

CHALLENGES TO SAFELY REOPENING K-12 SCHOOLS

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS
CRISIS
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
REFORM

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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- * Unanimous Consent: NEA Letter of Support; submitted by Rep. Raskin.
- * Unanimous Consent: Reopening School Buildings; submitted by Committee Chairwoman Maloney.

CHALLENGES TO SAFELY REOPENING K-12 SCHOOLS

Thursday, August 6, 2020

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM
Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:09 p.m., via WebEx, Hon. James E. Clyburn (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Clyburn, Waters, Maloney, Foster, Raskin, Kim, Scalise, Luetkemeyer, and Green.

Chairman CLYBURN. Good afternoon. The committee will come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any time. I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

On July 11, President Trump tweeted, and I quote, “the Dems think it would be bad for them politically if schools open before the November election, but it’s important for children and families.” He ended with a threat; may cut off funding if not open.

And just yesterday he said, and I quote, “my view is that schools should open. This thing is going away. It will go away like things go away, and my view is that schools should be open.”

The President views the decision about how to reopen schools as a political dispute about his own reelection, and to paraphrase his press secretary, he is refusing to let science stand in the way. I fundamentally disagree with that approach. Schools must reopen based on science and the safety of our children and teachers, not politics and wishful thinking.

I do agree with the President that schools are critically important for children and their families. My first job after I graduated from college was as a high school history teacher. My wife was a school librarian. At this time of year, I remember the anticipation at the start of school would come into focus. Two of my grandchildren are school age, and I know they are feeling that anticipation now.

In May, the Select Subcommittee focused on how to reopen safely through testing, tracing, and targeted containment. I hoped that the administration would implement these measures and that schools could safely reopen in the fall fully in person. Unfortunately, this is not possible in much of the country.

Last Friday, Dr. Fauci told us the virus is still raging across the United States because unlike Europe, we didn’t shut down suffi-

ciently in the first place. We cannot make the same mistake with our schools. We need to follow the science.

First, children can get the coronavirus, and they can pass it on to others. The President has claimed that children are, and I quote, “almost immune to this disease,” end of quote. But Dr. Fauci told our subcommittee last week, and I quote, “children do get infected, we know that, so therefore, they are not immune,” end of quote.

Evidence has started to pile up about outbreaks at summer camps such as CDC’s report last week that 76 percent of children who were tested at a YMCA camp in Georgia have had the virus. Other summer camp outbreaks have been documented in Florida, New York, Texas, here in South Carolina, Louisiana, and other states. Nationwide, more than 338,000 children have tested positive for the virus.

Second, the CDC has been clear that a key consideration for physically reopening schools is coronavirus rates in the community and that in-person school presents the, quote, “highest risk,” end of quote, of spreading the disease. CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield has warned that in virus hot spots, and I’m quoting him here, “remote and distance learning may need to be adopted for some amount of time,” end of quote.

The White House Coronavirus Task Force reported last week that 21 states are in so-called red zones because they have high positivity rates or rising infections. Reopening schools in these hot spots presents heightened risks.

Third. Even for schools outside of red zones, CDC experts and other scientists have urged that any schools considering reopening should take steps to limit transmission. That includes improving school ventilation systems, physically distancing, and wearing masks.

Our schools face life-or-death decisions because of the administration’s inexcusable failure to get the virus under control for the last six months, but there are steps the Federal Government can take to help schools safely reopen in person and stay open.

As Dr. Fauci and Dr. Redfield told us last week, we can control the pandemic by wearing masks, limiting gatherings, closing indoor dining and bars, and practicing social distancing. The President needs to follow and promote this expert advice, not denigrate and distract from it.

Rather than threatening to withhold funding from schools, we should assure every school has the resources it needs to safely educate students during the pandemic, whether remote or in person.

The next coronavirus relief package must provide sufficient funding to meet these needs. It must also include the funds in the HEROES Act to provide mobile hotspots and other connectivity devices to students and subsidies to make the internet affordable for lower income families. I urge my Republican colleagues to support these investments in our children.

I look forward to hearing from my witnesses who speak from deep expertise and experience in education and public health. I also invited Secretary DeVos to testify today so she could explain why she is pressuring schools to fully reopen despite the risks.

I offered to accommodate her schedule, but she refused to appear. I find it hard to understand how Secretary DeVos can expect to

lead our Nation's efforts to safely educate our children during this pandemic if she refuses to speak directly to Congress and the American people.

I will now yield to my friend, the distinguished ranking member, Mr. Scalise, for his opening remarks.

Mr. SCALISE. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate you calling this hearing.

I do want to mention since the chairman mentioned the President's spokesperson, Kayleigh McEnany, to finish the quote that was started by chairman. Quote, she said, the science is on our side here. We encourage the localities and states to just simply follow the science. Open our schools. That was the President's spokesperson on that issue.

Mr. Chairman, last week, our Nation's top public health officials came before the Select Subcommittee and urged the importance for America's children to safely reopen our schools for face-to-face learning, for educational health, for mental health, for physical health, and yes, for the public health of our children.

Dr. Redfield, who is the CDC head, testified under oath, quote, it's important to realize that it's in the public health's best interests for K-12 students to get back into face-to-face learning. There's really very significant public health consequences of the school closure. I do think that it's really important to realize it's not public health versus the economy about school reopening, closed quote.

CDC guidance further adds, quote, the harms attributed to closed schools on the social, emotional, and behavioral health, economic well being, and academic achievement of children in both the short-and long-term are well known and significant. Aside from a child's home, no other setting has more influence on a child's health and well-being than their school.

Dr. Fauci said just last week, school reopenings are important for, quote, the psychological welfare of the children. The fact that many children rely on schools for nutrition, for breakfast, for healthy lunches.

The United Nations General Secretary Just this week called the situation around the globe with school closings, quote, a generational catastrophe that could waste untold human potential.

Mr. Chairman, the overwhelming consensus among the public health community is that for the sake of the health and development of more than 50 million American children, it is critical to safely reopen schools for in-person learning.

Let's get more specific. The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act requires each state to have procedures requiring teachers, principals, and other school personnel to report known or suspected instances of child abuse and neglect. This came up at last week's hearing as well.

We've seen the reports of child abuse drop by an average of more than 40 percent compared to the levels reported during the same period in 2019. That doesn't mean that child abuse has stopped or dropped by 40 percent. It just means it's not getting discovered because our teachers were doing such a great job of doing that. Now those children are home with those very parents who were abusing

them, and it's not getting detected. Imagine the damage to tens of thousands of our children because of that.

The evidence from hospitals strongly suggests that child abuse has actually increased during the pandemic, in fact. Teachers can't report what they can't see, and as a result, thousands of children are being abused in America today. We cannot sit by and make excuses. We need to follow the safety guidelines and stand up for those children who are counting on us to take action and do our jobs.

Our children in America need us to do what we know we can do. They don't need excuses from us. They need us to look at these challenges and recognize how to overcome them, and there are road maps everywhere from CDC to the American Academy of Pediatrics to so many other organizations.

Dr. Redfield added last week, quote, we're seeing, sadly, far greater suicides now than we are deaths from COVID. We're seeing far greater deaths from drug overdose that are above the excess that we had as background than we are seeing the deaths from COVID.

Again, I know we're used to seeing the charts, and we mourn every death from COVID, but why don't we talk about the other deaths that are happening because people are shutting in, because people are staying home? We cannot act like we're living in a vacuum, we're living in silos. When children aren't in schools, there are very devastating things happening to them.

I understand we want to make sure that we have a safe environment, but again, we can't use that as an excuse. We have to go and figure out how to do it. We can't talk about how hard it is to do. A lot of people do hard work every day.

People are going to hospitals every day working on the front lines. They're going to grocery stores working on the front lines. None of that is easy, but they do it because they know that everybody else is relying on them. We need to have that same can-do attitude.

On the other side of the equation, CDC advises, quote, the best available evidence indicates that COVID-19 poses relatively low risks to school age children. Children appear to be at the lowest risk for contracting COVID-19 compared to adults.

As of July 17, the United States reported that children and adolescents under 18 years old accounted for under seven percent of COVID cases and less than one percent of COVID-19 related deaths.

If we focus on the well-being of our children, the question really is not should we reopen. The question really is why haven't we started planning more widespread to reopen safely? All schools can be doing this. We've seen some schools do it even in hotspots. Now we're seeing schools that aren't in hotspots trying to figure out how not to reopen. This is not like inventing the wheel. Others have figured it out. We need to share that learning experience with everybody.

The coronavirus continues to pose a serious threat. Dr. Redfield and Dr. Fauci gave us five things every American should do, and they testified it would have a dramatic impact on reducing the virus. I know the chairman talked about this as well, wearing

masks, as I know we're all doing, social distancing, hand hygiene, staying smart about gatherings, and staying out of crowded bars and crowded areas.

If we did those five things, we've done the modelling data. We get the same bang for the buck as if we shut the entire economy down. We should do all of those five things, and we should also encourage schools to safely reopen.

We know that schools present some unique and specific challenges. The good news is, Mr. Chairman, each one of those challenges can be responsibly addressed. We're not talking about a one-size-fits-all model. Every school system's different. Hot spots move around. The good news is each one can be responsibly addressed.

The main concerns, as we hear, are from teachers. Children may not be at great risk for getting sick, but they can spread the virus. Teachers with high risk factors, like any other person in a high-risk factor anywhere else that they go to work, knows that there are risks that you can help address.

But smart school reopening will ensure that the risk of COVID coming into the schools is greatly reduced, and the chance of it spreading within the school is also mitigated.

Finally, at-risk teachers can be socially distanced from kids by assigning them virtual learning responsibilities or other new tasks associated with mitigating the risks of spreading COVID.

In most of the school settings I've seen, teachers aren't just six feet away from the nearest student. In many cases, they're over 10 feet away from the nearest student, and they're all wearing masks. Many schools have adopted CDC guidelines on symptom screening. Every day, parents can take their own child's safety and their own safety into their hands. They can take their temperatures. They can complete a checklist for symptoms. If the child or family member exhibits any of those symptoms, the child should just stay home.

While no plan is perfect, CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics have laid out guidelines for safely reopening America's school, and they address those concerns. Those guidelines should be followed by everybody.

Once in the schools, students, faculty, and staff, of course, should wear masks and have access to easy hand sanitizing stations. That's why we put over \$150 million out there for our states, a lot of which, by the way, is still available and can be used by our schools today. They don't need to wait for Congress to pass a new bill. There is over—almost \$100 billion available to our schools and anybody else who needs them.

