

# Georgia teachers and students force temporary closure of North Paulding High School over COVID-19 outbreak

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On Sunday, the superintendent of the Paulding County School district in Dallas, Georgia sent an email alerting the parents of North Paulding High School that the school would be closed for in-person instruction on Monday and Tuesday of this week. The superintendent, Dr. Brian Otett, explained in the letter that the school had suffered nine confirmed cases of COVID-19 since reopening one week ago. The cases included three staff members and six students.

The cluster of cases emerged as a direct consequence of the reckless decision of the Paulding County Board of Education to reopen schools for in-person instruction amid a surge in COVID-19 cases in the state. It appears that the county opened its schools with almost no protective measures in place.

Parents of North Paulding High students reported that they were offered the choice between in-person and virtual learning, but a limit was placed on how many students could do virtual learning. That option was so popular that the limit was reached within a few days. Many families are now on a waiting list, according to the school board.

North Paulding High School opened its doors on August 3. The school made national headlines just days later after students posted pictures and videos of their peers walking through crowded hallways, without masks.

School administrators responded to the exposure with hostility. Two of the students involved were suspended, including 15-year-old Hannah, who told *Buzzfeed* that she was found to have violated rules against unauthorized use of smartphones in school hallways. The school principal can also be heard in this leaked **audio file** threatening anyone else with “consequences” if he or she posts anything “negative” on social media.

The posts went viral on social media, prompting a massive backlash from students, parents, teachers and others in the Dallas area and throughout the country. Only after the school was made the focus of nationwide negative attention were the students reinstated.

## The homicidal conspiracy of the Paulding County Board of Education

The Paulding County Board of Education has fully supported the bipartisan drive to reopen the schools. As in other counties throughout the country, it has made no serious attempt to protect its students and staff. In fact, as the *World Socialist Web Site* reported on Friday, in a **video** released on social media of a county Board of Education meeting held just prior to the school reopenings, the chair of the Paulding County Board of Education, Jeff Fuller, can be heard calling the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines “complete crap.”

Fuller says: “I would like to see Paulding County lead the way in an absolute normal return to school on August 3.” He suggests that children are immune from the virus, saying that it is “not fair to kids to shove something down their throats that’s not affecting them.” He ends his remarks by urging his colleagues to not “buy into the hype” around the pandemic.

Newly released video clips from the same meeting reveal even more sinister plotting by members of the Paulding County Board of Education to get around Department of Health regulations. Per the Georgia Department of Health, schools are required to classify anyone who has been within six feet of a COVID-19 sufferer for 15 minutes or more as a close contact. In the new clip, Theresa Lyons, a member of the board, suggests that students change seats every 14 minutes to get around this regulation.

Not only did the school board do virtually nothing to provide protection for students, it sought to circumvent the minimal protections that were mandated!

What’s more, there is mounting evidence that the school board was aware of outbreaks among members of the North Paulding High School football team, many of whom, one Facebook video shows, worked out together in a crowded indoor gym the week prior to the school’s reopening. Parents were apparently notified of the outbreaks just hours before the start of the first day of classes.

In addition to the student cases, multiple teachers at North

Paulding reported positive tests prior to the first day of school. One infected staff member told *Buzzfeed News* that she came into contact with “most teachers at the school” during a staff event the week prior to reopening. Teachers and staff are reporting that the school is refusing to confirm coronavirus infections among district employees.

A leaked “Open Records Act” request from a local parent suggests that North Paulding High School alone had 23 confirmed cases before August 5.

If any students, teachers or staff die from COVID-19 in the coming weeks or months, their blood will be on the hands of the Paulding County Board of Education.

### **Children and the COVID-19 pandemic: What the science shows**

The emergence of nine new COVID-19 cases in the last week among North Paulding students and staff tragically confirms the emerging science concerning the ability of children to spread the virus.

A mounting body of scientific evidence shows that young people are transmitters of the virus. Anyone who says that youth are “unaffected” by the virus or in some way immune is either grossly misinformed or consciously lying on behalf of the political establishment, which understands that scientifically verified information will hinder the drive to reopen the economy.

A new report from the American Academy of Pediatrics released Sunday finds that nearly 100,000 children tested positive for the coronavirus in the last two weeks of July. Out of almost five million reported COVID-19 cases in the US, the organization found that more than 338,000 were children.

A new CDC report released Friday looked at nearly 580 children who were hospitalized with the coronavirus between the start of March and late July. Researchers found that hospitalization rates for children increased steadily over that timeline. About one in three hospitalized children had to be admitted to an intensive care unit—a rate similar to the ICU admittance rate for hospitalized adults with the coronavirus.

These are only the two most recent studies in a growing body of scientific evidence, which, taken as a whole, indicates that the reopening of the schools will have catastrophic consequences for students, teachers, and parents.

### **The way forward for youth, students and parents**

The experience at North Paulding High School has been

instructive for teachers, parents, and students everywhere. It was only under conditions of a groundswell of opposition that the school board was forced to act.

Nothing will be accomplished without a mass united movement of workers and young people. In order for this fight to go forward, workers and youth must be clearly armed with an awareness of their enemies and their allies.

The demand that schools reopen is central to the ruling class campaign to force workers back to work in order to pump out profits for the corporate-financial elite. While the Trump administration has spearheaded this campaign, the Democrats bear equal responsibility. This fact was underscored on Friday when the Democratic governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, announced that all schools would be allowed to reopen.

Educators, parents, and students must organize independently of the pro-corporate unions and Democratic Party and form a network of rank-and-file committees in every school and neighborhood to prevent the unsafe reopening of the schools.

These committees must be guided by science. They must fight to connect with ever broader sections of the working class to prepare for a **nationwide general strike** against the reopening of the schools and the broader reopening of the economy.

Only through a broad-based movement of the working class will society be able to contain the pandemic, vastly expand public education funding and ensure that the social interests of the working class take precedence over private profit. We urge all those who wish to take up such a struggle to **contact us today**, sign up for the **WSWS Educators Newsletter** if you are an educator, and join our youth and student group, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality if you are a student or young person.



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