



For Immediate Release

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WNY EDUCATION ALLIANCE CALLS FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION TO PROTECT CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS

(Buffalo, NY – February 14, 2022) Following three straight years of disruptions to in-person education and extracurricular activities, it is critical for governments at all levels to conduct a thorough review to better understand the real benefits and the real harms that resulted from the various mitigations that were implemented in schools during the pandemic.

Throughout the pandemic, public health experts and policy makers have ignored the significant harms associated with commonly used mitigations such as school closures, quarantines for healthy children, and prolonged masking. The disruptions caused by these policies significantly impacted children by altering “their experiences at home, school, and in the community, and the effect on their mental health has been devastating” as recently warned by the U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy¹.

At the same time, the current evidence seems to show that school closures, quarantines for close contacts in schools, and prolonged masking have had a negligible impact on reducing Covid transmission rates in the broader community. Indeed, the benefits of these restrictive policies have not been well documented and communicated.

A recent study² by Jonas Herby, Lars Jonung, and Steve H. Hanke from the Johns Hopkins Institute for Applied Economics, Global Health and the Study of Business Enterprise did not find evidence “that lockdowns, school closures, border closures, and limiting gatherings have had a noticeable effect on COVID-19 mortality.” Instead, the researchers observed that the lockdowns caused a number of unintended consequences, such as “reducing economic activity, raising unemployment, reducing schooling, causing political unrest, contributing to domestic violence, and undermining liberal democracy.”

The authors concluded their study by stating that the lockdowns were “ill-founded and should be rejected as a pandemic policy instrument.”

¹ Dr. Vivek Murthy, U.S. Surgeon General, “US Surgeon General Issues Advisory on Youth Mental Health Crisis Further Exposed by COVID-19 Pandemic”, December 7, 2021.

² Jonas Herby, Lars Jonung, and Steve H. Hanke, “A Literature Review and Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Lockdowns on COVID-19 Mortality”, *Studies in Applied Economics*, January 2022.



The same sort of review needs to be applied to the mitigations that have been used in schools as well, regardless of the conclusions and the political ramifications.

In New York State, public health experts continue to justify restrictions in schools based on case counts and hospitalizations despite the lack of evidence that shows that there is a meaningful link between them and despite the availability of much more effective mitigations, such as vaccinations and the one-way use of N95 masks.

Even worse, by ignoring the unintended consequences of these restrictions, which have caused significant harm to children over the last three school years, our public health officials have not adequately weighed the costs and benefits of health policies aimed at children in day care facilities and schools.

All decisions regarding health-related restrictions should be made using a data-driven cost/benefit analysis, as opposed to political considerations or virtue signaling.

To facilitate a thorough review of both the benefits and harms associated with Covid-related restrictions in schools and to ensure that future restrictions are only implemented when the benefits outweigh the harms, WNY Education Alliance recommends the following steps:

- 1) **Create a Bipartisan Commission** – The commission should be tasked with conducting a scientific review of the benefits and harms associated with the various restrictions in schools and day care facilities, including school/day care closures, quarantines for close contacts, and masking.

It is critically important for the commission to be bipartisan (evenly split), apolitical, and 100% focused on the health of children.

- 2) **Publish Findings** – The commission should publish its findings for the public and make recommendations to address public health failures and to create a more data-driven framework for making future public health policy decisions.

Transparency is important to rebuild trust in public health.

- 3) **Introduce Legislation to Protect the Rights of Children** – The 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states that “no State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law...”



School closures and unnecessary quarantines deprived children of their rights to an education without due process and we now know that the harms outweighed any minimal benefits.

Therefore, legislative action is needed in New York to ensure that the educational rights of children are not arbitrarily taken away again. Health directives which close schools, quarantine close contacts, or add other restrictions, such as masks, must only be allowed when the benefits of such policies clearly outweigh the harms. There needs to be a more effective process to ensure that the rights of children are protected from health policies which do not make sense.

Protect Children's Educational Rights (PCER)

WNY Education Alliance believes that the data is clear that school closures did little to slow the spread of Covid and were extremely harmful for most students.

In addition, the practice of quarantining close contacts in schools and day care facilities represented a flagrant human rights violation once tests were made available to more accurately assess whether close contacts had Covid. Indeed, the data shows that more than 98-99% of close contacts did not subsequently test positive for Covid.

Closing schools for no scientific reason, knowingly quarantining healthy children, and implementing harmful restrictions when more effective mitigations are available could set very dangerous legal precedents if corrective legislation is not passed.

WNY Education Alliance urges representatives from both political parties to work with all education stakeholders to: 1) learn from the policy mistakes that were made over the last few years, 2) pass bipartisan legislation that ensures that future decisions do not arbitrarily deny children their right to an education, and 3) restore trust in the educational, public health, and political institutions.

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WNY Education Alliance

WNY Education Alliance is a non-partisan organization committed to improving education in the Western New York area through advocacy, community engagement, and strategic partnerships.