

FRANK PALLONE, JR., NEW JERSEY  
CHAIRMAN

CATHY McMORRIS RODGERS, WASHINGTON  
RANKING MEMBER

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

*Congress of the United States*

*House of Representatives*

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927

Minority (202) 225-3641

May 5, 2021

The Honorable Rochelle P. Walensky, MD, MPH  
Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
395 E St SW  
Washington, DC 20024

Director Walensky:

Recently disclosed emails<sup>1</sup> that reveal the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) "partnership" with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and involvement from the National Education Association (NEA) on CDC's Operational Strategy for Reopening Schools raise significant concerns about whether you, as the Director of the CDC, are putting politics over science and Biden-Harris campaign donors over children. Such revelations also raise serious questions as to whether you are honoring your pledge to ensure CDC guidance is evidence-based and free from politics.

On January 11, 2021, as the incoming Director of the CDC you pledged in the *New York Times* that you would lead with "facts, science, and integrity -- and being accountable for them, as the CDC has done since its founding 75 years ago."<sup>2</sup> Further, you wrote that, "[a]s CDC Director, I will be responsible for making sure that the public trusts the agency's guidance, and that its staff feels supported."<sup>3</sup> You even stated that on your first day as CDC Director, you would direct the principal deputy director "to begin a comprehensive review to ensure that all existing guidance related to Covid-19 is evidence-based and free from politics."<sup>4</sup>

On February 18, 2021, we sent you a letter concerning the CDC's recently released Operational Strategy for Reopening Schools. In that letter, we requested in item #3 that the CDC "provide the names and positions/affiliations of any stakeholders contacted or engaged by the

---

<sup>1</sup> Committee staff has the emails referenced throughout, which can be made available upon request.

<sup>2</sup> Rochelle P. Walensky, *As the New C.D.C. Chief, I'll Tell You the Truth* (January 11, 2021) available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/11/opinion/rochelle-walensky-cdc-director.html>

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

CDC during the preparation of the updated guidance.” On March 17, 2021, the CDC sent a response, but did not provide information on this item. However, recent disclosures make clear the AFT and the NEA were involved in the development of that guidance.

On May 1, 2021, the *New York Post* reported that emails showed the AFT received an advanced copy of your guidance, lobbied for changes to that guidance, and that you personally notified the AFT that the CDC accepted those changes.<sup>5</sup> The hundreds of pages of emails also show potentially inappropriate political influence from the White House over CDC’s guidance process. Emails show Carole Johnson, the White House Testing Coordinator, facilitated a number of your interactions with the AFT, particularly when it came to changes the AFT requested, and apparently organized at least one conversation between you and Becky Pringle, the President of NEA.

Additionally, the emails shed new light on your public about-face on whether the science suggested that schools can safely reopen and that doing so does not require teachers to first be vaccinated:

**February 3:** You stated that “[t]here is increasing data to suggest that schools can safely reopen and that safe reopening does not suggest that teachers need to be vaccinated.”<sup>6</sup>

**February 3:** Internal emails show you originally stood by those remarks after your staff notified you there was “a spike in Twitter activity.” You responded by saying: “I stand by my comments...based on science.”

**February 4:** White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki publicly undermined you, saying your February 3 remarks were made in your “personal capacity” and that “official guidance” was forthcoming.<sup>7</sup>

**February 7:** Internal emails show you and Randi Weingarten, President of the AFT, had a conversation: “Just heard from Randi. She can be on a call at 2PM today. I will send an invite now and have her call Dr. Walensky's mobile.”

**February 12:** Following public pressure from the White House and your conversations with the AFT, you changed your position: “We strongly encourage states to prioritize teachers...to get vaccinated.”<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Jon Levine, *Powerful teachers union influenced CDC on school reopenings, emails show* (May 1, 2021), available at <https://nypost.com/2021/05/01/teachers-union-collaborated-with-cdc-on-school-reopening-emails/>

<sup>6</sup> Berkeley Lovelace Jr., *CDC director says schools can safely reopen without vaccinating teachers*, CNBC (Feb. 3, 2021), available at <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/02/03/cdc-director-says-schools-can-safely-reopen-without-vaccinating-teachers.html>

<sup>7</sup> Ayesha Rascoe, *Should Schools Reopen if Teachers Aren't Yet Vaccinated? CDC Will Soon Weigh In*, NPR (Feb. 5, 2021), available at <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2021/02/05/964534341/should-schools-reopen-if-teachers-arent-yet-vaccinated-cdc-will-soon-weigh-in>

<sup>8</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *K-12 School Operational Strategy* (updated Feb. 12, 2021), available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operation-strategy.html>.

