

MIAMI HERALD | EDITORIAL

Schools chief Carvalhho to follow science on masks. Too bad DeSantis won't do the same

Miami-Dade County Public Schools Superintendent Alberto Carvalhho vowed to be guided by “science, by medical experts and public health experts” before deciding on a mask mandate for the next school year.

Good. That’s what you’d expect from the leader of Florida’s largest school district in a county with high transmission rates in a state where COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations reached record numbers over the past week.

However, Gov. DeSantis is forcing Carvalhho and other school-district leaders to make these decisions based on the governor’s interpretation of public health, which means we’re all in trouble.

Friday, DeSantis signed an executive order that essentially bans school mask mandates, prohibiting districts from violating “parents’ right . . . to make health decisions for their minor children.”

School boards that dare to cross the governor can lose state funding. In other words, the governor is willing to knee-cap school districts in order to make his constituents deathly ill.

Just hours before DeSantis’ announcement, Carvalhho told the Herald Editorial Board he would consult with the district’s

medical task force, which will meet before school starts on Aug. 23. He will also look at what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics have recommended. Carvalhho previously had said masks would be optional, but that was in late June, before Florida became the pandemic’s epicenter thanks to the highly transmissible delta variant.

DELTA A DANGER

An internal CDC document obtained by the Washington Post, based on still-unpublished data, states delta might lead to more serious illness and that it’s as contagious as chickenpox and more contagious than the Ebola virus or common colds. That prompted the federal agency to advise fully vaccinated people to go back to wearing masks indoors.

The CDC and the Academy of Pediatrics also reached a consensus: Schools should be open, and universal masking is recommended for children older than 2 “because a significant portion of the student population [under the age of 12] is not yet eligible for vaccines, and masking is proven to reduce transmission of the virus and to protect those who are not vaccinated,” the Academy of Pediatrics wrote in a July 9 advisory.

Carvalhho said it’s “probably a fairly accurate prediction” that the task force would end up recommending a mask mandate. Among the experts advising Carvalhho is U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, a Miami Palmetto Senior High graduate.

TEMPER TANTRUM

“We have been a district that’s well informed by science, by medical experts and public health experts and that will not change under my leadership,” Carvalhho told the Editorial Board. “The CDC has opined, the American Academy of Pediatrics has opined and the [Florida Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics] has opined as well. And, you know, they all agree in terms of protected and preventive measures.”

If only school districts could base their decisions on the needs of their communities, by looking at infection rates in their back yards instead of being forced to follow an irresponsible blanket state policy that applies anywhere from rural to urban counties.

“I’ve been very clear I believe that generalized pronouncements via executive order, or state statute, that basically don’t differentiate between conditions — which may vary significantly from South Florida, Central Florida, the Panhandle — that don’t take into account how different those conditions may be and the impacts they may have, may not necessarily be in the best interest of our communities,” Carvalhho said.

DeSantis’ order is nothing more than a governor throwing a tantrum after the Broward County School Board approved a mask mandate last week. The tantrum worked: The School Board now says it will comply with his order and is considering



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mandating masks only for employees, parents and visitors. It’s now up to districts to figure out how to please a governor who’s not afraid to use his executive powers to punish communities while protecting the health of students and staff.

“In light of the release of the Executive Order, we certainly hope to be able to craft protocols that ensure full funding of our children’s education, while simultaneously protecting their and their teachers’ health and well-being,” Carvalhho said in a statement released Saturday.

Local control makes sense, right? Well, not in Florida. DeSantis’ reaction to the pandemic has gone from vowing to protect the economy against shutdowns to making a mockery of a virus that’s killing Floridians (38,900 and counting). At least he says vaccines are effective, which is way more than what some Republicans will dare to profess.

At a recent speaking engagement in Utah, DeSantis made fun of mask wearing. He opened up his speech at the American Legislative Exchange Council by looking at a mostly unmasked crowd and saying: “Did you not get the CDC’s memo?” our governor asked. “I don’t see you complying,” Politico reported.

His Friday announcement happened at a Cape Coral restaurant where — surprise! — most people were not wearing masks, the Sun Sentinel reported.

That’s typical fashion for a governor who sells campaign drink koozies and T-shirts emblazoned with “How the hell am I going to be able to drink a beer with a mask on?” DeSantis doesn’t have to like masks and he can tour the country all he wants mocking them. But playing off parents’ rights against the right of Floridians to live in good health will likely hurt the very people whom he’s working hard to accommodate — to say nothing of the rest of us.