Temperature checks, as students move throughout the building, and requiring physical distancing are all things that are mentioned. Six feet or more for desks keeps students in smaller groups. Many schools are doing platoons, improved ventilation by opening windows. Many schools are looking at conducting classes outdoors where it's possible, increase wipe downs of desks, chairs, equipment. These are all guidelines that have been laid out.

If someone does get sick, and we know, by the way, that it's going to happen, have a plan in place to follow those scientific recommendations. Doctors and smart scientists have already laid out how to do it if these things happen. No school system should be

just today wondering what to do in those situations. This should have been planned weeks ago, and if not, start planning it today and talk to the other school systems who are opening up next week.

In my own home state of Louisiana, we have schools opening up in person next week, and they've already gone through these guidelines. They'll be happy to share that with anybody who is willing.

Mr. Chairman, Washington, DC. just announced that their schools will not be open in the fall. Not one child under the age of 18 has died from COVID in the entire District of Columbia, and yet, they're shutting down all schools.

If D.C. followed all of the safety guidelines that we just listed, and considering the devastating damage to these children, how can you justify the harm that you're doing to the tens of thousands of children in the city by shutting down in-person learning? Those kids are going to suffer, and we all know it. The data is there. The science is there. The reports are everywhere about what damage is being done to those kids if those schools are not open.

Education is a local responsibility, as we know, and each school must adapt to their unique challenges. That's why CDC laid this out in their guidance. It makes clear that a school in a hot spot must be more cautious than a school where transmission's very low, but all schools can and must develop a plan to resume in-person learning.

The stakes are too high and the ability to dramatically lower risk too easily attainable for us to be having an actual debate about whether or not it can be done. It, of course, can be done, and it is being done in hot spots and in places where it's not a hot spot, and yet, it's not being done in places where it's not a hot spot.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I want to first thank you for holding this hearing, thank our witnesses that we're about to hear from. Our teachers have faced an unprecedented challenge. In the spring, they had to deal with closing schools early and put out new guidelines. We did see parents, including myself and my wife, step up to the plate in this new home school environment. Everybody has stepped up to the plate and has had to answer the call to this new challenge that we're all facing.

I want to thank all of the teachers and the parents who home schooled for what they've done and what they're preparing to do to help educate over 50 million children who are counting on us. I want to extend a thank you to all who help us get our schools re-open and to help our kids have that opportunity to achieve the American dream that we enjoy, that we owe to them to give them that same opportunity.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman CLYBURN. Well, I thank the ranking member for his statement. And I would now like to introduce our witnesses.

I'm honored to have the former Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, with us today. Secretary Duncan led the Department of Education with distinction from 2009 through 2015. Prior to his service under President Obama, Secretary Duncan led the Chicago Public Schools for eight years. Since leaving government, Secretary Duncan has returned to Chicago where he works to help improve opportunities for young people.

We are also joined by Dr. Caitlin Rivers, a Senior Scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security and an Assistant Professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Dr. Rivers is an epidemiologist, specializing in emerging infectious diseases, and a recent panelist for the National Academies of Science on reopening schools during the coronavirus pandemic.

We are also grateful to be joined by Superintendent Robert Runcie of Broward County Public Schools in Florida.

I would like to yield to my colleague and friend, Congresswoman Wasserman Schultz, who represents the southern portion of Broward County, for a brief introduction.

Debbie.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Chairman Clyburn, Ranking Member Scalise, and the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, for allowing me to introduce an esteemed witness from my district, Superintendent Robert Runcie.

I am honored to represent Broward County which is home to the sixth largest public school district in the country and the second largest in Florida. We entrust the safety and education of nearly 270,000 students and 175,000 learning adults at 241 schools, centers, technical colleges, and 89 charter schools to Superintendent Runcie.

Under his leadership, our students have seen improved literacy in graduation rates, college acceptances, and career readiness. He has also expanded technical programs, established the first military academy, and expanded access to speech and debate, art, music, physical education, coding, and STEM offerings.

I can personally speak to the superintendent's skillful leadership. My twins graduated from a Broward County public school, and my youngest daughter is currently a senior in the district.

During the pandemic, Superintendent Runcie has worked with the school board, principals, teachers, staff, parents, and students to ensure that everyone remains safe and that their education is not compromised. This is no easy task with President Trump and Governor DeSantis at the helm of our state, each one recklessly browbeating schools to return in person, even threatening to withhold funds if they don't return in person five days a week while a virus rages through our community and just as cases and deaths spike even higher.

Yesterday, total cases in our state topped 500,000. Distressing records were set all through July. People are dying, our hospitals are stressed, and a rushed return to school would only put more people at risk. Superintendent Runcie is paving a prudent model pathway, beginning our school year online, and keeping our teachers, staff, and students safe, one that other school districts will be able to follow.

I'm thrilled to introduce him to you so you can see why he is the pride of Broward County and the remarkable leader of our Broward County Public Schools.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Chairman CLYBURN. Thank you, Ms. Wasserman Schultz.

Next, I am pleased to introduce Angela Skillings from Gila County, Arizona. Ms. Skillings teaches second grade in the Hayden Winkelman Unified School District in eastern Arizona.

Despite strictly following the CDC school guidance precautions, Ms. Skillings and her two co-teachers contracted the coronavirus while teaching summer school together. Ms. Skillings and one of her colleagues recovered, but a third teacher, Kimberly Byrd, passed away.

Ms. Byrd had been a public school teacher for 38 years. She was a wife, a mother, a grandmother, and I know her passing has been devastating to her family, her students, and her community. Ms. Skillings, I am truly sorry for the loss of your friend and colleague, and I appreciate your willingness to speak with us today and share your experiences.

Finally, we are joined by Dan Lips, Director of Cyber and National Security at the Lincoln Network and a Visiting Fellow at the Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity.

The witnesses will be unmuted so we can swear them in.

Please raise your right hands.

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

Thank you. Let the record show that the witnesses answered in the affirmative.

Without objection, your written statements will be made a part of the record.

With that, Secretary Duncan, you are now recognized for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ARNE DUNCAN, MANAGING PARTNER, EMERSON COLLECTIVE, FORMER SECRETARY OF EDUCATION (2009-2015)

Mr. DUNCAN. Chairman Clyburn, Ranking Member Scalise, thank you for inviting me to offer testimony today.

We are confronting not one or two but of several crises at once. The first is the pandemic itself which began as a natural disaster.

The second is the abject failure of leadership from the Federal Government which inflamed that natural disaster into a manmade catastrophe that has led to the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

At the same time, we're also facing a much-needed reckoning with America's long history of systemic racism which has some of its most damaging effects in our Nation's schools.

Today these multiple crises have all come to a head at once, and some of the Americans who risk paying the highest price are our children.

The essential question is, how can schools reopen in the midst of a pandemic? Look. We all want our children to go back to school in person. Everyone is united in that; parents, students, and teachers, all of us. But we can only allow that once it is safe. And everyone is looking to our Federal Government to show some leadership here because in the absence of a clear plan, superintendents are being left to navigate these decisions on their own.

As a Nation, we're asking them to solve problems that the Federal Government has been making worse. We're asking them to make potentially life and death public health decisions. We're asking 15,000 school districts to become 15,000 healthcare providers without any real resources or expertise.

We're asking them to sanitize and secure physical infrastructure, redesign food systems, rethink transportation systems, and reengineer mental health systems that are already strapped. And, by the way, we're also asking teachers who may be at high risk to go to school every day where they might catch COVID-19 and bring it home to their families.

We're asking all of them to do all of these things under the threat of a President and a Federal Government that's saying reopen or else. They're telling schools to choose between safeguarding our health and getting the funding that they desperately need.

Let's be clear. Schools are part of a community. So, even if we do miraculously manage to secure our schools, the truth is, if we don't keep the rest of our communities healthy and safe, we will all remain at risk.

The bottom line is this: If we really want our kids to go back to school safely, the single most important thing we can do has nothing to do with education at all, and that is defeat the virus.

What infuriates me about what is happening today is that it's an unforced error. We're in this situation because our Federal leadership failed us, period. It did not have to be this way. If we had done what was necessary in the spring, wearing masks, social distancing, testing to scale, contact tracing, we could have brought students back earlier in the summer to recoup that lost learning time.

If we had valued our students and teachers more than our bars and our restaurants, we'd be sitting here today with a far better chance of more districts safely reopening. If Congress had appropriated a significant investment in schools back in the spring, our local communities could have immediately deployed those resources to address glaring equity gaps that COVID-19 has both exposed and, unfortunately, exacerbated. Manmade catastrophes are absolutely tragic, but they can also be repaired, and the time to start is now. So, here is where we ought to begin.

First, Congress needs to immediately deploy funds where they're needed most, and that should include at least \$200 billion in funds to states and districts which would be targeted primarily to low income schools.

Funding should be targeted to our children who are most vulnerable, those who experiencing homelessness, students with disabilities, and English language learners as has been done in previous disaster relief bills.

Money should also be targeted to a national tutoring initiative. We have millions of college students, recent graduates, and retired individuals, who could serve as a nationwide resource to provide intensive tutoring to students who need to regain lost learning time due to both the COVID slide and the summer slide.

The Federal Government could spur this idea into action in partnership with private sector leaders.

Fifty billion dollars in child care funds should be included so that this essential system can continue to serve our communities, including our teachers and school staff, and \$7 billion in E-rate funding to close the digital divide that exacerbates the inequities in educational opportunity between the haves and have nots.

So, that's what we should be doing, and here is what we should not be doing. We should not be delaying the start of the school year. Our children have lost far too much valuable learning time already.

Schools need to begin, but how school starts, whether they are in person, remote, or some hybrid model, that's going to have to vary from place to place. And very importantly, our goal can't just be opening schools. It must be keeping them open because if we open them up only to close them a short time later, that will just create more instability, more chaos, and more confusion. We don't need any of that.

Students, parents, teachers, staff, they all need and deserve stability. So, we should be focused on starting school in whatever way is safe and responsible with the clear goal of bringing more students back over time.

I wish, I desperately wish, that we could go back to earlier this year and change the way this pandemic was managed from the start, but we can't. What we can do is act now so we don't keep making matters worse.

What we can do is something that hasn't been done yet by this administration, and that's put our students, our children, front and center in how we make decisions. Don't they deserve that? Don't the American people deserve that?

Thank you again, Chairman Clyburn, and Ranking Member Scalise. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to taking your questions.

