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Now They Want a Pandemic ‘Amnesty’

The school shutdown lobby now want voters to forgive them. Not so fast.

By The Editorial Board [Follow](#)

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Believe it or not, American Federation of Teachers chief Randi Weingarten on Monday tacitly acknowledged that keeping schools closed during the pandemic was a mistake. Miracles happen, apparently. But she also now wants parents—especially if they’re voters next week—to forgive her and her political allies without seeking an apology or holding them accountable. Sorry, that lets them off way too easy.

“I agree,” Ms. Weingarten tweeted a link to a piece in *The Atlantic* by Emily Oster, “Let’s Declare a Pandemic Amnesty.” The article argues that Americans should forgive experts and government leaders for their mistakes during the pandemic.

Ms. Oster cites school closures as one example: “There is an emerging (if not universal) consensus that schools in the U.S. were closed for too long: The health risks of in-school spread were relatively low, whereas the costs to students’ well-being and educational progress were high.” (In the summer and fall of 2020, Ms. Oster herself favored opening schools.)

However, she adds, “in spring and summer 2020, we had only glimmers of information. Reasonable people—people who cared about children and teachers—advocated on both sides of the reopening debate.”

That’s awfully generous to Team Shutdown, which included all of the progressive great and good and nearly all of the media. Yet it was clear by summer 2020 that children were at extremely low risk for severe illness. They were also struggling with remote learning, as were their parents. All efforts should have been made to reopen schools, as Florida did in August 2020, and to keep them open.

But the teachers’ unions lobbied hard to keep them closed and succeeded in far too many places where they dominate local and state politics. Many big city school districts didn’t reopen until spring 2021. Chicago didn’t offer full in-person learning until last fall. The results in lost learning have been catastrophic.

Ms. Oster pardons Ms. Weingarten because “on every topic, someone was eventually proved right, and someone else was proved wrong” and “in some instances, the right people were right for the wrong reasons.” You can guess who the right people are.

This plea for forgiveness would be more plausible if the shutdown lobby had shown more willingness during the pandemic to listen to other arguments that proved to be right. Instead they dismissed and tried to discredit the authors of the Great Barrington Declaration who argued for focused protection of the most vulnerable while opening schools. Tech platforms censored them.

Ms. Oster says “most errors were made by people who were working in earnest for the good of society.” But the teachers unions intentionally misled the public by hyping the virus risks for children. They did this to extort more money from Congress to “safely reopen” and compensate for learning losses from the shutdowns. Democrats gave them \$122 billion last March, only about 15% of which was spent during the 2021-22 school year.

“Getting something wrong wasn’t a moral failing,” Ms. Oster writes. But in Ms. Weingarten’s case, it was.

One certainty: The left will never forgive the shutdown dissenters, notably Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, for being right.

American Federation of Teachers chief Randi Weingarten
PHOTO: ZUMA PRESS

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