Although many pages of the emails have been redacted, those that we were able to review paint an unsettling picture of the “partnership” between the CDC and the AFT, and your personal desire to “ensure” the AFT’s confidence:

**You to AFT officials:** “Dear All, I just wanted to circle back and extend my gratitude for the language you have provided us below. Regrets for my delay in reply but I wanted to be certain you knew it is being worked into (with just a few small tweaks) the school opening guidance. We have also included the executive summary you suggested. Please know we are listening and working hard to ensure your confidence and partnership in this endeavor.”

**AFT response:** “Dr. Walensky, [t]hank you so much for your responsiveness to the suggestions made by Randi and our team. We are immensely grateful for your genuine desire to earn our confidence and your commitment to partnership. We will pass this message along to Randi. She will certainly be most grateful.”

Unsurprisingly, the AFT praised the very guidance they helped shape.<sup>9</sup> While Ms. Weingarten travels the country in a private jet<sup>10</sup> for in-person meetings, kids sit at home glued to screens as parents are left looking for answers. The AFT’s priority is not focused on getting kids back to school, despite studies showing, with appropriate measures in place, in-person learning is safe. However, as the Director of the CDC, your decisions should be guided by science, not political interest groups.

CDC’s partnership with “stakeholders” is not the only partnership that matters. CDC and the Congress also have an important partnership that relies on trust. CDC was not forthcoming when we asked about whose input and what input was being provided to CDC during the preparation of the guidance. To restore this partnership and rebuild trust, CDC needs to be accountable and transparent about the CDC guidance process and detail what input was provided by “education partners.” Please provide written answers to the following questions by May 19, 2021:

1. What date did the CDC share its draft school reopening guidance with the AFT?
2. How many conversations did you or other CDC officials have with Randi Weingarten or AFT officials about the CDC’s guidance prior to its release on February 12, 2021?
3. Did you have a conversation with Becky Pringle, President of the NEA, on February 1, 2021? If so, did you make any commitments to specific language or recommendations the CDC would include in its updated school guidance?
4. What date did the CDC share its draft school reopening guidance with NEA?

---

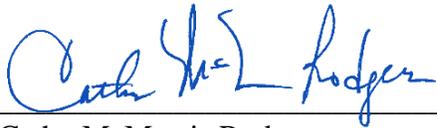
<sup>9</sup> American Federation of Teachers Press Release (February 12, 2021) *available at* <https://www.aft.org/press-release/afts-weingarten-cdcs-schools-reopening-guidelines>

<sup>10</sup> Randi Weingarten, Twitter (April 5, 2021), *available at* <https://twitter.com/rweingarten/status/1379201094291660802?s=20>

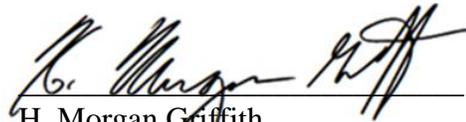
5. Did the CDC share its draft school reopening guidance with any other political interest group for input prior to releasing it on February 12, 2021? If so, please identify who and when.
6. Please identify all organizations, entities, groups, or other “stakeholders” the CDC shared an advanced copy of the school guidance to for input and disclose when it was shared with the organization, entity, group, or “stakeholder.”
7. Did anyone outside the CDC instruct the agency to discuss the draft guidance with the AFT, the NEA, or any other political stakeholder prior to its release on February 12, 2021? If so, please identify who instructed you to and when.
8. Did anyone outside the CDC instruct the agency to incorporate feedback from the AFT, the NEA, or any other political stakeholder in your February 12, 2021 guidance?

If you have any questions, please contact Bijan (BJ) Koohmaraie or Grace Graham at (202) 225-3641. Thank you for your prompt attention to this request.

Sincerely,



Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Republican Leader  
Committee on Energy and Commerce



H. Morgan Griffith  
Republican Leader  
Subcommittee on Oversight and  
Investigations



Brett Guthrie  
Republican Leader  
Subcommittee on Health