Chairman CLYBURN. Thank you, Mr. Duncan. We will now turn to Dr. Rivers.

Dr. Rivers, you're now recognized.

**STATEMENT OF DR. CAITLIN RIVERS, SENIOR SCHOLAR,
JOHNS HOPKINS CENTER FOR HEALTH SECURITY, ASSISTANT
PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL
HEALTH AND ENGINEERING, JOHNS HOPKINS BLOOMBERG
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

Ms. RIVERS. Chairman Clyburn, Ranking Member Scalise, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about safely reopening schools during the pandemic.

We have been looking ahead to school reopening since they first closed in March. As I'm sure my colleagues here will attest, schools play multiple essential roles in our communities. They educate our children, they provide basic healthcare, access to mental health services, meals, and they provide childcare for working parents. In so many ways, the schools are the flywheel of our society.

But we are not here today because anyone disputes the value of schools. Schools did not close in March because they faded in importance. They closed because of the pandemic. They closed because we care a great deal about protecting children and teachers

and families at home and ensuring their health and safety is a top priority.

We know more about the virus than we did in March. We know that children are much less likely to experience severe illness than adults, and often their infections are so mild that they are not even detected. Nationwide, less than 10 percent of recognized coronavirus cases are in children, but we also know there are many more infections that are not detected and that we only see the tip of the iceberg.

Children are much less likely to die than adults. Less than one percent of coronavirus deaths in the U.S. are in kids, but less than one percent is not the same as zero. Tragically, 488 people between the ages of 0 and 24 have died of COVID-19 as of July 29, according to CDC.

And schools are not attended only by children. They are also workplaces for teachers and staff who may be at higher risk of severe illness because of their age, and children return home to family members, many of whom may be older adults who have underlying health conditions. Although many gaps in our understanding remain, it's become increasingly clear that it is possible for children to spread the virus. Multiple outbreaks, some quite sizable, have been described in childcare settings.

Recently, a report of an outbreak at a summer camp in Georgia found that nearly half of campers were infected. The camp had to close just a few days after opening.

There are still some open questions about whether children are as infectious as adults or whether they are somewhat less likely to spread, but the risk here underscores the importance of mitigation measures to slow the virus's spread. On that front, we also know more now than we did in March. In addition to physical distancing and hand hygiene, it's now clear that universal masking and ventilation and air circulation are important for reducing risk.

Limiting the number of contacts any person has, which in the school setting may mean hybrid approaches or pods or cohorts, are important options as well.

But above all, the most important factor in determining whether schools can safely reopen is the prevalence of the disease in the community. Communities that have a lot of virus circulating will have a much tougher time reopening safely than places where things are under better control.

How these factors come together, the importance of schools, the risk of the virus to children, teachers, and family, local disease prevalence, mitigation measures, this is probably the most complex decision that we are facing in this pandemic. We all want in-person learning, but when and how we can make that happen, and how can we do it as safely as possible is the question at hand.

The final word on these decisions should be left to communities. How communities weigh the risks and benefits and resources available to support in-person learning will vary from place to place. That decision-making process should include a coalition of staff, families, health officials, and other community stakeholders, but communities can't decide alone, and they can't implement alone.

School leaders and families are not experts in epidemiology or pandemic preparedness. They need clear guidance and technical

support from our public health authorities at all levels, Federal, state, and local.

For example, CDC documents on school reopening distinguish substantial controlled from substantial uncontrolled spread, and they encourage consideration of school closures for the latter, for substantial uncontrolled spread. But additional guidance on what indicators and thresholds might differentiate between substantial controlled and substantial uncontrolled would help communities to better assess their local conditions.

Districts also need supplemental funding to implement the mitigation measures that we need to slow spread and to support the technologies and support services needed to deliver remote learning.

And above all, they need to be able to make decisions appropriate to their local disease prevalence, risk tolerance, and capacity to implement mitigation measures without fear of having funds withheld or their decisions undermined.

Although we have learned a lot about the virus in the last few months, there are still many questions unanswered. CDC and NIH should put in place now the necessary research studies to collect data on our most pressing questions which could include the degree to which asymptomatic children are infectious, which mitigation measures are most important, how remote learning can be effective, and how best to approach these issues with respect to underlying educational inequities.

The more we can learn about this virus, the better informed our decisions will be, and we can be sure that there will be many more difficult decisions ahead, including those on schools, between now and when we find a safe and effective vaccine that is accessible to all Americans.

Thank you.

Chairman CLYBURN. Thank you. Ms. Runcie. Ms. Runcie, you are now—Ms. Skillings, you are now recognized. Oh. I'm sorry. Mr. Runcie, you are now recognized.

**STATEMENT OF ROBERT W. RUNCIE, SUPERINTENDENT,
BROWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Mr. RUNCIE. All right. Thank you, Chairman Clyburn, and Ranking Member Scalise, and distinguished members of the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and a special thank you to Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz for her leadership and relentless support and advocacy for our children.

In less than two weeks, Broward County Public Schools will start the new school year. The first day of school has always been a day of great anticipation and excitement as every one of our 30,000 employees welcome back almost 270,000 of our precious children into our classrooms. Providing valuable learning opportunities for our kids, offering engaging experiences, that's what we live for. The coronavirus pandemic has changed all of that. It is painful and enormously disappointing not to be in a position to open our schools safely.

On March 13, we announced the closing of our school campuses due to the coronavirus pandemic. And within just a few short days

of our schools closing, we became the lifeline for many in our community. We continued to distribute food from our local school sites and have since then served over 2 and a half million meals to students and families.

We addressed digital inequities by distributing more than 100,000 laptop computers to our students who needed one while also offering discounted internet services for families and free mobile hotspots to students, those that have housing instability and homeless as well.

District mental health staff, they continue to provide services to our students. Our amazing school social workers received more than 34,000 referrals and have provided close to 160,000 interventions.

Looking forward, a big consideration about how and when we open schools is the state of the pandemic. Unfortunately, south Florida continues to be a hot spot for coronavirus spread in this country.

As of this week, Florida had reported more than 480,000 known cases of coronavirus with the highest concentrations right here in Broward and Miami-Dade Counties where the positivity rate has at times been as high as 20 percent.

Public health experts and infectious disease physicians almost universally recommend that children not go to school until the positive test rate is three to five percent over a rolling two-week average. Our local positive test rate is still averaging above 10 percent.

As we continue to consult with our local public health officials and medical experts for guidance, I've been clear about reopening schools, and that is we will not compromise the health and safety of our students, teachers, and staff. That's our highest priority, period.

Faced with an ongoing pandemic that continues to spread through our community, our only option when the school year starts in just a few short days will be to begin with a distance learning or what we call e-learning models for all students. That is the only we can educate our students while still keeping them, their teachers, and all employees healthy and safe. We simply cannot risk exposing our students and staff until the coronavirus is under control.

Our commitment is to deliver high quality instruction to our students, regardless of which learning model we provide. We understand that e-learning will never be a substitute for face-to-face teaching and learning in our classrooms, but during this time, our students will continue to learn, and we will work to make the learning environment personal, engaging, interesting, challenging, and fulfilling.

I will continue to ask our community for help. The only way our district will be able to open our school buildings is when we've lowered the number of coronavirus cases in our community.

It will require each and every one of us to contain community spread of COVID-19 by wearing masks, by physical distancing, and changing our behaviors. I'm also urging and begging our Federal Government to pass an additional coronavirus relief package that responds to the impact of COVID-19 and assists with the ongoing

recovery by providing at least \$200 billion to public schools across this country that serve over 50 million students.

This funding is critically needed to help cover the impending substantial shortfalls in state and local revenue collections to continue to feed students and their families, to close gaps in remote learning, to expand mental health services, to provide reliable high speed internet access for all students, and to purchase the necessary PPE materials and equipment for enhanced cleaning and sanitation protocols so we can make our schools safe for our students, teachers, and staff when we open.

Our children have so many abilities and talents to develop and countless dreams that are being stifled by COVID-19. We owe it to them and future generations to meet this pandemic head on by developing and implementing national and local strategies to get this pandemic under control. And to provide the necessary funding and support so we can fully open schools and safely provide them with the opportunities to thrive. They deserve nothing less.

Thank you, and I look forward to answering your questions.

Chairman CLYBURN. Thank you, Mr. Runcie.

Ms. Skillings, you are now recognized.

**STATEMENT OF ANGELA SKILLINGS, TEACHER, HAYDEN
WINKELMAN UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Ms. SKILLING. Thank you, Chairman Clyburn, Ranking Member Scalise, and the rest of you distinguished members of this committee for taking your time to hear us today.

Chairman Clyburn already talked about Ms. Byrd and her story. We were virtually teaching summer school when we contracted COVID-19. Ms. Byrd did pass away less than two weeks after her—after going into the hospital.

I am a second grade teacher. I've been teaching for 17 years. This will be my 14th year at this district. We are a very rural, small town in eastern Arizona. We only have 3—around 300 students, kindergarten through 12th grade, 90 percent Hispanic, 84 percent free and reduced lunch. Our students start school in kindergarten or preschool, and they stay in the same cohort, same classrooms, all through senior year unless they move out of our district.

Our school is a community, but we're also a family, and we are all worried about the struggle of returning to school. Our district was just hit again last week. We had four more support staff members contract the virus. Seven staff members out of the 60 members of our district staff, that is a little over 11 percent. We need to—together as a staff, we are worried about each other and about what can happen, and we are not ready to lose another staff member.

I think about the emotional impact of our students and them not being in the classroom. I also think about the impact of them losing Ms. Byrd. She was here for 38 years. She was my son's teacher for second and third grade. She was a dear colleague, a mentor, and a friend.

Our students have expressed to me how they were concerned that even I would pass away, and that right there is emotionally damning. It would bring them into the classroom, and when somebody passes away, how is that going to affect them?

I cannot speak for all teachers, but I can speak for the teachers in our community and the teachers I have talked to throughout the United States in the last of couple weeks. We have continually been told that children don't contract and transmit the virus, but how do we know that? We put them in seclusion. We took them out of the classroom in March. They have been sheltered, at least in our community.

To me, we are forcing schools to be open, and that is going to put those students back into the petri dish that we have in our classrooms. They spread everything. Students are children. Children are children. They like to be around each other. They like to share.

Why are we putting them in there? Do we need that to gain more data on that age group? We need it—we do know that it doesn't spread or that they're not affected as much and that only one—around one percent have passed away.

