

Oppose all public education budget cuts, layoffs and the unsafe reopening of schools! For a socialist program to fully fund and vastly expand public education!

**Joseph Kishore--Socialist Equality Party candidate for president
23 June 2020**

The assault on public education since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic has been unprecedented in scope and ferocity. As with every aspect of the pandemic, the full brunt of the crisis is being imposed on the working class, while trillions are squandered on Wall Street and the financial oligarchy.

Massive austerity has already been implemented across the US, with an estimated 1.44 million educators laid off in March and April alone, including 779,000 K-12 public school educators. For the 2020-21 fiscal year, states face a public education funding shortfall of \$230 billion.

Cuts on this scale have never been seen before in the history of American education.

The massive assault on public education is the direct corollary to the handout of trillions of dollars to Wall Street, supported by both the Democrats and the Republicans. Following the 2008-2009 financial collapse, the Obama administration bailed out the banks and escalated the attack on public education as part of an overall assault on the working class.

Once again, on a far larger scale, the crisis sparked by the pandemic is being used to impose plans long in the making, including privatization, mass layoffs, and the destruction of arts and other programs.

The Socialist Equality Party demands an immediate reversal of all budget cuts and layoffs of educators, and the redirection of the massive trillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street into public education, public health and the eradication of poverty. The resources exist to fully fund public education and provide a safe learning environment, but they are monopolized by the financial oligarchy that controls the entire political system.

Whether Biden or Trump is elected in November, the assault on public education will continue. The “choice” offered by the Democrats and Republicans in the election is between two reactionary representatives of the ruling elite.

Indeed, both Democrats and Republicans are implementing historic cuts throughout the country. Ohio’s Republican

Governor Mike DeWine demanded \$465 million in education cuts for May and June. For the coming fiscal year, New York City’s Democratic Mayor Bill DeBlasio announced \$827 million in cuts from the Department of Education. California’s Democratic governor Gavin Newsom has proposed a nearly unfathomable \$8 billion in cuts to K-12 public education across the state.

The drop in revenue to schools is expected to be as high as 20-25 percent in many states. According to the Learning Policy Institute, a 15 percent across-the-board loss in state funding nationally will destroy 319,000 teaching positions. If state revenues decline by 30 percent, which is entirely possible, approximately 700,000 teachers would likely be cut.

The attitude of the Democrats and Republicans to this existential crisis is epitomized by the grotesquely misnamed CARES Act, which both parties passed virtually unanimously. It allocated a dismissive \$13.5 billion for schools while financing the multi-trillion bailout of Wall Street. By contrast, an estimated \$230 billion in federal infusions is needed merely to compensate for the state funding drop.

The capitalist politicians, meanwhile, have seized on the crisis to dramatically expand the privatization of the education industry to further enrich the tech industry, edubusinesses, and hedge funds.

In just one of such initiatives well underway, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, a Democrat, announced in May that Microsoft founder Bill Gates, who funds nationwide school privatization initiatives, and former Google CEO Eric Schmidt will be brought in to “reimagine” New York’s schools, healthcare and economy. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos lost no time in insisting that CARES money, initially earmarked for public schools, be distributed to their private and religious counterparts.

Alongside their complicity with Wall Street’s sledgehammer to school funding, the Democrats have joined with Trump to echo the criminal demand, “Schools in our country should be

opened ASAP,” so that parents can be forced back to work. With no vaccine, universal testing or adequate contact tracing anywhere in the US, this is a formula for massive community spread. To cite only one grim statistic, half of US school buildings have been rated unsatisfactory, with 41 percent failing to have adequate ventilation, conditions conducive to the widespread transmission of the disease.

As the Socialist Equality Party’s candidate for president in the 2020 US elections, I condemn the bipartisan attacks on public education and the plans to reopen schools under unsafe conditions. The pandemic has laid bare the homicidal class war being waged by the financial oligarchy against the population. All measures to stem the disease have been shelved, as the corporate and financial elite force a return to work. They are acting with contempt for the lives of millions of people who will be affected by reopening schools.

There is overwhelming opposition by teachers to the unsafe reopening of US schools. A poll conducted in late May by the EdWeek Research Center showed 65 percent of educators say schools should stay shut to slow the spread of the coronavirus. Yet this finds no political expression because the two big business parties are entirely subservient to Wall Street’s profit-taking.

As for the unions, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association continue to do everything in their power to prevent a nationally unified fightback by educators. They systematically sabotaged the struggles of teachers throughout the country over the past two years, isolating every strike they could not prevent and imposing agreements demanded by the state.

In a phony public relations effort, they implore Congress to pass the so-called HEROES Act. For both the unions and Democrats, this is all an act of political theater, as Trump has deemed the bill’s small allocations “dead on arrival.” Meanwhile, Democrats and unions are putting forward reactionary “equity” plans that pit “richer” districts against poorer ones and advocate new regressive taxes.

Therefore, educators must take matters into their own hands. We urge teachers, students, parents and workers to form rank-and-file safety and workplace committees in every school and neighborhood to determine how and when schools should reopen. These committees should work with trusted health experts in the field. They will break the stranglehold of the unions and unite the struggles of all educators with every section of the working class.

The Socialist Equality Party proposes the following specific demands:

- **No reopening of schools until they are safe**, as determined by local rank-and-file committees in conjunction with scientists and public health workers. Any education worker refusing to work for health reasons must be provided a full wage and a guarantee against victimization. All laid off workers, temporary or part-time workers must be made whole for lost income due

to the pandemic.

- **Rescind all the cuts** and instead carry through a multi-trillion-dollar infusion into public education, literacy, the arts and culture. All schooling from pre-K through all forms of continuing education must be free, high quality and accessible to all.

- **Free quality computers and high-speed internet access must be provided for every family** to ensure that accessibility to online learning is not dependent on wealth. Coaching and assistance must be provided to all educators transitioning to online learning.

- **Safe conditions for learning and work.** School buildings must be rehabilitated or rebuilt for 21st-century learning, health and safety. A massive program of construction and infrastructure development is necessary. If school is resumed while the pandemic continues, there must be adequate medical staff, PPE, cleaning supplies and maximum safety measures available at every school.

- **Immediate academic, physical and emotional support for children and educators.** This must include funding for: one-to-one support for those who are falling behind, the establishment of neighborhood feeding programs (replacing inadequate and spotty school lunch pickups), a dramatic increase in school counselors, nurses, arts programs, special education staff, vocational programs and English-language learning made available both online and in-person.

The vast sums needed for such demands require the political mobilization of the working class against the Democrats, Republicans and the entire capitalist system. This entails a frontal assault on the vast wealth built up by a tiny parasitical elite. Three individuals control more wealth than half of the American population.

The fight to establish the right to public education means a fight to establish a society based on social need, not private profit, in which the wealth produced by workers is owned and controlled democratically, and in which every individual has the right to an education, a decent job, a livable income, health care, a healthy environment, and access to culture.

If there were any question, the past months’ experiences have demonstrated that the fundamental social rights of workers are incompatible with a society subordinated to the dictates of big business.

It is time to take up the fight for international socialism. I urge all educators to form independent rank-and-file committees in every school and neighborhood, support my campaign and, above all, join and build the Socialist Equality Party. To sign up, visit socialism2020.org.



To contact the WWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wws.org/contact