where you agreed that my suspension on Twitter, in your own words, "Politicians shouldn't be exempt from standards about spreading misinformation. Greene has repeatedly shown reckless disregard for those standards. This suspension is justified." This is your tweet. Just last year, January 2, 2022, I was suspended for my statements about COVID-19, as a Member of Congress, by the way. And also, I would like to point out by the emojis by your name here, it looks like you are more of a political activist than anything. Clearly, unfortunately, you think Ukraine comes before the United States. I am not sure what the black flex is. I mean, is that digital blackface? But congratulations on graduating from school. But I would like to know—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. No, it is about honoring Black—

Ms. GREENE. Ms. Weingarten, I reclaim my time. I didn't ask you a question.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Sorry.

Ms. GREENE. What I would like to talk about is your recommendations to the CDC as not a medical doctor, not a biological mother, and really not a teacher either. So, what you did is you advised the CDC—

Mr. GARCIA. Mr. Chairman, that is—

Ms. GREENE. Excuse me. This is my time. You advised the CDC to have schools provide remote work options for staff that have documented high risk conditions, who are increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19, to limit the risk of workplace exposure, telework, virtual teaching opportunities, modified job responsibilities, environmental modifications, scheduling, flexibility, temporary assignments to different job responsibilities.

None of your advice had to do to stop the spread of COVID 19. It was all about teachers staying home, and there was big results of that. Let me tell you, I am a mother, and all three of my children were directly affected by the school closures by your recommendations, which is something that you really can't understand.

Let's talk about the real effects of this. Obviously, we know the test results, oh, and by the way, that you are celebrating what I had said on Twitter, I had said that children should be in school. I had said the truth that children were not dying at high rates of COVID-19 like older people were. I had also advocated for our children, not for teachers getting to stay home and kids being forced into virtual schooling. I advocated for the safety of our children and further education. But you as a political activist for the president of the Teachers' Union were not advocating for anything good for our kids, and our kids have suffered greatly. As a matter of fact, suicides increased. Their rates of learning went down, and you know what else happened to them? Anxiety, depression, all kinds of problems happen to kids.

[Chart]

And then, ironically, here is something that was shocking to me, and I will bring this up to you. You know what else happened? While kids were forced to stay home and you approved of this, the diagnosis of youths with gender dysphoria surged. This is literally 2020, but yet this is 2021, and this is a problem. This is a major problem, and the direct effect of school closures can be seen here. These are diagnoses of gender dysphoria, and you can see it sharply increased after 2020 and 2021. It went up. The rates went up.

So, kids were forced to stay home into so-called virtual learning where they were spending a lot of time on social media, and all of a sudden, we see a direct result of this, and this is a major problem. But the other problem is you had no business advising the CDC what the medical guidelines were for school closures because now we have a Nation of schoolchildren who have suffered because of it. The problem is people like you need to admit that you are just a political activist, not a teacher—

Dr. WENSTRUP. The gentlelady's time has expired.

Ms. GREENE [continuing]. Not a mother, and not a medical doctor.

Dr. WENSTRUP. The gentlelady's time has expired.

Ms. GREENE. I yield.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Mr. Jordan from Ohio for 5 minutes.

Mr. GARCIA. Point of order, Mr. Chairman. I just want to make note that the decorum of the attacks on the witness were unacceptable that the gentlelady from Georgia just did. And so, it would be nice if we didn't attack the witnesses, particularly when making a decision about whether or not she is a mother. You are a mother. Thank you for being a great parent. Thank you.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Thank you.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Your point of order is recognized, Mr. Garcia?

Mr. RUIZ. A point of order?

Dr. WENSTRUP. Yes.

Mr. RUIZ. Given that his point of order is recognized and given that that was not just cruel personal attacks to Ms. Weingarten, who loves her children, it is reflective of the cruel personal attacks to any adopted mother or father who love their children. So, I would kindly ask that those remarks be taken out of the record for the sake of all of the parents who have adopted a child and love them dearly and see them as their own.

Dr. WENSTRUP. It was not a violation of the House rules. However, your point of order is recognized. I now recognize Mr. Jordan from Ohio for 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. JORDAN. I thank the Chairman. Who cares more, Ms. Weingarten? Who cares more about a child's education, the teacher's union or the child's parents?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I would say that Mr. Jordan or Representative Jordan, teachers, parents, and teachers care about kids obviously. Parents care about their own kids more than probably anyone else, but teachers and parents are real partners in children's education.