But do we need the statistics, or should we more think of the humanitarian value of when our students going home after being—after contracting it in our schools and then giving it to their family members. Our community—when I first tested positive for COVID-19, in the small town of Winkelman, I was the only person. Just me. No. 1.

Now in the last six and a half, seven weeks, we are up to 28, so we need to be careful. We need to think about our community. I can tell you after teaching seven years in second grade, I have seen them pass everything around from pink eye to stomach flu to even influenza. So, passing around COVID-19 will not be something we can stop, and we all know that.

My main concern is if we, as adults, cannot be in a classroom together or into a meeting together, we have to cancel work. We are working from home. Then why are we forcing children back into the classroom? Why are their lives more—not as important as adults?

I understand that adults, you know, contract and have problems, but if we bring kids into the classroom, they're taking it home. And these kids, yes, are our future. They are our—they are our leaders. They're going to be there 30, 40 years from now, and we need to protect them now.

Teachers will be teaching in our district online. We will be teaching face to face, offering whole group and small group instruction on a virtual platform. Schools are making adjustments to address the student needs per their district.

Our district is also putting an emphasis on social and emotional learning. Yes, teachers want to be in their classrooms, but teachers also need to think of themselves and their families. Our jobs, our careers are not just about our students. We also have to worry about our community and the people we work with and our own families at home.

I was looking at the money, and yes, I would like to thank our government—excuse me—our government for what they have given to us. That helped our district by the things that we needed to get started with students in our classrooms, but we also have to think about the other stuff.

If our buses are going to be making more runs, we are going to need more money to help with transportation. We're going to need

more money to help with substitute teaching. If a teacher has to teach from home, and we have students in the classroom, we will have to have someone in the classroom with them. They cannot just sit in the classroom while the teacher is online.

My finishing quote is—I love to say this one. We can recover a child’s lost education, but we cannot recover a life.

Thank you again for taking the time to hear my story.

Chairman CLYBURN. Well, thank you very much, Ms. Skillings. We’ll now hear from Mr. Lips.

**STATEMENT OF DAN LIPS, FELLOW, FOUNDATION FOR
RESEARCH ON EQUAL OPPORTUNITY**

Mr. LIPS. Good afternoon, Chairman Clyburn, Ranking Member Scalise, and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Dan Lips, and I’m a visiting fellow with the Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity or FREOPP, a nonpartisan research organization that focuses on the impact of public policies and reforms on those with incomes or wealth below the U.S. median.

As we’ve heard today, communities across the country are facing difficult decisions about how to begin the school year during the pandemic. The prospect of any child, teacher, or school employee contracting COVID–19 and facing the possibility of death or serious illness should weigh heavily on all policymakers involved in decisions affecting schools’ plans. But it’s critical that policymakers also recognize the serious risks associated with prolonged school closures, particularly for disadvantaged children.

Researchers studying the educational effects of school closures warn that time out of school results in months of lost learning and that the learning loss are most acute for low income students. The bottom line is that prolonged school closures will create a large achievement gap for a generation of American children.

Beyond these educational effects, prolonged school closures create significant risks for children’s health and welfare. There’s alarming evidence which I describe in my written testimony that prolonged school closures since the spring have endangered child welfare.

Closures also have significant negative effects for parents. Many parents have been forced to choose between their jobs and their childcare, and this challenge is, of course, most difficult for single parents.

The good news is that it’s possible for schools to reopen. Health experts, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, have issued guidelines for safely reopening schools with certain precautions such as physical distancing, utilizing outdoor space, cohort classes to minimize crossover among adults and children, and face coverings for students, particularly older students, and for teachers and school personnel.

We’re seeing many school districts choose to reopen across the country with in-person instruction or hybrid learning options at the beginning of this fall. According to a new analysis from University of Washington researchers, 41 percent of rural districts and 28 percent of suburban districts plan to provide in-person instruction this

fall. But the majority of the Nation's largest public school districts are not reopening with in-person instruction.

Seventy-one of the Nation's largest 120 school districts are beginning the school year with remote learning. Altogether, these school districts serve more than 7 million children, including 1.4 million children living in poverty.

It's important to recognize that children from low income families have fewer resources to learn outside of school and their peers. According to one estimate, rich families spend more than \$9,000 out of pocket on their children's educational and enrichment outside of school each year while the poorest families spend \$1,000 or so.

Today, families with financial means are working to create better options than remote learning, including home schooling, setting up pandemic learning pods or micro schools by forming co-ops with other parents and hiring teachers or tutors, but children from lower income families have few options.

Policymakers must address this inequality. For example, states should use existing CARES Act funds to provide aid directly to parents in the form of education savings accounts or scholarships to support their children's outside of school learning needs. Oklahoma, New Hampshire, South Carolina are already doing this. Other states should follow their lead.

As Congress considers future aid packages for K-12 education, you should provide aid directly to parents to help disadvantaged children learn when their school is closed. There's precedent for providing emergency education relief in this manner.

After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, many children were displaced and had nowhere to go to school. Congress provided more than \$1 billion in aid that followed affected children to a school of their parents' choice, allowing them to continue their education.

If millions of children are unable to attend school this year, Congress should focus much of its aid in a similar manner, providing direct assistance to help children continue learning while schools are closed.

In my written testimony, I discuss these and other recommendations for how school systems can prioritize and address the needs of disadvantaged children during the pandemic.

Since 1965, Congress has rightly focused Federal education aid on promoting equal opportunity for at-risk children. In 2020, this will require focusing aid to support disadvantaged kids who cannot go to school.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.

Chairman CLYBURN. Thank you, Mr. Lips, and let me thank all of the witnesses here today for their testimony, and we now will move to a period of questions and answers, and I would like now to yield myself five minutes for questions.

Mr. Lips, I'm particularly interested in your testimony. You indicated the challenges that rural districts have and low-income districts. When I taught school, I taught in a very low-income district, and trying to teach history to low-income students who do not have as much support in the home as some others. It's a pretty significant undertaking, I'll promise you.

I would like to know from you, though, what would you suggest that, as lower—rural, low-income school district would do with parents incapable of investing the amount of resources in their children's learning, as you have highlighted here, what would you say the school district ought to do with that school district?

Mr. LIPS. I think there are several options, Chairman. Thank you for the question.

I think that we're hearing encouraging strategies of deploying remote learning technologies, trying to close the digital divide. That's an important way to try and address this gap.

I also think that providing aid directly to these families to hire tutors, to provide childcare would be a compelling way to address the outside-of-school learning gap that we've seen in pretty stark terms since the spring. Some of the divergence of the learning that was provided—the instruction, I should say, that was provided while schools were closed is discouraging. There were lots of pandemic dropouts of kids not logging into remote learning.

I think gearing more resources directly to the parents of disadvantaged children to make better decisions on their behalf and try and take advantage of some of the options that more wealthy people have been trying to do: to hire tutors, forming pandemic pods. That's not to say that schools themselves don't need resources. I'm suggesting that some of that aid should be provided directly to parents.

Chairman CLYBURN. Well, I agree with that, but let me follow up a little bit. I'm concerned about—you mentioned online learning at the outset, which is great if you're connected. If you're from a school district where the adoption rate is around 35 percent, as it is in my congressional district, and you're low income in the first place and, therefore, you aren't able to hire tutors—and if you're able to hire tutors, then we have another problem with distancing and masking and other issues—how would you suggest that school district function?

Mr. LIPS. Mr. Chairman, thank you for the question.

On the first point, I absolutely agree with some of the conflicts that were described earlier in terms of providing remote instruction to disadvantaged children and trying to close the digital divide by providing subsidized internet access and hardware—information technology hardware to close that gap.

At the same time, I think there are real great opportunities to provide direct scholarship aid or education savings account aid directly to low-income families so that they can partner with a couple other families and hire a tutor to make sure that their children don't suffer the learning loss that we—you really should be expecting at this point with these prolonged school closures.

Understanding that there are likely risks of people gathering in—together in any circumstance, under a pandemic pod or micro school, it would at least be a smaller group of children. The ability to adhere to CDC guidelines by social distancing would be very feasible if a tutor was working with, say, four or five kids at a time while schools are closed.

Chairman CLYBURN. Well, thank you.

I'll now yield to the ranking member for any questions you may have.

We're not hearing you. I now see you, but I can't hear you.

Mr. SCALISE. Is that working now, Chairman?

Chairman CLYBURN. OK. OK.

Mr. SCALISE. All right. Thank you.

I know, when we heard some of our witnesses testify, it was clear that they didn't watch last week's hearing because there was a lot of talk last week by some of the President's best medical experts about the different steps that the President has taken that have not only laid out a clear plan but also how it saved lives, saved millions of lives, in fact. So, you know, maybe they should watch a replay of that hearing, and they could learn some things themselves about other things that this administration has done working with very smart people, including, last week, we had Dr. Fauci, we had Dr. Redfield, and we had Dr. Giroir all talking about different steps that the President is taking as part of an overall plan to help us find a vaccine, which, as we've seen, is revolutionary in where we are in stage three testing for two different major drugs that could be ready to go possibly in a month or two that are showing incredible promise.

That's only happening because of the President's plan, called Operation Warp Speed, which I would direct them to go see. It's a way that the President has moved all of the red tape of agencies like the FDA out of the way so that we can focus all of our resources from our smartest scientists in the world into finding a vaccine and other therapies, like Remdesivir, that they have also approved for treatment for COVID-19.

But we have also seen all of the steps that have been taken by the administration to lay out guidance, from the Centers for Disease Control to CMS and other agencies, to safely reopen businesses, nursing homes, and of course, as we're talking about today, Mr. Chairman, safely reopening schools.

And it's not just the CDC that's put out these guidelines. It's other respected agencies, like the American Academy of Pediatrics, probably the most well-respected people who deal with the health of our children, pediatric doctors, and they laid out guidelines. They didn't say that you just throw the kids back into school and have a petri dish setting, probably like we did before. You know, I think that, when you go back to a setting that we'll see in the next few weeks, it won't be anything like we've seen before, and there were things like all kind of viruses where a common flu killed kids all across the country, and maybe we should have been taking better steps like we're taking now on hygiene and washing hands and other basic things. But now we know a lot more than we did just a few months ago.

We know how to reopen safely, and the guidelines are there very clearly for how to do it. What's interesting is that some school systems have spent all their time working to get it done, and then you see a few, unfortunately, that are trying to find reasons not to get it done, and it's not for lack of the money. I know I've heard a lot of talk about money, but as I talked about last week, states have nearly \$100 billion that we've already sent them that can be used to safely reopen schools. And I haven't seen a run on that money. The money is still there. It's still there.

