

CDC Announced Stricter School-Masking Guidelines after Teacher Union Threat

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Students wearing protective masks attend classes on the first day of school amid the coronavirus disease pandemic, at Barbara Goleman Senior High School, in Miami, Fla., August 23, 2021. *(Marco Bello/Reuters)*

The CDC adopted stricter [mask guidance](#) for public schools after a major teachers' union pressured the agency with a reproofing statement.

Email correspondence obtained by Fox News between officials from the National Education Association, the nation's second largest teachers' union, and the White House reveal collaboration to push the CDC to release more rigorous mask recommendations.

One such email includes a NEA draft statement criticizing the CDC for neglecting to address school safety in its May 13 public health guidance, which relaxed mask-wearing requirements indoors and outside for fully vaccinated Americans.

On May 14, a day after the CDC's updated guidance went live, White House director of labor engagement Erika Dinkel-Smith said she convinced the NEA to put a pause on publishing its critical statement. The statement ultimately released by the NEA was significantly gentler in its criticisms of the CDC, which eventually clarified that everyone should be wearing masks in schools regardless of vaccination status.

“We appreciate the developing nature of the science and its implications for guidance, but releasing the guidance without accompanying school-related updates creates confusion and fuels the internal politicization of this basic health and safety issue,” the NEA draft statement read. “CDC has consistently said, and studies support, that mitigation measures, including to protect the most vulnerable, remain necessary in schools and institutions of higher education – particularly because no elementary or middle school students, and few high school students, have been vaccinated.”

“This will also make it hard for school boards and leaders of institutions of higher education to do the right thing by maintaining mitigation measures,” it continued. “We need CDC clarification right away.”

Other emails obtained by Fox News indicate there was subsequent communication between Dinkel-Smith, CDC chief of staff, Sherri Berger, NEA President, Becky Pringle, and Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers on May 14. In these conversations, the leaders presumably discussed tightening mask guidance for public schools per the teachers' union insistence.

A day later on May 15, the CDC updated its masking recommendation to urge all school students, faculty, and staff to resume mask-wearing regardless of vaccination status.

The emails, released via a Freedom of Information Act request filed by Americans for Public Trust, come after the *New York Post* revealed in May that the American Federation of Teachers [influenced](#) the CDC February guidelines on reopening schools.