Mr. JORDAN. OK. That is fine, but I asked you, who cares more? You would say parents?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Look, I am not here to be in a competition. Parents are so important in children's lives. Teachers are so important in children's lives too.

Mr. JORDAN. I agree. Why do you re-post and praise the op-ed that was in the *Washington Post*, parents claimed to have the right to shape their kids school curriculum? They don't. You have posted that, and you said this was a great piece that people should read. Head of Teachers Union praises op-ed claiming parents don't have a right to shape their kids' curriculum. You really believe that?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. The headline of that op-ed was not appropriate compared to the actual work in that op-ed. The work in that op-ed talked about if you actually read that op-ed—

Mr. JORDAN. You disagree with the headline then?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. No, I disagreed with the headline. The work in that op-ed—

Mr. JORDAN. OK.

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. Talked about how parents and teachers have to have a role in kids' education.

Mr. JORDAN. So should the headline have read parents claim they have a right to shape their kids school curriculum. They do. Should that have been what the headline said?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Well, you know, Mr. Jordan—

Mr. JORDAN. Well, let me ask you this. Let me just ask you straightforward. Just let me ask straightforward. Do parents have a right to shape their kids' curriculum?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Parents have a right to have a role in their kid's curriculum, yes.

Mr. JORDAN. Who are the extremist politicians? You did 25 pages of your written testimony. You had 14 pages. Your law firm had, I think, the other 11. And right at the end of the main body of your written testimony before you get into the issue of today about the consultation you guys had with the CDC, you say in this last paragraph, "Attacks by extremist politicians have undermined teachers in schools." Who are the extremist politicians?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I think you just heard one, sir.

Mr. JORDAN. So, Ms. Greene is one of them?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I think—

Mr. JORDAN. OK. That is—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I think the issue is the culture wars that are going on in schools right now banning books, undermining teachers—

Mr. JORDAN. How about this statement, "I don't think parents should be telling schools what to teach?" You just told me a few minutes ago you didn't agree with that sentiment. That is a statement from a politician. Is that extremist?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I believe that parents have to have a role in kid's education, and, in fact, when I was teaching at Clara Barton High School, we had parent engagement all the time.

Mr. JORDAN. Who said this statement?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. If you want me to finish, I will finish. I, like so many other teachers used to do, I was a high school social studies teacher. I know you were a wrestling coach. I was a high school social studies teacher.

Mr. JORDAN. Yes. My wife taught. Our kids went to public school. I appreciate good teaching. I am a high school coach, and—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I know, and I honor that.

Mr. JORDAN. Same here.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. You know, so what I would do and so many other teachers do as well—

Mr. JORDAN. But I asked you a specific question. "I don't think parents should be telling schools what to teach." Do you know who made that statement?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I don't know.

Mr. JORDAN. September 28, 2021, candidate for Governor in the state of Virginia. Do you know who made that statement?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I don't. Are you talking about Mr. McAuliffe?

Mr. JORDAN. I am talking about Mr. McAuliffe. He made that statement. Is that extremist? Is that an extremist political statement?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. In fact, what I did Mr. Jordan, was when I heard that statement—

Mr. JORDAN. No, we know what you did. You endorsed him and then did a six-figure—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. No. When I—

Mr. JORDAN [continuing]. Ad buy your organization did 18 days later.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. What I did Mr. Jordan, is when I heard that statement, I called Mr. McAuliffe, and I told him I disagreed with him in that statement.

Mr. JORDAN. But it wasn't enough to get you to not do a six-figure ad buy for his campaign.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. What the ad buy did was do what we thought Mr. McAuliffe was, which was——

Mr. JORDAN. In that same paragraph on page 12——

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. Really supportive of teachers and parents——

Mr. JORDAN. I just got a minute. I just got a minute. In the same——

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Sorry.

Mr. JORDAN. In the same paragraph on page 12, you said, "Most Americans disapprove with the culture wars that have saturated education policy." Who started the culture wars?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I know that when you have banning of books, like a book about——

Mr. JORDAN. Let me ask you this.

Ms. WEINGARTEN [continuing]. Like a book about Roberto Clemente, like a book about Ruby Bridges, that is wrong.

