

As opposition mounts to reopening of the schools

## Missouri governor says children infected with COVID-19 will “get over it”

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The campaign to reopen schools across the US, spearheaded by the Trump administration and supported by the entire political establishment, is provoking widespread opposition among educators, parents and young people.

Missouri Governor Mike Parson, a Republican and ally of Donald Trump, declared in a radio interview on Friday, “These kids have got to get back to school. They’re at the lowest risk possible. And if they do get COVID-19, which they will, and they will when they go to school, they’re not going to the hospitals. They’re not going to have to sit in doctors’ offices. They’re going to go home and they’re going to get over it.”

This statement expresses the callous indifference of the entire ruling class to the suffering that the pandemic has inflicted on the working class. The ruling elite is engaged in a homicidal class war whose central focus is forcing workers back on the job under conditions of an out-of-control pandemic and no protection for workers against COVID-19. The reopening of the schools, which the corporate elite and the politicians know will lead to mass infections and deaths, is central to the back-to-work drive.

The pandemic is rapidly spreading in Missouri, with a daily average of 854 new confirmed cases over the past week, up from 238 only a month ago. Across the US, cases and deaths are rising rapidly, with over 60,000 new cases and nearly 1,000 deaths each day for the past week.

Contrary to Parson’s claims, the most recent data (July 15) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) documents 188 deaths of youth under 25 attributable to COVID-19, including 31

deaths of children under the age of 15. While children have the lowest infection and death rates for any age group, this is in part due to the global wave of school closures that began in mid-March, as well as a lack of testing for this age group.

The families that have lost children under the horrific circumstances of the pandemic will never be the same. Prior data from CDC indicates that the case fatality rate for children is roughly 0.02 percent, meaning that with a full reopening of schools, potentially thousands of children could die.

Parson said nothing about the dangers posed to children’s parents when they come home infected, or the potential for orphaning hundreds of thousands of children across the country. He also ignored the dangers posed to teachers forced to be in the classroom, roughly a quarter of whom fall under the categories most at-risk of dying from COVID-19.

The moves to reopen schools under unsafe conditions have been met with growing opposition and protests by educators and parents. Millions of educators rightly view this campaign as an existential threat and are seeking a way to mobilize teachers and school workers to oppose it.

Across the US, there have been protests outside school board meetings, car caravans and an explosion of discussion on social media, all largely independent of the teachers unions, which are collaborating in the back-to-school drive.

Over the past week, significant demonstrations have taken place, including in Mississippi, Texas, Florida and Arizona, four traditionally conservative states that have become major hotspots for the pandemic.

Some of the most significant developments have

taken place in Mississippi, where backwardness has long been promoted by the political establishment. Roughly 1,000 Mississippi educators have organized a Facebook group called Mississippi Teachers Unite, which held a rally last Friday outside the Mississippi state capitol. Rejecting the denigration of science, one sign showed an image of a ouija board with the caption, “Better add this to the school supply list—just in case your child needs to ask their teacher a question.”

In Austin, Texas, roughly 1,000 participated in a caravan rally that followed a route around the state capitol. The rally drew support online from over 8,000 teachers across the state. The organizers declared its purpose was to give “names and faces to the word teacher.” They added, “We are people with needs and concerns.”

In Arizona, a series of car caravan protests involving hundreds of teachers have taken place in multiple cities in response to Republican Governor Doug Ducey’s mandate that schools resume in-person instruction on August 17. One of the organizers, Stacy Brosius, told *Reuters*, “We don’t want any children to get this from us, because as a teacher, I don’t want to go to any of their funerals.”

Separately, 87 doctors have signed a letter to Ducey demanding that he rescind the order to reopen the schools.

Facing immense pressure from rank-and-file educators, the Florida Education Association on Monday sued Republican Governor Ron DeSantis over his administration’s demand that all schools fully resume in-person instruction. At a press conference Monday, DeSantis was heckled by demonstrators shouting, “Shame on you!” The state has become the epicenter of the pandemic in the US, with over 9,000 new cases each day since July 10.

The union has filed the lawsuit as a diversion from the mobilization of educators in strike action and a fight to unite teachers and school workers across the country in defense of education and against the criminal back-to-work policy.

The protests that have broken out have for the most part been outside the framework of the unions or with limited coordination by local teachers unions under pressure from rank-and-file educators. The national teachers unions, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA),

have given their support to the resumption of in-person instruction.

The principal activities of the teachers unions revolve around promoting the passage of the fraudulent HEROES Act—which Trump and Senate Republicans have repeatedly called “dead on arrival”—and shilling for Joe Biden, who facilitated the assault on public education throughout both Obama administrations.

In response to the immense growth of opposition to schools reopening, AFT President Randi Weingarten has begun advocating that older teachers with health concerns use sick leave and the Family and Medical Act (FMLA) to stay home in districts that demand the resumption of in-person instruction. This is intended to forestall collective action and create the conditions for purging experienced teachers and replacing them with low-paid younger teachers, part of an effort to split the workforce along generational lines.

In the coming weeks, as the pandemic takes an ever greater toll, opposition among educators, parents and students to the unsafe reopening of schools will become increasingly acute. In schools that reopen, cases will inevitably break out, prompting protests demanding the closure of schools. These demands will face intransigent resistance from the ruling elite, which will conspire with the teachers unions at every step to keep the schools open.

To prepare for the coming struggles, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) calls upon educators, parents and students to develop a network of independent rank-and-file committees to unite across districts and states. The call for a nationwide strike in opposition to the homicidal policies of the ruling class must be popularized among educators and the entire working class. We urge all those seeking to develop fighting organizations to ensure the safety and well-being of educators and all workers to contact us today.



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