Most states have over 70 percent of the money that we, Congress, sent them in the CARES Act, and so I know some people want to talk about new money and, you know, hundreds of billions of dollars, but when you still have nearly \$100 billion that's unspent and available, sent to states to do things like safely reopen schools, I hope they would go look to that money first and find a way to get it done for the children.

That's what I wanted to ask you, Mr. Lips, about because we know that being in person works much better for most people. Home schooling is a very successful part of our education system, but it's a very small percentage of parents who choose that option for their kids. Most want the in-school setting, and there are a lot of studies that show, for many kids, in-person is just—there is no substitute for it, and so that's why we need to put such a focus on it.

Have you seen in those guidelines that it's flexible enough to handle different kinds of school systems in different kinds of parts of the country, Mr. Lips?

Mr. LIPS. Absolutely. I think that what we really need here is flexibility, and, for schools to respond effectively, we need to think creatively about bringing kids back into the classroom. We clearly know that in-person instruction is the best way to educate children. What we saw during the spring when many school districts were not providing one-on-one instruction when schools were remote, lots of parents reported that they—their children really didn't learn very much and weren't logging in consistently. We saw pandemic dropouts of kids. In some cities, as much as one-fifth of the kids never logged on.

We need for an—educationally, we need kids to be in the classroom to be able to benefit from in-person instruction, but, also, there is the critical element that you discussed before about the schools being on the front lines of our child welfare systems. There have been alarming reports of undercounts of child abuse reporting that's happening, yet we are concerned that those abuse incidents are happening, just not being reported. There has been an alarming increase in calls to the National Sexual Abuse Hotline, including increased calls from children.

We need kids back in school if—when it's safe, both educationally but also for children's welfare.

Mr. SCALISE. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman CLYBURN. I thank the gentleman for yielding back.

The chair now recognizes Ms. Waters for five minutes.

Ms. WATERS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I'm very, very pleased that you're holding this hearing. This subject of whether or not we're going to be able to educate our kids is a subject that's on the minds of so many families, so many parents, and so many people who don't have children in school anymore. We're really, really, really concerned about all of this, amazed at those who are insisting that we open the schools and disregarding all that we have learned about, you know, what should and should not be done basically as we deal with this pandemic.

We know that some, like Mr. Scalise is saying, that they know that we'll lose some kids. Well, what percentage of kids are you willing to lose? I'm not willing to lose one kid when we don't have to.

So, I think it's very important for us to listen to the parents, and from what I can understand, most of the parents are saying they are afraid. They don't want the kids back in the classroom. We have not been able to guarantee their safety.

Let me ask the Honorable Arne Duncan—and thank you for being here—have you heard about the percentage of parents who are saying they don't want the kids back in the classroom, they don't believe that we have the safety measures that are necessary to protect them? If so, what percentage of parents are frightened to send the kids back?

Mr. DUNCAN. That varies community by community. And it's great to see you again.

That varies community by community. Parents are very concerned. You know, my wife and I are concerned. We see that in urban districts. We see that in rural districts. Again, I think the thing that frustrates me the most is, if had we done what we needed to do as a country in March and April and May and June and July, and now in August, all of us parents would have less concern.

Had we invested in schools to get them all the—you know, the equipment that Bob Runcie talked about, had we done the things we did to secure our schools and make them more viable to open now, we would have alleviated those parents' concerns. But our lack of action, our lack of investment, our lack of a plan has heightened that concern, that fear to a level that it just—we just don't need to be here now, and so that's—

Ms. WATERS. Absolutely. Absolutely. Absolutely.

Arne, I understand that some of the schools in the richer areas certainly are not sending the kids back. They are opting for tutors, et cetera, et cetera. And I'm not being facetious when I ask this, but I understand that the son of the President of the United States is attending—would be attending a school, but his school will not be opening up, and they're projecting that maybe they'll open up by October.

Have you heard this information?

Mr. DUNCAN. Well, not only is that correct, but this pandemic doesn't know political party. It doesn't know wealth versus poverty. It doesn't know urban versus rural versus suburban versus, you know, Native American country. This pandemic doesn't discriminate.

And, for all of our children—and not just our children; for their parents, for their grandparents, for our teachers, like Angela and her colleagues, for them to be safe, we have to do the right thing here. So, many schools—again, I'm pushing. I don't want to delay the start of school. Our kids have lost too much learning time. I want to have an almost mandatory summer school starting July to get kids caught up because we didn't have the discipline as a country, as adults, because we had such horrific leadership from the top, we did not do what we needed to do. So, we need to open, and we need to close that digital divide.

So, you know, the idea that children can only learn, you know, five days a week, six hours a day, in a physical building, that doesn't make any sense. Kids should be able to learn anything they want anytime, anywhere, anyplace.

Ms. WATERS. Well, let me just say that I met with Superintendent Beutner for the Greater Los Angeles area, LAUSD, and he was talking about our Title I students, how Title I students we know are poor. They have dysfunctional families, whatever, what have you. And he said, if he had \$350 million for the state of California to ensure that they have the technology, the supplies, and the ability to do distance learning, he believes that we certainly could do learning with them. We should not allow them to be dropped off of the agenda.

Do you think we should pay special attention to those children whose parents have not been able to afford the computers, and we need the broadband and all of that for them to be able to participate in distance learning? Do you think that we can direct the money directly to those students like title I students?

Mr. DUNCAN. We have to do that, and what this pandemic has done, what the murder of George Floyd has done is it's just slapped us all in the face at these massive, long-standing, systemic inequities that have existed forever, and now, as a country, we can't hide from them. So, making sure that children—every child has access, not just to a computer, but to the internet, to Wi-Fi, that should be as ubiquitous now as water, electricity, making sure those families have access so that kids can learn anything they want anytime, anywhere, anyplace, find their path and find their

[inaudible]. We have to do that. We should have done it before, but we have to do it now.

Let me just say what troubles me so much is districts like L.A. are—

Ms. WATERS. My time is up, but I want for them to know that I like what he's talking about with tutoring and teaching one and two and three kids in a community. I'm going to get in touch with him and talk with him about that some more. I wish we had more time.

Thank you very much.

Chairman CLYBURN. Thank you. The chair now recognizes Mr. Luetkemeyer for five minutes.

Mr. LUETKEMEYER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, just to followup on last week's hearing, in that hearing, I had a long discussion with Dr. Redfield with regards to the incorrect coding of individuals' deaths so that there was an overstatement of deaths due to corona, which was a followup to a previous question I asked of Dr. or Admiral Giroir in a previous hearing, and, as—and we found out two more states now are actually looking into this as well, and we are—we have sent a letter—I think I sent a copy of it to you—requesting information from both Dr. Redfield and the admiral with regards to what they're going to be doing about it. So, just to give you a heads-up.

Mr. Lips, I just want to talk to you just a second with regards to something that Dr. Redfield said last week. He said: I want to reemphasize here, because I don't think I can emphasize it enough, as the Director of the Centers for Disease Control, the leading pub-

lic health agency in the world, it is in the public health interest to these K–12 students to get those students back open to face-to-face learning. We have to be honest that the public health interests of students in this Nation right now is to get a quality education in face-to-face learning.

I—from your previous statements, I assume you agree with that statement, Mr. Lips?

Mr. LIPS. I do. I think that that should certainly be the goal. We should be doing everything we can to get children back into school in a safe manner, and we should be giving flexibility to parents and teachers and school personnel to make decisions about risk, to create the best circumstance for our local communities. But certainly, the goal should be to trying to get kids back in school. These prolonged school closures are devastating for children, particularly for low-income children, who are—we know are falling further and further behind every day that schools remain closed.

So, we've seen public health guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the CDC, of best practices that can be used to reopen schools. Wherever possible, schools should think creatively about following those guidelines to bring kids back into the classroom.

Mr. LUETKEMEYER. Well, I know that there is a paper put out by the CDC that is very extensive, eight pages here, and it deals with everything from comparing this—the COVID to the flu, harmful learning aspects that, if we don't go back to school, with regards to losing past education, how they fall backward, and then the digital way—the virtual way of learning, while it can get you by, it's not a very efficient way of doing it; the social and emotional skill development that is not there; the safety, which I think you mentioned—you're one of the few people who mentioned safety today; nutrition; physical activity. These are all important things that I think we need to consider when you start taking a look at—and this is why the professionals have all said that we need to go back to school.

With that in mind, Secretary Duncan, in May 2009, during a spring H1N1 outbreak, the outbreak that killed 358 children between April and October of that year, you said to the school superintendents and principals, I quote: I urge you to take your queues from public health officials in your area, in your state, and at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

But this time around seems different. Last Friday, in this committee, CDC Director Redfield testified and confirmed an urgent need to get students back to school. As I've indicated with this report, it's very extensive. It deals with all of the myriad of issues there.

But, however, the following day, you tweeted: Why are we asking 15,000 school districts and 100,000 schools to figure this out by themselves?

So, my question is, why is it acceptable for superintendents to rely on public health officials when you were Secretary, but not now?

Mr. DUNCAN. You know, they need to absolutely rely on that. And what the challenge has been, at the Federal level, there hasn't been a plan, there hasn't been investment, we haven't done what

we needed to do for the previous four or five months to make this possible, and now we have a thousand people dying per day of COVID-19.

Mr. LUETKEMEYER. Let me stop you right there, and let me put some more facts on the table here. This was a brand new disease we knew nothing about. As of January 1, it was a clean slate. We never heard about the coronavirus.

Now, over the last several months, we continue to develop plans and strategies as new evidence comes out, as new information comes out. And I think, last week, we saw in our committee, Ranking Member Scalise had a stack of papers about 18 inches tall that were different plans that were in place to try and address many of those things.

So, I think that that argument rings pretty hollow whenever you look at the bulk of evidence that's there to show that there are plans, that we are trying to be flexible and continue to improve and address issues as they pop up, and this is an ongoing thing, and we have to manage this virus.

This is why I think, you know, as we go through and we have schools open up—in my area, it's not unusual to have a school close down for a day or two or three with the flu because as it runs through the community. I would anticipate that same thing happening here. As the COVID runs through the community, go down for a period of a week or so and come back up. I think we can manage this thing, and we just have to learn to do that.

So, with that, I yield back to the chairman.

Chairman CLYBURN. I thank the gentleman for yielding back.

The chair now recognizes Mrs. Maloney for five minutes.

