

United States Senate

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION
JUDICIARY
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

January 19, 2022

Dr. Rochelle Walensky
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Director Walensky,

I write regarding the CDC's Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 schools. I am concerned that the Biden Administration's CDC guidance that encourages schools to shut down all in-person extracurricular activities like sports, choir, and band is misguided and puts American children's health and development at risk. This administration is using the guise of COVID-19 to take away freedoms, seemingly without any regard for the well-being of our nation's children.

As part of updated guidance provided on January 6, 2022, the CDC recommends that schools cancel high-risk extracurricular activities when a community is experiencing a "high" COVID-19 transmission rate.¹ The CDC guidance links to a covid data tracker map that shows over 99% of counties in the United States are experiencing a "high" COVID-19 transmission rate,² which suggests that the CDC believes almost every county in the U.S. should shut down high-risk extracurricular activities including sports, choir, and band.

As a parent and grandparent of school aged children, it has been heartbreaking to watch their experience during the pandemic. Children need to play sports and develop their talents; not allowing them to do so is harmful to their mental health. Last year, a CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly report demonstrated a 50.6% increase in suspected suicide attempts by adolescent girls for 2020 compared to 2019, and a 31% increase among all adolescents for 2020 compared to 2019.³ A JAMA Pediatrics review of 36 studies on children and adolescents during COVID-19 associated school closures and social lockdown with adverse mental health symptoms and behaviors including anxiety, depression, lower physical activity, food insecurity, and school

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>

² https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view?list_select_state=all_states&list_select_county=all_counties&data-type=Risk

³

https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7024e1.htm?s_cid=mm7024e1_w&ACSTrackingID=DM59196&ACSTrackingLabel=Suspected%20Suicide%20Attempts%20Increased%20for%20Adolescents%20and%20Young%20Adults%20During%20COVID-19_DM59196&deliveryName=DM59196

disengagement.⁴ We need to be helping our children not hurting them, and banning them from playing sports or attending band practice will only harm children.

Lockdown measures designed to control the spread of COVID-19 do not work. The Administration is more focused on pushing Critical Race Theory, and being a puppet for teachers' unions than doing what is best for our children's education – which is returning to normalcy. It is past time we learn to live with COVID-19, not in fear of it. Americans will not stand for President Biden controlling our children's ability to play sports or attend band practice.

It is also difficult for Americans to trust that CDC guidance is based on scientific evidence, especially given the Biden administration's propensity for bowing to teachers' unions. Prior to the February 2021 CDC announcement on school reopening guidelines, emails indicated that some CDC language in school reopening guidelines was actually written by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).⁵ In light of this, I request responses to the following requests:

1. What specific scientific evidence and data led to the conclusion that stopping children from playing sports will reduce the spread of COVID-19?
2. Please detail any and all communication you have had with outside groups, including teachers' unions such as the AFT, which have led to your decision.

Our children's health and well-being are on the line, and it is long past time for this administration to stop trying to micromanage the decisions Americans make about their own health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marsha Blackburn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath it.

Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator

⁴ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2788069>

⁵ <https://nypost.com/2021/05/01/teachers-union-collaborated-with-cdc-on-school-reopening-emails/>