



**Opening Statement of Rep. Aaron Bean (R-FL), Chairman
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education
Hearing: “Generational Learning Loss: How Pandemic School Closures Hurt
Students”
July 26, 2023**

(As prepared for delivery)

Ask any parent and he or she will tell you that America’s kids are in trouble.

The great irony of COVID is how a majority of parents so easily predicted online education would be detrimental for students and how so many bureaucratic experts—with all the research power in the world—took years to reach the same conclusion.

The Nation’s Report Card’s 2022 assessment for eighth graders found math scores are at their lowest point in nearly two decades. The same for reading scores. History and civics scores plummeted to their lowest mark since the tests were first administered in the 1990s.

In other words, in the matter of only two years, a generation of progress was lost.

When you examine the data by class you see an even more harrowing picture. Low-income and minority students suffered the most. And for some students from working-class families, school closure didn’t mean online class. It meant babysitting their siblings or no school at all.

And test scores just scratch the surface of learning loss. Underneath is a sea of social problems this generation is facing and will continue to face as a consequence of

school closures. Among adolescents, mental health issues spiked. Hospital visits spiked. And sadly, suicides spiked.

This is the steep price our kids are paying for needless COVID school closures. In fact, the mass shuttering of schools throughout the pandemic is one of the greatest education policy failures in our nation's history.

At the height of the pandemic, school closures affected 97 percent of K-12 students, or some 55 million students. As late as May 2021—well over a year after the pandemic began—most school districts in blue states like California and Oregon were not back to in-person instruction. In the free state of Florida, our schools were back in person within six months, and the NAEP's results once again prove that we made the right decision.

And research shows that Democrats and teachers unions disproportionately influenced school closures.

In 2021, Tulane University researchers found that schools in communities with a higher share of Democratic voters were much more likely to stay remote. The study found that an increase in Hillary Clinton's 2016 vote by 14 percent was associated with a 10.5 percentage point increase in the chance that local schools stayed remote.

A Brookings Institute study found that “school districts with lengthier collective bargaining agreements were less likely to start the fall 2020 semester with in-person instruction.”

What the data does not support is that school shutdowns were predicated primarily on pandemic severity.

This set of facts suggests we need to rethink our pandemic response if one were to arise again.

So where do we go from here?

We need to start by identifying and dispelling the mass attempt by school-closers to memory-hole their responsibility. The campaign to downplay and walk back the teachers unions' role is well underway in the mainstream press and scientific journals.

George Orwell famously wrote in his novel, *1984*, that the Party's final and most essential command was to ignore the evidence of their eyes and ears. But this Committee and the American people will not be gaslit!

We must demand accountability from the bureaucrats and teachers unions responsible for this tragedy. But we must also acknowledge that there is a limit to the behavior we can change from entrenched powers by demanding accountability.

We must decentralize the decision-making power for education in this country. Above all, that means school choice. At the end of the day, no solution will better equip American schools for another pandemic than empowering parents to make the best decisions for their children.

We should also acknowledge that some states acted heroically to get students back into classrooms and are aggressively addressing the effects of the pandemic now. We will hear about that from our witnesses.

With that, I thank the distinguished witnesses for making the effort to appear today, I look forward to your testimony, and I yield to the Ranking Member for an opening statement.