Mrs. MALONEY. Can you hear me?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Can you hear me? I can't hear him.

Chairman CLYBURN. I do hear you, Ms. Maloney.

Mrs. MALONEY. OK. Great. Great. I couldn't hear you for a while.

The evidence shows that children catch coronavirus, and they spread it to adults, including teachers, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, parents, and grandparents.

Just last Friday, the CDC released a report about a coronavirus outbreak at a Georgia summer camp. Three quarters of the campers tested positive. Children under 10 got the virus at higher rates than older kids and adults.

This is not just an isolated incident. The American Association of Pediatrics reports that more than 338,000—100,000 children have tested positive for coronavirus.

Secretary Duncan, you coauthored an article with one former Education Secretary and one former head of CDC that identified eight basic steps to reopen schools. In that article, you stated, and I quote, "Despite precautions, there will inevitably be coronavirus cases at schools," end quote.

So, the distinguished Mr. Secretary, thank you for joining us once again. Why are you so sure that there will be additional coronavirus cases if we fully reopen all schools?

Mr. DUNCAN. First, I'll just say both education and fighting pandemic, there is nothing partisan about this. This is all bipartisan.

We all care about kids. We should all care about our—the health and safety of our children, their education, and the adults.

I was very pleased to be able to do that with Dr. Frieden and with my predecessor, Margaret Spellings, who happened to be Republican. We've done a lot of really important work together.

Unfortunately, our schools are not islands. They don't have bubbles wrapped around them. Our schools reflect our communities, and as we have seen across the country, as schools have tried to start to reopen in the past week or two, in some cases, they've had cases of the coronavirus literally on the first day that they opened.

And the best thing—as I said in my oral testimony, the best thing we can do to keep our children, our teachers, our parents safe is to beat down the percent of cases in our communities.

Superintendent Runcie desperately wants to open schools. There is nothing in it for him not to open schools. He can't afford to do it because it is not safe for his community because his community has not done the right thing over the past four or five months. We have lacked discipline. We have lacked the willingness to listen to science. We have lacked the willingness to invest in our communities. We have not socially distanced. Instead, we have chosen to open bars rather than to be able to start school on time.

So, we will continue to have cases. Our goal should be to minimize that. Then we have to do all the things that we know—we have to test. We have to have accurate tests. They have to be reliable. We have to get them back fast. We have to contact trace. We have to isolate.

And the worst thing in the world for me would be if we open prematurely, not thoughtfully, open for two or three weeks and have to shut everything back down. It just further traumatizes children, endangers adults—you know, endangers teachers, endangers parents. We should open very slowly, very gradually, very carefully, with the goal of not being to open, but to stay open.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you. And, now that some schools have started, we know that you're absolutely right. In fact, one Indiana junior high school was notified of a student COVID case just a few hours into the very first school day of the year. This school had to use its emergency protocol and order some students to quarantine on day one.

You also wrote, and I quote, "All contacts of new cases must be traced and quarantined," end quote. If the government does not provide support for testing, tracing, and containment, can we really expect schools to be able to stay open in communities where the virus is present?

Mr. DUNCAN. Let me be really clear. If we can't test accurately and quickly and get those results back, if we can't contact trace, if we can't quarantine, we cannot open schools. It is not safe to do that. And that's a recipe not just for disaster but for death. So, for us to open, for us to stay open, for me, that's a prerequisite. We have to be able to test, to contact trace, to quarantine, and socially isolate—self-isolate.

Absent that, we cannot entertain the conversation of opening in person.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you very much.

Dr. Rivers, as a former teacher, I loved your explanation of how schools and all the different facets of how they serve society, but I want to talk to you about what we've seen in other countries, that they've reopened schools during the pandemic. I understand that some countries have done very well, but others have experienced massive new outbreaks.

What factors, in your opinion, whether a country was able to be safely to open and sustain that reopened school, and what lessons does that hold for the United States? What impacted whether you could safely open and sustain it and other schools were not able to do that?

Ms. RIVERS. I think the two major factors are the background prevalence of disease in the community and mitigation measures. Places that have a lot of virus circulating will have difficulty remaining open safely, even with good mitigation measures, because there is the potential to have so many introductions of cases into the schools that it becomes difficult to control even with their own mitigation measures.

But for places that do have moderate or mild levels of community transmission, if they're able to put in place things like social distancing, universal masking, hand hygiene, maybe pods or cohorts, that will improve the probability that classrooms can stay open with onward transmission.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you. My time has expired.

Chairman CLYBURN. The chair now recognizes Mr. Green for five minutes.

Mr. Green, you're now recognized for five minutes. Not here? Where is he?

Mrs. MALONEY. Chairman Clyburn?

Chairman CLYBURN. Mr. Green, can you hear me?

Mrs. MALONEY. Chairman Clyburn?

Mr. GREEN. Are you talking to me, sir?

Chairman CLYBURN. Mr. Green, yes. We had some malfunction here.

Mr. GREEN. Can you hear me OK now?

Chairman CLYBURN. Yes, sir.

Mr. GREEN. Is it my turn to go? Is that what you're saying?

Chairman CLYBURN. Yes. Yes, sir. You're now recognized for five minutes.

Mr. GREEN. OK. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Chairman and Ranking Member and our witnesses. I want to first address an issue of concern to me, the handling of positive COVID tests and death reporting. From some estimates, the Federal Government has been reimbursing healthcare providers anywhere between \$5,000 to \$39,000 depending on the severity of the case, and that is providers get a 20-percent add-on payment for Medicare and COVID-19 patients over non-COVID patients.

Clearly, there is a financial incentive to report, if not inflate, COVID cases. The Democrat Governor of Colorado retroactively lowered their fatality count due to inconsistencies by 12 percent. Cause of death after a motor vehicle trauma that sudden death listed as COVID is not proper. If it's just 10 percent inflated nationally, that's 15,000-plus cases getting the extra 20 percent where

it's not warranted. It also affects the number upon which important decisions are made.

And I'd like to take this opportunity to ask the chairman to request that the GAO conduct an audit of every single COVID death, how the reimbursement payments worked, how exactly the amounts are determined, the extent to which waste, fraud, and abuse may be occurring. This study would be extremely helpful to Congress and how we can protect taxpayer dollars and direct relief to legitimate causes.

Now on to the topic of sending kids back to schools. I believe we must listen to the experts. The CDC says, quote, "The best available evidence indicates, if children become infected, they are far less likely to suffer severe symptoms," end quote.

The CDC advised that, quote, "Aside from a child's home, no other setting has more influence on a child's health and well-being than their school," end quote. Let me note that children account for less than seven percent of U.S. cases, less than 0.1 percent of deaths, and almost all of those have confounding medical variables.

In other testimony before the Oversight Committee, Dr. Redfield said 7.1 million children get nutritional, behavioral health counseling from school. Adolescent suicides are on the rise. Child abuse is on the rise, and schools and teachers are typically the first to report it.

Dr. Redfield even said: This is not public health versus the economy. For the children, it's public health decision versus a public health decision. Let's open the schools.

That's what he said.

As a physician, I'm keenly aware of the risk-benefit decisions. Often, we prescribe medications with significant, even deadly, side effects. But we weigh the benefits of the drug with those risks, and we make the decision, many times to give the drug, because the chance of good—a good outcome outweighs the chance of a bad. I promise you, everyone listening to me has done just that. Motrin causes gastric ulcers, and aspirin toxicity can kill.

Dr. Redfield from the CDC was clear. The risks to students being out of school, risks to their nutritional health, risk of suicide, risk of a child abuse, loss of mental health counseling, loss of school nurses providing a degree of health that they can't get at home, all will produce far greater harm to our children than will be harmed by COVID-19. It's not even close.

On the other hand, the argument for adults, 33,800 additional dead from undiagnosed cancers, additional 77,000 suicides, the massive increases in out-of-hospital cardiac arrests may or may not balance those lost due to COVID. So, for adults, the risk-benefit ratio is harder to make; I completely agree.

But, in children, that risk-benefit ratio is undeniable and undebatable. If we do not open our schools, we will do far more harm to children than we ever would letting them return to the classroom with social distancing, et cetera, and while protecting at-risk students and teachers.

One witness today stated that we had lost over 400 children to COVID-19, all of which are tragedies. The witness mentioned that we should act to save just one life, or, in other words, we should close the entire Nation's schools to save one life.

If we followed that logic, we will never allow a single child to ride in an automobile. Last year, 4,074 children died in automobile accidents. If my math skills served me well, that's 10 times more than died with—to COVID. Should we stop all children from riding in cars? No. As a physician, I firmly believe the right decision is to reopen our schools. The risk-benefit ratio is right there.

Now I'd like to make one more point. Nowhere in the Constitution of the United States does it give the Federal Government a right to tell Tennessee whether we can open our schools. This whole discussion is Federal Government overreach. Tennessee is quite competent enough to make this decision on its own. We need to stay out of Tennessee and our other states making this decision.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

With that, I yield.

Chairman CLYBURN. Thank you for yielding.

Now, I might add, as I—before recognizing Mr. Foster, let the chair recognize Mrs. Maloney for a UC, unanimous consent, request.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

I have a unanimous consent request. I seek unanimous consent to enter into the record the following 21 documents detailing cases of COVID across 19 states contracted or transmitted at childcare facilities, camps, or schools this summer. Included among these outbreaks are fourth graders and their teachers at one location of a network of for-profit schools in North Carolina, where Secretary DeVos and Vice President Pence visited without wearing masks just last week.

Here are the documents. May I put them in the record, please?

Chairman CLYBURN. Without objection, so ordered.

Chairman CLYBURN. I think you submitted them in advance, and I thank you for doing that.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you. Thank you.

Chairman CLYBURN. The chair now recognizes Mr. Foster for five minutes.

Mr. FOSTER. Thank you. And thank you to all our witnesses testifying today.

As you all spoke about, while teachers, students, and parents would ideally like to return to school as soon as possible, many school districts are not in a place right now to safely reopen schools for in-person learning.

As a scientist, I think it's important to—for people to remember that just because people wish that something were true does not mean that science says it will be true. Science will never tell you that there is a safe way to detonate a nuclear bomb in your backyard, and they will—or that there is some magic device available today that will allow you to safely open schools in areas where there is a high level of community spread with no prompt testing available.

The CDC has issued guidance that schools should continue remote learning until the number of positive coronavirus cases drastically decreases below levels we're seeing today, or we have a vaccine.

