

February 28, 2020

Thomas M. Brady
Director
Department of Defense Education Activity
4800 Mark Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22350

Dear Mr. Brady,

As president of the 1.7 million-member American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and as president of the AFT-affiliated Overseas Federation of Teachers (OFT), we are jointly writing to urgently request you to act to protect the 700 teachers at DoDEA schools in Italy, Bahrain, Spain and Turkey represented by the OFT and AFT. These teachers, their families, and the population of their host countries are being put at potential risk by the refusal of DoDEA officials to create and implement a responsible, epidemiology-based, comprehensive protocol for the coronavirus pandemic. In fact, so far, DoDEA officials have reacted with a troubling disregard for their own employees as well as for the public health of host countries and the guidance of U.S. health agencies.

This past week, our teachers at DoDEA schools in Northern Italy were told to report to their schools by local DoDEA managers. We know that close proximity (within six feet) furthers the spread of this highly contagious virus.¹ Teachers could easily have supervised students' online learning by teleworking safely from home. Yet, even though DoDEA schools in Vicenza and Aviano were then closed due to the outbreak, and officials in the Veneto region had closed schools, universities, museums and movie theaters,² DoDEA managers in Vicenza called teachers into a mandatory meeting (in the close confines of an all-purpose room) on Feb. 26, simply to confirm that teachers were to continue reporting to school and to go over what was expected of them. Our members were told they must either report or take sick leave (but must continue working remotely while on leave, and submit a doctor's note after three days of leave). Then 13 DoDEA management staff and instructional systems specialists drove to Aviano (apparently violating Italian government bans on travel in and out of the Vicenza area at the time) to force teachers there to attend a similar meeting.

As infection rates and death tolls in Italy climbed, DoDEA officials did not accede to our union's request to reverse the compulsory attendance mandate. Thus, we have had a situation in Vicenza and Aviano where teachers have been reporting to DoDEA schools,

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/transmission.html>

² <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/24/808893094/coronavirus-has-pandemic-potential-but-isn-t-there-yet-who-says>

The American Federation of Teachers is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy, economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

American Federation
of Teachers, AFL-CIO

AFT Teachers
AFT PSRP
AFT Higher Education
AFT Public Employees
AFT Nurses and Health
Professionals

555 New Jersey Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
202-879-4400
www.aft.org

Randi Weingarten
PRESIDENT

Loretta Johnson
SECRETARY-TREASURER

Evelyn DeJesus
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

VICE PRESIDENTS

J. Philippe Abraham
Shelvy Y. Abrams
Barbara Bowen
Vicky Rae Byrd
Zeph Capo
Alex Caputo-Pearl
Donald Carlisto
Larry J. Carter, Jr.
Kathy A. Chavez
Melissa Cropper
Aida Diaz Rivera
Jolene T. DiBrango
Marietta A. English
Eric Feaver
Francis J. Flynn
Jeffery M. Freitas
David Gray
Anthony M. Harmon
David Hecker
Jan Hochadel
Fedrick C. Ingram
Jerry T. Jordan
Ted Kirsch
Frederick E. Kowal
Louis Malfaro
Terrence Martin, Sr.
Joanne M. McCall
John McDonald
Daniel J. Montgomery
Michael Mulgrew
Candice Owley
Andrew Pallotta
Paul Pecorale
David J. Quolke
Jesse Sharkey
Denise Specht
Wayne Spence
Jessica J. Tang
Ann Twomey
Adam Urbanski



sharing closed ventilation systems, cafeterias and bathrooms. Some teachers, with no option for childcare, have been forced to bring their small children to work. (Apparently DoDEA will protect students, but finds it acceptable to allow *teachers'* children to run the risk of illness.) At the end of each day spent in these conditions, teachers and their children had to return to their homes and neighborhoods, risking further potential spread of the virus there.

DoDEA managers' actions do not reflect the guidance of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO),³ and we believe they were in direct violation of the U.S. Occupational Health and Safety Administration's general duty clause, which states that the employer shall furnish a place of employment that is "free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to its employees."

We ask you to call to account DoDEA managers in Italy for their disrespect for teachers and willingness to put teachers unnecessarily in a work setting that could arguably result in contagion. But this situation is broader than even the treatment shown our teachers and families in Italy. This virus is jumping like wildfire from country to country. We therefore urge you, as DoDEA director, to immediately take the following steps:

- Direct DoDEA managers in any countries/areas with outbreaks to close schools and allow teachers to telework—DoDEA policy in such situations should reflect that it values the lives of all humans in the path of this epidemic.
- Meet with our union to develop a DoDEA schools and staff coronavirus protocol encompassing guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization. In places the outbreak has not yet reached, this protocol would include good ventilation and hygiene, disinfection procedures, and employer-provided education. In places combating outbreaks, it would include closing schools, allowing teleworking and distance learning, and being prepared with a comprehensive continuity-of-operations plan. It would also include doing the utmost to prevent the spread of the virus into host countries.
- Implement testing per either CDC or WHO guidelines, preferably using the guidelines of whichever agency is more stringent in its guidance.
- Direct your management staff to treat all teachers and staff with professional respect and human dignity, both through the course of this pandemic and as a regular practice. DoDEA teachers and their families are military families serving their

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/transmission.html>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>


Brady/Page 3

country. We hope you agree that they deserve the respect that comes with that commitment.

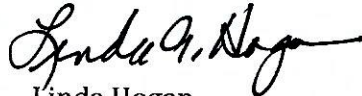
Finally, the national AFT has a team of experts in health and safety, education and public policy currently assisting the OFT in this pandemic, as well as working on the healthcare and education aspects both stateside and globally. We want to offer these resources to you. We stand ready to work collaboratively with you and your staff.

Thank you for your swift attention to this letter. Working together, we can do our best to assure that the DoDEA is fully prepared and compassionately responding, not just to this pandemic, but others that are sure to come in the future.

Sincerely,



Randi Weingarten
President, AFT



Linda Hogan
President, Overseas Federation of Teachers