OPEN MIC

BIDEN CARES

Felice Gorodo’s Aug. 3 op-ed, “Biden committed to empowering the Cuban people,” regarding his visit to the White House with diverse Cuban Americans, highlights fundamental qualities of President Biden: empathy, thought and effective action.

At this critical moment, he is demonstrating his support for the Cuban people and for Cuban Americans. He is listening to our voices, rallying international support, and throwing the full weight of our country to directly empower the Cuban people through internet connectivity, focused sanctions that target the people responsible for repression and not punishing the general populace.

— Pedro Freyre, Miami

SCHOOLS THREAT

Despite the unanimous vote of the Broward County School Board to institute a mask mandate for all public schools in light of CDC recommendations, because of the surge of COVID-19 cases, Gov. DeSantis issued an executive order preventing schools from requiring masks. The ramifications of this damaging order cannot be overstated.

Does he not realize that when significant numbers of unvaccinated children return to indoor learning, the virus will spread, impacting them, their teachers, school staffers, their families, and the community? Where is the justification for this executive order?

Perhaps it dovetails with the governor’s desire to increase charter school and private school attendance at the expense of funding Florida’s public schools. He has signed legislation to this effect.



Perhaps the funds he threatens to withhold from school districts that disobey his executive order will be redirected to the \$130 million already allocated to these private schools.

If private schools impose mask mandates, will he attempt to hamstring them as well?

— Sheila Gewirtzman, Plantation

UNFAIR AND FALSE

I fully agree with Sen. Rick Scott’s Aug. 2 op-ed, “Democrats must heed the failures of communism in Cuba”. I only wish he had applied the same standards when referring to the Black Lives Matter demonstrations after George Floyd’s murder last year.

It is the double standard frequently used by Scott and his colleague, Sen. Marco Rubio, that

make this critique of Biden ring hollow.

— Patricia Dressler, Aventura

SOAP OPERA

Watching the COVID-19 drama unfold in Florida is like viewing a reality show or watching Darwin’s theory of evolution played out in real time. It is astonishing how Florida diddles with the crisis and becomes first in the nation for the virus spread.

Will Gov. DeSantis be given a leadership award for achieving this ‘victory’ as he goes against the recommendations of top epidemiologists, other scientists and doctors around the country?

His opposition to mask or vaccine mandates, limits on social gatherings and his efforts to bottle-up health statistics is appalling, but seem to have achieved results.

Simultaneously, many Floridians are proudly giving their lives to cleanse the gene pool while standing up for their rights against so-called government control, by refusing to vaccinate or to wear a mask. It takes a concerted effort to achieve results like these.

I’m a former resident of Florida, with friends, parents, ad other family living there now. I am sad and angry to see people put more faith in social media, fake news and politicians who have a partisan agenda than with top scientists who study these phenomena as their career.

How will this play out? For now, evolution is in control, and the virus naysayers and the government control alarmists are in Mother Nature’s cross-hairs.

— Daniel Stapleton, Aldie, VA

SCOTT PLACATES

It’s laughable that Sen. Rick Scott would criticize Democrats’ approach to Cuba, stating that “appeasement of dictators does not induce reform.”

Scott continues to embrace the GOP’s seditious former president and efforts to rewrite history. Let’s consign Trump to history and work to ensure our continued democracy, instead of appeasing a would-be dictator.

— Janis Dzelzkalns, Pinecrest

DOCTOR’S NOTE

According to the Herald’s Aug. 1 story “Most hospitals are reluctant to mandate vaccines for healthcare workers,” about 40% of health workers at Jackson Health System are not vaccinated against COVID-19.

Why would I want to be

“ONE GREAT THING ABOUT FLORIDA HEAT — YOU CAN GUARANTEE NO ONE IS WAITING IN YOUR BACK SEAT TO KILL YOU.”

FLASHBACK
South Florida,
Memories and
Memorabilia,
on Facebook

hospitalized where there is a significant probability of being infected with COVID-19 by the very workers who are caring for me?

There is something very wrong with this picture.

— Kenneth Barnes, Miami

TEST SUBJECTS

Parents who are adamant about masking their children deserve a big “Thank you.”

We appreciate that they are allowing their children to be used as guinea pigs to test the effectiveness of wearing a mask. Most parents I know would not want to risk their children getting COVID-19 and possibly dying.

These parents are going above and beyond. God bless all of them.

— Mary Ferguson, Cutler Bay

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