Dr. Rivers, in a National Academy of Science report that you co-authored, you discuss that, in order to meet these benchmarks to

safely reopen, schools will need to implement a long list of mitigation strategies, including wearing masks, hand washing, physical distancing, eliminating large gatherings, creating cohorts, cleaning, ventilation, air filtering, and temperature and symptom screening.

So, how important is it to these strategies to reduce transmission of the virus when a school reopens? Can communities, for example, pick and choose which ones they will comply with and still safely open their schools?

Ms. RIVERS. My recommendation is that schools should implement as many of these as possible, particularly if they have high levels of virus in the community. Places that don't have a lot of virus circulating may be able to scale back the mitigation measures, but in places that do have many new cases, it will be important to be vigilant about implementing these measures.

Mr. FOSTER. So, are there any examples of any countries anywhere who have successfully opened schools and kept them open with the level of community spread that we're now seeing in many areas of the Southern United States?

Ms. RIVERS. I don't think there are many examples worldwide of places that have as much outbreak, as much virus as we have, and so I don't have any examples of schools reopening that have been able to do that successfully.

There have been a number of countries that have reopened where reopening has not gone well. In Israel, for example, schools were reopened in May, and that led to the acceleration of the outbreak in the community, and so they had to close down again. I think that's a cautionary tale for what may happen if you do reopen when there is a lot of virus circulating.

Mr. FOSTER. Thank you.

Secretary Duncan, what enforceable policies can be put into place so that all students, teachers, administrators, and other school employees can follow the CDC safety guidelines about wearing face coverings, maintaining social distancing, washing hands, and so on, and, in particular, how do you enforce these guidelines? You know, how do you detect violations, and how do you respond when violations are detected?

Mr. DUNCAN. Yes. I think there are a number of things that don't—aren't 100 percent guaranteed for success but at least gives you a chance to try and keep people safe, and you just touched on a lot of them, Congressman. It's good to see you again.

You know, first, obviously, the social distancing is absolutely critical. That has to happen. You know, that's a hard thing for, you know, four-year-olds, six-year-olds, eight-year-olds to not play tag or not do whatever, but we have to establish new norms there.

The masks are a must, a mandatory thing. You're going to see things around—you know, Plexiglass shields around desks or maybe in front of the teachers' desks, but I just want to, you know, elaborate on just the complexity of this? How do we keep, you know, bathrooms clean? How do we change walking in terms of hallways? How do we think very differently about buses and transportation? How do we think differently about delivering food?

All of these things are really hard, and I think what we have to rely on are our teachers and principals leading by example, and then, if—you know, if students don't do it or teachers don't do it,

that principal, that, you know, accountable, responsible adult at the building, just as now, you know, people who go on airlines and aren't wearing masks are asked to leave, unfortunately we're going to have to do those types of things in schools if we're concerned about everybody's safety, not just the children, but the staff and parents and grandparents at home.

Mr. FOSTER. Yes. I'd like to ask quickly about just how prompt the testing has to be to be useful. Last week, the committee heard from Admiral Giroir that over 40 percent of the tests that we're seeing nationwide take more than three days to get results, while Dr. Fauci testified that waiting multiple days for a test result is not good enough, and I think, quote, in many respects, obviates the whole purpose.

So, you know, for example, professional sports teams or those visiting the White House, you know, are tested promptly, and they get the results quickly.

So, Dr. Rivers, is this level of testing realistically going to be available in most school districts, and what are the implications if the testing takes longer?

Ms. RIVERS. I think the first goal is to have test results returned within 48 hours, and the second goal is within 24 hours. And that's to enable the isolation, the contact tracing, and the quarantine that allows us to break trains of transmission. If we don't have those capabilities in place, it becomes very hard to get ahead of the outbreak, and we see a lot more virus circulating, and we'll have a lot more difficulty maintaining or regaining control.

Mr. FOSTER. Thank you.

I'm out of time and yield back.

Chairman CLYBURN. I thank the gentleman for yielding back.

The chair now recognizes Mr. Raskin.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

As Secretary Duncan observed, we're in this agonizing situation because of the miserable failure of the administration to develop an effective national strategy to defeat COVID-19. And I say defeat it. I don't say limit it, manage it, contain it, and all of these other euphemisms for passivity, but we don't have a strategy to defeat the disease.

Now, all of the dads and moms in the country want our kids to go back to school. Students want to learn together. Teachers want to teach in the classroom. And everybody agrees that in-person instruction is better than online instruction. That's not the question. If that were the question, it would be easy. We would just say go back and do it.

But nobody knows whether it's safe today or what is safe and how to make it safe under these conditions of chaos. This is a time when America leads the world in case counts. America leads the world in death count. 338,000 children have contracted the disease and been infected by it, and COVID-19 is spiraling out of control in many parts of the country, and we get from the administration nothing but confusion, disinformation, and quack miracle cures coming from the highest levels.

Now, given the refusal or the inability of the administration to create an effective nationwide strategy to defeat the disease, these

decisions must be made at the state and local level, not by random heckling of local governments.

I'm amazed that our distinguished colleague, Mr. Green, rails against the Federal threat to local decisionmaking here when it is precisely President Trump who is trying to dictate to state and local governments all over the country that everybody has to go back 100 percent according to his specifications, even when the private schools that his Cabinet's—Cabinet members' kids go to are all doing it online or some mixed version of online instruction and in person.

So, federalism is on the side of the majority here. It's the administration that is defeating the values of federalism by trying to use money as a threat to force people to meet the will of the President.

Now, Mr. Runcie, six weeks before the fall back-to-school period, 210 of your teachers and contractors in Broward County schools tested positive for COVID-19, representing 138 different school campuses.

Can you explain what happens concretely if a teacher or student gets sick in a classroom of 25 students and one or two teachers? What happens from there, and what does that do to the entire school environment?

Mr. RUNCIE. Well, that's certainly—thank you, Congressman, for the question.

That's certainly going to cause some major disruption. We require everyone to self-report. We would then have to isolate the individuals. They would have to go under, you know, quarantine. They can't come back until they get tested, two negative tests. So, they would be out for at least a couple of weeks.

We then have to go trace and identify everyone who has been in direct contact as well as indirect contact and establish protocols for them to quarantine or be able to monitor themselves.

If it's limited to one particular classroom, we could find a way to obviously deal with that. If we see other cases that materialize in the school, then you're looking at a situation where you may need to shut down the entire school and then, you know, clean and then potentially come back.

So, it's an enormously disruptive situation, and I'll tell you that a large part of it, you just have one case in a school, it's going to create a climate of fear that makes it difficult to have a reasonable learning environment, right? So, we really need to take that into account, that what happens in the school and the climate that's created when you have that.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you so much.

Ms. Skillings, we're very sorry about the loss of your colleague and your friend to COVID-19.

Can you tell us what the impact of this tragic loss was on her students and then the rest of the school body and the teachers in terms of thinking about what to do with respect to returning in the fall?

Is—

Chairman CLYBURN. Ms. Skillings?

I don't think Ms. Skillings—Ms. Skillings, can you hear?

Ms. SKILLINGS. That's for me?

Mr. RASKIN. Yes, that's for you.

Ms. SKILLINGS. Can you hear me OK?

Chairman CLYBURN. Yes, we can hear you.

Ms. SKILLINGS. I cannot hear any of you. I have a friend who is live streaming and letting me hear her through her cell phone.

I can tell you that, in our community, the parents have expressed that the students are feeling a lot of stress with the loss of our colleague. Yesterday, many of them got her letter from the end of the year with a poem with their names on it, and a parent shared on social media their students crying and reading the heartfelt poem that she wrote for each individual student.

As for former students, I have had former students call me and express how it is hard for them at the loss of a teacher that they all have come to love and admire. So, many of them have gone into education because of being in her classroom.

As for the teachers and our staff, we have been devastated. It is the hardest thing to go through the loss of someone who you are so close to.

We have a very low teacher turnover. Teachers are here to stay because we come from this community, and we stay in our community and dedicate ourselves to this family.

Chairman CLYBURN. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you.

And, Secretary Duncan, what would it mean for schools across America—

Ms. SKILLINGS. You're behind, Jena, so I don't hear.

Mr. RASKIN. I'm sorry. What would it mean—

Chairman CLYBURN. Mr.—

Mr. RASKIN [continuing]. for schools across America if they decide quickly to reopen in the fall and then large groups of teachers—

Chairman CLYBURN. Mr. Raskin?

Mr. RASKIN [continuing]. staff, and students get sick—

Chairman CLYBURN. Mr. Raskin?

Mr. RASKIN. Yes?

Chairman CLYBURN. Your time has expired.

Mr. RASKIN. Ah, OK.

Chairman CLYBURN. You are recognized. Do you have a request to make?

Mr. RASKIN. I would like to submit for the record a letter from the National Education Association on behalf of its 3 million members to the committee.

Chairman CLYBURN. Thanks for submitting that in advance, and, without objection, it will be entered into the record.

Chairman CLYBURN. And, with that, Mr. Kim is recognized for five minutes.

Mr. KIM. Thank you, Chairman, and thank you to all the witnesses for joining us here today.

As a father of two boys, I know firsthand what worried parents are feeling as they're getting their kids ready for this next upcoming year, and what we all want to do is do everything right for our kids, make sure that we are taking care of them, and making sure that they are safe.

What we owe the American people coming from Congress, coming from our government, is to talk straight about the challenges that

we face, and make sure there is no misrepresentation, no way that we're trying to skew facts or other assessments here, and that's why I find it so frustrating that, in the last several hearings, I continue to hear colleagues of mine cite the American Academy of Pediatrics to support their arguments.

Given how much time they cite the American Academy of Pediatrics, I wonder if they actually took some time to be able to just pick up the phone and call them and talk to them about their perspective because I did that just yesterday. I called the American Academy of Pediatrics and talked to them, and what I heard from them was a crystal-clear frustration on their part by having the Trump administration misrepresenting their position and using them as a political prop. And that's something that we just need to make sure we get past because they have also spoken out publicly about this, saying that the original guidance of theirs was, quote, misrepresented and misunderstood.

So, let's just stop this and make sure that we have a discussion straight with the American people and talking through what it is that we need to do to get our kids an education and to keep them safe.

I personally believe that there is a common-ground approach to this that a lot of Americans understand. I think both Republicans and Democrats both believe that in-person education would be best if we're able to achieve that with the health conditions that we face.

I also believe that most Americans, Republicans and Democrats, believe that science and medical expertise should play a key role in making these decisions, and that the health of students, teachers, and education support professionals need to be high in the mind as we're making these critical decisions going forward.

