

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

2321 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6301

(202) 225-6375

www.science.house.gov

February 19, 2021

Dear Chairwoman Johnson:

As members of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee, we respectfully request that our Committee hold a hearing in the next few weeks regarding the science on safely reopening or maintaining our nation's K-12 schools for in-person learning. The purpose of such a hearing would be to provide scientific and factual information to parents, teachers, students, and local school officials about how schools can safely be open during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to consider the research on the detrimental impact on children of prolonged virtual learning.

We appreciate your leadership on the Committee in prioritizing holding hearings regarding the many scientific issues surrounding COVID-19, from the safety of coronavirus vaccines to the impact on the research industry. We can think of no greater issue our Committee should examine than the future of our children, many who are falling behind and struggling with virtual learning.

The scientific community has learned a lot over the past year about the impact of COVID-19 on children, and how to mitigate the spread of the virus. According to an article published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, there is little evidence to show in-person instruction in classrooms contributes to the spread of COVID-19.¹ This study mirrors a report from the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control. The Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Rochelle Walensky, said, "There is increasing data to suggest that schools can safely reopen and that safe reopening does not suggest that teachers need to be vaccinated."²

There is also increasing evidence that virtual learning is having a detrimental impact on the developmental, emotional, and mental health of school-aged children. According to the CDC, mental health emergency room visits increased 24 percent this past March-October over 2019 visits for children ages 5-11, and rose 31 percent for children ages 12-17 over the same

¹ Honein MA, Barrios LC, Brooks JT. Data and Policy to Guide Opening Schools Safely to Limit the Spread of SARS-CoV-2 Infection. *JAMA*. Published online January 26, 2021.

² "Teachers Don't Need Vaccines to Open Schools, CDC Chief Says." *Bloomberg*, 2 Feb. 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-03/cdc-director-says-teachers-don-t-need-vaccines-to-reopen-schools>

period.³ This transition to at-home virtual learning has also put a strain on millions of parents and caregivers.

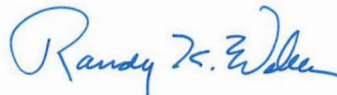
The most recent guidance from CDC released on February 12 makes clear that schools can and should be open.⁴ However, there have been conflicting messages from Biden Administration officials, political leaders, and union officials about whether schools should be following the science and prioritizing in-person learning.

We believe a hearing held by our Committee could provide scientific and fact-based information to build confidence for in-person learning. In a recent interview you stated that COVID-19 vaccination distribution is “not an issue that should be tainted with politics,” and that decisions “need to be guided by scientific determinations and where those supply is most needed.”⁵ We couldn’t agree more and believe the same about our nation’s children and schools.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.



Frank Lucas
Ranking Member
Committee on Science,
Space, and Technology



Randy Weber
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy



Brian Babin, D.D.S.
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Space
and Aeronautics

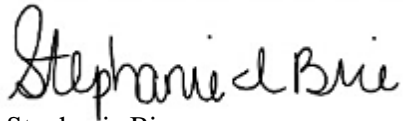


Michael Waltz
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Research
and Technology

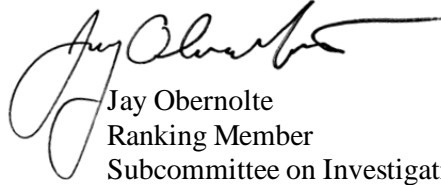
³ Leeb RT, Bitsko RH, Radhakrishnan L, Martinez P, Njai R, Holland KM. Mental Health -Related Emergency Department Visits Among Children Aged <18 Years During the COVID-19 Pandemic – United States, January 2-October 17, 2020. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2020; 69: 1675-1680. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6945a3>.

⁴ “C.D.C. Draws Up a Blueprint for Reopening Schools.” *The New York Times*, 12 Feb. 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/12/health/school-reopenings-cdc.html>

⁵ “House Democrat says the COVID-19 vaccination distribution is ‘not an issue that should be tainted with politics.’” *The Hill*, 21 Jan. 2021, <https://thehill.com/homenews/house/536228-house-democrat-says-the-covid-19-vaccination-distribution-is-not-an-issue-that?r=1>.



Stephanie Bice
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Environment



Jay Obernolte
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Investigations
and Oversight



Bill Posey
Member of Congress



Anthony Gonzalez
Member of Congress



Jim Baird
Member of Congress



Pete Sessions
Member of Congress



Daniel Webster
Member of Congress



Young Kim
Member of Congress



Randy Feenstra
Member of Congress



Jake LaTurner
Member of Congress



Peter Meijer
Member of Congress



Carlos A. Gimenez
Member of Congress