Mr. JORDAN. Those who think——

Ms. WEINGARTEN. And that was in——

Mr. JORDAN. Let me ask you this——

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Those things were in——

Mr. JORDAN. Those who think boys should compete against boys in sports or those who think boys can compete against girls in sports, which side started the culture war? Which one of those positions?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Sir, when I talk about the culture wars, I am talking about things like book banning. I am talking about things like stopping teachers from teaching honest——

Mr. JORDAN. Is it starting a culture war if you think literature should be age appropriate? That is not starting culture wars.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I believe that literature should be age appropriate, too.

Mr. JORDAN. OK. I am out of time. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Although we are pressed for time because of votes, I now recognize Mr. Gomez from California, but I would recommend, and we have discussed this with the Ranking Member in the past, especially if you are waiving on, you be here on time. And I know we all have schedules to keep, but go ahead, Mr. Gomez.

Mr. GOMEZ. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. I really appreciate it. So, I think there should be broad agreement. We shouldn't ban books. Like, that is just flat-out pretty simple. But I believe my colleagues on the other side of the aisle want to distract and rewrite what happened over the last several years, everything from the COVID response to the massive tax cut that they gave to the top one-tenth of one percent in this country. They want to change a lot of the narrative of the last, not 2 years, but 4 years from before that when President Trump was in the White House.

So, I want to kind of focus on issues that I think the American people really care about. If they cared about children, why are they attempting to cut Federal childcare funding by 22 percent? That is

what their budget would do. And why do they want 200,000 children to lose access to Head Start and 100,000 children to lose access to childcare? Working parents are spending nearly as much of their income on childcare as they do on housing. As a new parent and founder of the Dad's Caucus, I can tell you one thing: our childcare system is in crisis. Not only is it unaffordable and inaccessible, childcare workers who are predominantly women of color are severely underpaid and overworked.

Meanwhile, the Biden Administration and congressional Democrats have consistently acted to protect childcare across the country. For example, the Biden Administration invested around \$39 billion from the American Rescue Plan to help childcare providers to keep their doors open. These efforts have helped 220,000 childcare programs, which employ over a million childcare workers with the capacity to serve nearly 10 million children. Additionally, the President's budget would expand access to affordable high-quality childcare by enabling states to increase childcare options and by lowering costs so that more parents can afford care. The president's budget also funds a Federal-state partnership that provides high quality universal free preschool to support healthy child development and ensure children entered kindergarten ready to succeed.

Meanwhile, congressional Democrats led the fight for increased childcare funding in last year's spending package, securing \$8 billion for the childcare and development block grant, increase of \$1.9 billion above the Fiscal Year 2022 enacted level. And before that, House Democrats passed Child Care is Essential Act, which would have appropriated \$50 billion in Federal childcare funds. Ms. Weingarten, how does adequately funding our Nation's childcare benefit our children's development and growth?

Ms. WEINGARTEN. So, thank you for that question, Congressman. All day long, I have been talking about how teachers teach kids. I am glad that in this pandemic, thank God, it did not affect children the way it affected adults, but it is the teachers that teach kids. It is the bus drivers, it is the school nurses, but we need help. And so, when we have Head Start, when we have community schools, when we have all these things that look like they are on the chopping block now, it is going to make it harder to teach kids. It is going to be making it harder if you cut Head Start for kids to have a head start when they get to kindergarten.

And so, when you cut community schools or the guidance services, all these things that we need for kids now, because of their development issues, because of suicidal issues. We need this help. We can't do it alone. We asked for during COVID for teachers to be safe and have clear guidance to have them safe. We wanted to be in school. I have said that over and over and over again today.

Mr. GOMEZ. I appreciate that. Two of my siblings are teachers in San Francisco Unified. They teach there for a long time. Until recently, they taught a dual immersion Spanish, English.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Great.

Mr. GOMEZ. And if you have ever had a teacher in your family or sibling or mother or father, people recognize that they give everything. Oftentimes because they don't have enough resources from school, they subsidize the supplies for their own students. If they see a student without a coat, they give them a coat. If they

see a student that they need a little extra help, they go out and give a little extra help on their own time, not because they are getting paid, but on their own time, and that is what the teachers have done for our country. So, I really appreciate it. I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I would now like to yield to Ranking Member Ruiz for a closing statement, if he would like to make one.