I also believe that many of us agree that there is no one-size-fits-all solution across this country and that states and local communities should be able to make these decisions. I agree that—I also believe that Republicans and Democrats agree—and I hope they agree—that we should be prepared to provide significant support and funding to our schools to be able to achieve this.

That's why I get so frustrated when I continue to see comments coming from the President to other elected leaders that are saying otherwise, so I wanted to—just yesterday, I saw an interview on Fox News, the President told the American people, quote, we're set to rock and roll, but the big problem we have is Democrats don't want to open their schools because they think it's going to hurt the elections for the Republicans.

Mr. Runcie, I wanted to direct this one to you: From your perspective, is there any truth to the President's claim that school districts are not opening up for political reasons?

Mr. RUNCIE. Absolutely not. I can tell you that my school board, this administration, our entire community has been working day and night, seven days a week, trying to figure out how we can open schools, and our intent, as with the planning that we started last spring, was to get to a point where we could at least do a hybrid, right, where we have some days in school, some days online where we could execute CDC guidelines. That's not feasible, again, be-

cause of what's going on in the community. Our schools are connected to that.

The other thing I would say is that, look, our buildings, they may be closed, but education is still open. We spent the entire summer training and training our teachers with a laser white focus to make sure that the online experience, the eLearning that is going to be delivered, is going to be substantially different, and so we put a number of things in place, in addition to training, to make sure that they're effective, they can engage their students.

We've also created two different schedules for our elementary so that there is a morning session and there is an afternoon-evening session for K-5 to accommodate parents who may have to work or may not be there to support their youngest learners.

We were talking about tutoring earlier. At our secondary level, we are creating what some may call, you know, homework hotline, but it's after-school support, where there is going to actually be an educator that's certified and available to help students in core subject areas or their families now be available between 3 to 9 o'clock. That's something that we'll probably retain going beyond this pandemic, and so—

Mr. KIM. Look, I really appreciate that, and the thoughtfulness that you've put into this really comes across, and I've talked to a lot of school districts in my own district, and none of them are looking at this through the local lens. Enough is enough, and we need to make sure that we're getting our kids the education that they need, and we don't need to have that politics as a part of that. And any assessment or any statement that accuses our education officials across this country of doing so is just flat-out wrong.

So, Mr. Chairman, I want to turn back to you and just continue our work to try to come across and build this common-ground approach to be able to get our kids an education safely and responsibly.

Thank you so much.

Chairman CLYBURN. Thank you, Mr. Kim, and thanks to all of you for your participation here today.

Let me thank all the panelists. And, at this point, I am ready to yield to the ranking member for a closing statement, but I can't see him. Under the rules, I've got to be able to see him. I don't know if he's still with us.

Mr. LUETKEMEYER. Mr. Chairman, the ranking member had to step off. He's got another event to attend, and I have been volunteered to close for him, if that's OK?

Chairman CLYBURN. Absolutely. I now yield to you for that purpose.

Mr. LUETKEMEYER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank all our witnesses. It's been a great hearing today, and, you know, the title of the hearing was "Challenges to Safely Reopening K-12 Schools." And I think we all thoroughly vetted the problems that we see.

There's concerns obviously for many in many different ways, and I just want to go through some of the things here that I—you know, the scientists and the pediatricians that we rely on for the scientific and the data to show that we can do this safely are all recommending this, whether it's Dr. Fauci, Dr. Redfield at the

CDC, the academy of pediatricians, they all have guidelines. They all have plans on how we can do this safely.

You know, throughout this situation, we've talked about the health risks, and there is no doubt there are some health risks. But, again, in the paper I showed earlier of the CDC, they discuss very thoroughly the health risks with regards to the common flu, how your children are more at risk of the flu than they are of the COVID. In our state of Missouri, we lost more people to the flu than we have COVID.

So, I think perspective is needed here to be able to understand the risks that are involved, and I think the points have been made a couple different times that it's up to local officials to make those decisions based on their science and the involvement that you have with the community and the medical community with regards to how COVID is progressing in your community. That needs to be paramount.

Obviously, it's low risk with regards to children. It doesn't mean no risk, but there is very, very minimal risk. Science has shown that children under 18, there is a minimal risk to their being exposed to some learning issues that we have.

The fourth thing I want to talk about here is, the system that we have in place, if we do the virtual learning—I admire the testimony today of the different folks talking about virtual learning. That's fine, but we've heard over and over again, even from the American Academy of Pediatricians, as well as the teachers unions—and I can read the statement from teachers unions: This past spring, unwanted—this spring's unwanted experiment has made clear what we had long known before the pandemic: remote learning cannot be a substitute for in-person learning. Eighty-six percent of our members—this is the teachers union now—said we believe the digital learning time this past spring was inadequate for their students.

So, while it is a substitute and can get us by for a period of time, it is not a long-range strategy. We need to understand how we have to manage this disease so that we can get control of it, so we can get our kids in the classroom in any way that's possible.

Other countries have done this—a lot of the countries include Austria, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore—have implemented different types of protocols in place that have helped the students be able to stay in school and learn that away.

Then one of the things that we don't discuss very much that was mentioned a time or two today was the safety factor for kids. Last week, Dr. Redfield made the comment about how the opioid problems, the suicide problems are exacerbated by kids staying at home. The child abuse problem, there has been a 50 percent drop in children being reported as being abused, yet the emergency rooms are being flooded by kids.

So, there's a lot of things to consider here. Again, the challenges, as the title of this committee hearing was challenges to safely reopening our schools, it is great, but it's not something we can't overcome, and it's not something that we don't have a plan for, a plan that can be—that we can be flexible enough to be able to be

changed as we know more about the disease, and as we learn better processes and procedures.

So, with that, Mr. Chairman, thank you so much for the opportunity to close and to also our guests today for their testimony.

I yield back.

Chairman CLYBURN. Thank you very much for yielding back the time.

Before I make my closing statement, let me briefly address the repeated claims that have been made that public health experts are recommending reopening all schools for in-person learning.

The truth is the President's public health advisors have made clear that reopening schools is especially risky in communities where the coronavirus is spreading at a high rate.

Dr. Redfield, the CDC Director, said—and I quote—in areas where there are hotspots, remote and distance learning may need to be adopted for some amount of time.

And Dr. Deborah Birx, coordinator of the White House Coronavirus Task Force, explained—and I quote—if you have high caseload and active community spread, just like we're asking people not to go to bars, not to have household parties, not to create large spreading events, we're asking people to distance learn at this moment so we can get this epidemic under control.

So, the experts are unanimous: Further reopening schools in virus hotspots is extraordinarily risky.

Now, as I close, I want to thank all of our guests here today, and I want to say that your remarks have been very powerful.

Superintendent Runcie, I know you are starting school for 270,000 students and 30,000 staffs in about two weeks. Everyone here wishes you and your colleagues across the country the very best as you shepherd students and families through a very challenging school year.

Ms. Skillings, I want to express again my condolences for the loss of your colleague. I am hopeful that your testimony today will help others understand the risks faced by teachers and staff. Absolutely everyone on both sides of the aisle recognizes how important it is to reopen schools.

I'll say it again: We all want schools to open, and we want them—our students to thrive. But this cannot come at the cost of lives. Not attending school in person causes harms that are not to be taken lightly, but there are ways to at least partially mitigate these harms.

There is no way to bring a parent, a teacher, or a child back to life once they've died from this virus. I was particularly interested in Dr. Green's comments about his state of Tennessee. He has pleaded for us to listen to the people of Tennessee.

Well, we are. That's exactly what everybody's been saying here today. But what we're hearing is that, irrespective of what may be going on in your state, if you don't reopen schools, we're going to cutoff funds.

That's not coming from anybody on this panel. Mr. Lee, I believe—we heard from Mr. Lips. He has repeated the word "flexibility" several times. That flexibility, it seems to me, has got to be throughout the system. Flexibility has got to be there for local school districts. And when it is determined by the school district

that there is too wide a spread in this community for us to have in-school learning, they ought not have their funds cut off; they ought to have more funds coming in order to have online learning. And for some strange reason, no one has talked here today about the heating and air conditioning units.

To me, when there is an outbreak, we could talk about cleaning things up. If this virus gets into a school maybe from three or four children and they've got a faulty HVAC system, it seems to me that we ought to be giving them the funds that's necessary to repair that system, not take the funds away for not opening the schools.

So, let me just say that I, as a former public school teacher, I recognize that children can catch and spread the viruses. I've been in the classroom with a flu outbreak. I also know how high-risk hotspots can be, and so this is why CDC must provide school districts with clear, science-based guidance about the risks of physically reopening schools.

Second, we must take affirmative steps to control the spread of the virus in communities. This is going to require shared sacrifice. Some sacrifices are minor, like requiring everyone to wear masks. We need strong Federal leadership and a national plan to guide these choices, not wishful thinking.

Finally, instead of illegal threats to cutoff Federal funds schools that follow public health guidance, we must provide school districts the funding and assistance they need to educate children safely. Regardless of whether a school opts to begin the school year remotely or in person, significant resources will be required for them to be flexible. Congress must allocate these resources.

We have heard today about the struggle of remote learning for students and families, and especially heartbreaking are the challenges faced by children with special educational needs or mental health concerns and children in hard-hit communities already struggling with this pandemic.

Families living in red zones will not benefit, however, from sending their children into unsafe schools. The only way we can provide real relief to these families is to take control of the pandemic as fast as we can.

So, if my colleagues are serious about getting kids back to school safely, I want to ask them to join me in demanding Federal leadership to contain the coronavirus instead of wishing it will go away. As the President said, it won't go away. We have to make it go away.

Our country failed to follow the science-based guidance for safe reopening provided by the select committee's first public briefing, and, as a result, more lives were lost; more livelihoods were destroyed; and, according to the CDC, we are not in a position where all of our schools can safely resume in-person operations.

We must learn from these mistakes, not repeat them. Our children's futures are at stake.

Before we close, I want to enter into the record a report of the American Federation of Teachers called "Reopening Schools Safely," as well as a position statement of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and a letter they sent to Secretary DeVos.

I ask unanimous consent for these materials to be entered into the record. So ordered.

Chairman CLYBURN. Now, without objection, all members will have five legislative days within which to submit additional written questions for the witnesses to the chair, which will be forwarded to the witnesses for their response.

I ask our witnesses to please respond as promptly as you are able to.

This meeting is hereby adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:14 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

