

# The ruling-class conspiracy to reopen schools: Profit versus science

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A deadly catastrophe is brewing in schools throughout the United States. Hundreds of thousands of children and teachers are being sent back to schools for in-person learning each week, despite a growing body of scientific evidence that children both spread the virus and are susceptible to falling ill themselves.

A spreadsheet published in *Education Week* lists data on reopening plans for 382 school districts, representing approximately 3 percent of all the districts in the US. It shows that 200,000 students are already back in classrooms and over 2.7 million will be back in school full-time by the end of August. If the data is extrapolated to include all of the nearly 14,000 districts in the US, millions more students, teachers and staff will be back in school over the next several weeks.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has already given the green light to open the state's schools, including in New York City, the nation's largest school district with over one million students and 135,000 teachers and support staff.

Reports are emerging daily of teachers writing out their wills and obituaries before the semester starts. Students and parents are being forced to sign waivers to exempt schools from liability in the event that students get infected with the coronavirus when they return to schools and college campuses.

The drive to reopen schools has been justified by President Trump and various right-wing governors with the claim that children are largely unaffected by the virus. The introductory paragraph of the revised CDC guidelines—produced under political pressure from the White House—falsely states that “children are unlikely to be major drivers of the spread of the virus.”

At a White House press conference Monday, President Trump dismissed reports of spreading infections among children, declaring, “I think, for the most part, they don't get very sick... It's also a case where there's a tiny fraction of death, tiny fraction, and they get better very quickly.”

For their part, the Democratic Party-aligned teacher unions, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the

National Education Association (NEA), are doing everything they can to suppress popular opposition to the reckless reopening of the schools. They have joined the chorus of corporate and political voices who falsely claim that schools can be reopened safely.

The claim that young people are “unaffected” by the virus is a blatant lie. Recent data shows a drastic surge of infections among small children and adolescents:

\* A new report from the American Academy of Pediatrics released Sunday found that nearly 100,000 children tested positive for the coronavirus in the last two weeks of July, a 40 percent increase from the previous two weeks. Out of more than five million reported COVID-19 cases in the US, over 338,000 were children.

\* A new CDC report, released Friday, found that between March and late July, hospitalization rates for children increased steadily. About 1 in 3 hospitalized children needed to be admitted to an intensive care unit—a rate similar to the ICU admittance rate for hospitalized adults with the coronavirus.

\* A JAMA (*Journal of the American Medical Association*) study released recently found that babies and young children infected with COVID-19 can carry high viral loads in their throats and airways—up to 100 times the amount of adults.

The science is clear: the reopening of schools while the pandemic continues to rage will lead to countless deaths among students, parents, teachers and other school workers. In countries where schools have been opened, the consequences have been dire. Israel is now suffering one of the world's highest per-capita rates of new infections, with many experts blaming the reckless reopening of schools as a major factor.

The experience in Georgia high schools earlier this week shows the futility of the limited social distancing measures that districts cite to justify reopening. Students at North Paulding High School, defying the school administration's ban on photos and social media postings, leaked photos of packed hallways of unmasked kids in the first few days of classes.

Leaked videos reveal a conspiracy of the district Board of Education to get around a state Department of Health regulation that schools classify anyone who has been within six feet of a COVID-19 sufferer for 15 minutes or more as a close contact. In the leaked video clip, a member of the board suggests that students change seats every 14 minutes to get around this regulation.

Dozens of new cases have been confirmed at North Paulding High School and surrounding schools since the leaked photos went viral, proving that the situation in Georgia is not the exception, but the rule.

Democrats and Republicans alike claim that they are solely motivated by concerns about the academic and emotional needs of children. On Monday, Florida's Republican Governor Ron DeSantis used this spurious claim when he rejected the plan by the state's third-largest school district to hold online-only classes for the first month of the semester, and instead demanded that 223,000 Tampa-area students attend in-person lessons on August 24.

The supposed concern for the well-being of children never stopped any of the politicians from both corporate-backed parties from slashing funding from public education, closing schools and gutting vital services. Furthermore, none of them dares speak about the permanent psychological damage that will be inflicted on children who lose a teacher, parent or grandparent to the virus, or how they will be affected socially and emotionally when they are told day after day that socializing, hugging, and playing on playgrounds (i.e., being a child) is against the rules.

The sole reason the Democrats and Republicans want to herd children back into the schools is so that their parents can return to work and restart the flow of corporate profits needed to finance the massive bailout of Wall Street and major corporations. For this homicidal return-to-work campaign to be accomplished, the virus must be normalized, along with the death that will come with it. Or, as President Trump so crudely said about the rising death toll, "It is what it is."

This is the policy of the ruling classes around the globe. Although there are currently more than 1,000 new coronavirus infections per day in Germany, all of the country's state governments are ruthlessly enforcing school openings after the summer break. Schools in at least 20 countries are planning to open for in-person learning in the coming month, including in Brazil, where record cases and deaths are being reported almost daily.

Educators, students, parents and workers everywhere will not, and cannot, accept this implicit death sentence. In the face of this corporate and political conspiracy, only the independent intervention of the working class can and will save lives.

There is growing opposition mounting among students, parents, teachers and broader sections of the working class. Over the past month, there has been an explosion of opposition to the unsafe reopening of schools in the US and around the world, with protests across the US and strikes by teachers in Colombia, Argentina, Haiti and other countries. Dozens of Facebook groups have emerged globally, from Rhode Island to Texas, to South Africa, Great Britain and many other countries, with a combined membership of well over 300,000.

This resistance must be organized and directed. The Socialist Equality Party urges educators and every section of workers to build rank-and-file safety committees, independent of the trade unions and both big business parties, to prepare for a general strike to halt the reopening of schools, stop the spread of the pandemic and prevent millions more infections and deaths.

We demand that all schools remain closed until the virus is eradicated. Funding must be made available for public education and online instruction. High-speed internet access, food distribution, mental health care, special education support and all other resources needed to provide the best quality remote learning must be guaranteed to every student and educator. At the same time, full income must be provided to parents who have to remain home with their children.

The SEP and its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, are leading this fight. We urge teachers to contact us for assistance in organizing your struggle. We call on students and youth to support this struggle and join the IYSSE. Teachers, educational staff and parents: sign up for the World Socialist Web Site Educators Newsletter for updates on this fight.



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