Mr. RUIZ. Yes, thank you. I appreciate giving a closing statement. I think we heard a lot from both sides of the aisle. I think we have very clear differences in methodology and what we think are priorities for this Select Subcommittee and what we want to focus on.

I do want to say some things because we heard from physicians throughout this hearing, and I also want to remind folks, I am a physician and a public health expert. And social distancing has been a long-term public health basic way of lowering transmission for deadly airborne viruses. It is not only shown in literature, but it has been practiced retrospectively and studied even from the great influenza pandemic, that if you have a virus that spreads through droplets from your mouth, the louder your scream, you cough, or you even speak, you have micro droplets spreading from your mouth. So, the farther people get, the safer they are from transmission. So, at the root basis of keeping people safe from airborne droplets, people were asked and sometimes regulated to stay far from each other.

So, I really want to defend public health and public health practice and say that in the event of a novel airborne deadly pandemic, social distancing is one of the crude and also rudimentary public health measures to keep people safe. But what we want to do for the next airborne deadly pandemic is that we want to create safe environments so that people can socialize, so we don't have to close the school, so we don't have to do these things to keep students apart from each other. And I think that is what we should be focusing on here today.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Exactly right.

Mr. RUIZ. We should be focusing thinking ahead for that next airborne deadly pandemic on how can we save lives, how can we lower transmission, and how can we keep kids safely in school, so we don't need to practice the social distancing that has shown to work? So, look, the charge of this Select Subcommittee is to understand the COVID-19 pandemic so that we can prevent and prepare for future public health crisis. Our mission is to get ahead of future deadly novel viruses with the potential to devastate our communities so that none of us have to endure another pandemic. Yet today, instead of doing the critical work or the work of addressing learning loss from the pandemic, it is what most parents are concerned about today is my child's mental health and the learning loss. What can we do today to help these children or the work of bringing relief to Americans youth facing a mental health crisis? We rehashed Ms. Weingarten's emails and her organization's commonsense feedback on school reopening guidelines, guidance that, as you may recall, led to 95 percent of schools returning to in-person learning just 1 year into the Biden Administration.

Look, we all agree that the pandemic took a serious toll on our Nation's kids. The question is, what are we doing to help our stu-

dents and their parents? You know, hyper partisan investigations do nothing to repair this harm. And neither does an extreme Republican budget that proposes deep cuts to the very programs intended to enrich our Nation's kids and help working families get by and provide the mental health necessary to recover, programs like Head Start, WIC, IDEA grants, and more, all of which will be gutted by Republicans' Default on America Act.

So let me be clear. Republicans cannot claim to be serious about protecting our Nation's kids and families while pushing devastating cuts to programs that pave the way for children to grow and thrive. In fact, those cuts do the opposite. They make the problem worse. They hurt our children and our families. And it is my hope that going forward, the work of the Select Subcommittee will focus on the facts and lead with the purpose of developing the forward-looking policy solutions to the challenges facing our Nation.

There is still time for us to change course, to discard the partisan allegations, the vilifications of individuals and organizations to make partisan accusations and investigations intended to score some points, you know, and to put people, because this is what we must do. We must put people over politics and work together to save lives, now and for the future pandemic. Thank you.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I thank the Ranking Member, and I think he knows, as we have been friends for some time, we have the same goals. There may be policy debates. We hear this group doesn't care, that group does care, and, you know, I care more than you and all this type of stuff. The bottom line is, this Committee would not have even been formed if we didn't care.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Right.

Dr. WENSTRUP. That is why this Select Committee was formed. So, we threw all the stuff you may have heard today from many ways. Our goal is to be prepared next time, and you know what? Next time, we may have a pandemic that affects kids more than adults.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Correct.

Dr. WENSTRUP. And how are we going to be ready for it, and that is really what we are after. We have 2 years to do this. It is a short time, and there are so many topics to cover. So, I hope that as we go through the process, understand the things that were mentioned we need to talk about, we plan to talk about all those. What programs are actually working? It is our job for oversight to decide how much are we spending on things, and where is the money going, and is it actually having a return on investment because that is the smart thing to do.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Of course.

Dr. WENSTRUP. So, you know, you hear things today like, oh, you don't like these guidelines. As I said to you, these guidelines that I questioned you about as being accepted, I agreed with them. I didn't have a problem with them. That wasn't the issue. So, I hope that you can see that we are working toward finding the process, understanding the process, make sure that we can do things smartly in the future. That is my goal. That is why I wanted to accept this job when asked to take it on by the Speaker.

Look, my family, I have got teachers, and I can tell you, I know my teachers from kindergarten through 8th grade. I still know

their names, and I still get together with my 8th grade teacher. You know, they mean a lot to me. Even at my age, he is still hanging on. So over and over again, you know we heard implied that I was against those things. I wasn't. I just wanted to understand the process, and we have had hearings here with the School Nurse Associations—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Yes.

Dr. WENSTRUP [continuing]. Represented, and we have had good discussions. Now, one of the things you said is you saw much less transmission in the schools. And so, me as a scientist, as a doctor, I am like, well, then why are you wanting to base things on community rates? That didn't make sense to me. So, these are questions we want to get to the answers to, and what data was used, and why did you come to these conclusions. You know, the data give us better choices. It did.

And so, you know, you mentioned a couple of things that I would like to put into the record, if we can. The written guidance from the medical experts that you talked to; I think it would be good if we got something from them for the record.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Well, I certainly can give you their names.

Dr. WENSTRUP. OK.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. I think a lot of what we did, sir, was we did orally, but so I will give you their names.

Dr. WENSTRUP. OK.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. And if I can find the written guidance, we will find it, of course.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Whatever you can do or whatever they may want to submit, and maybe they can—

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Sure.

Dr. WENSTRUP [continuing]. Recall what they put together, and I think that would be helpful.

Dr. WENSTRUP. You know, you mentioned the Cuomo Commission, and that you had narrowed your suggestions guidelines. I would like to have that as well, the things that were there for reopening.

Dr. WENSTRUP. And you did mention that you weren't asked by the previous administration. That is fine. Maybe that is another lesson learned. You know, look, we are looking at who were the groups that were asked to weigh in. OK. Well, was it helpful? Was it not? This is where we are right now, and so these are legitimate questions. So, you got the Cuomo Commission. I know you stated that you had contact with Dr. Walensky, and so I would hope that that was submitted to Dr. Walensky, who did ask for your input.

But let me just share something here from Ohio. And it is an exchange between reporters and our Governor in Ohio and the reporter saying that Governor DeWine, speaking during hastily called televised briefing, noted that almost every school district in the state agreed to resume in-person classes by March 1st, in exchange for teacher vaccines. But he said Friday that a handful of schools where vaccines had been distributed, including in Akron and Cincinnati, have indicated that they will renege on that agreement and delay reopening. Governor DeWine said that while anyone who wanted the vaccination in Akron schools has received one, school administrators there aren't planning to resume in-person

learning until mid-March. Governor DeWine was quoted saying, “That is not acceptable either.”

The Governor’s remarks came hours after an announcement by the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that there is strong evidence in-person schooling can be done safely, as long as masks, social distancing, and other strategies, though not necessarily teacher vaccinations, are put in place to protect against COVID-19.

So, when I read these things, you know, it seems to me fair to want an explanation as to why several large public-school districts in Ohio refused to open in March 2021 despite having vaccines distributed, thus compelling the Governor to take the extraordinary actions to compel them to open. And I just bring up this story because it is there for further discussion. These are the things we want to look back on and ask ourselves why. Why did some schools not reopen? They have the right to explain themselves, but this is where we need to go so that we can be wiser in the future.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Mr. Chair?

Dr. WENSTRUP. This is my closing statement, and we are finished. We are finished.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Sorry.

Dr. WENSTRUP. That is OK.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Because I could explain if you want me—

Dr. WENSTRUP. Well, we can talk about that later.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. OK.

Dr. WENSTRUP. You can send me a letter. This is where we are with the Committee, and we are having votes, you know, but this is my closing statement. What I am saying is that is what this Committee is supposed to be about, and I hope it can be that way throughout the rest of it because we are going to be doing this for a while. So, questions will come up, and you can feel free to answer that to me in writing, and I would appreciate that.

Ms. WEINGARTEN. Thank you.

Dr. WENSTRUP. And with that, I would say that this hearing is adjourned.

And without objection, all Members will have 5 legislative days within which to submit materials and to submit additional written questions for the witnesses, which will be forwarded to the witnesses for their response.

Dr. WENSTRUP. If there is no further business, without objection, the Select Subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 5:08 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

