

Full transparency on COVID-19! Hands off Florida educators! Close schools now!

Duval County Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
28 August 2020

The Duval County Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (DCRFSC) denounces a Florida Health Department order, issued Tuesday, mandating censorship of COVID-19 data within Duval public schools. This information is a life-and-death matter for students, staff and parents who have been forced back into unsafe schools even as Florida continues to have over 3,500 new infections every day.

The DCRFSC also condemns the bullying and intimidation tactics of Education Commissioner Richard Corcoran, who last week demanded the firing of teachers who fail to report back to schools under Florida's reactionary right-to-work statutes. Our committee has been informed that Corcoran is personally pushing a vindictive policy across every school district, demanding investigations for "professional misconduct" and seeking to prosecute teachers to the fullest extent of the law. According to the Florida Education Association, teachers are barred from "instigating strikes" or even "supporting" them. Such penalties could range from firing and the revoking of certifications to fines and jail time.

The Duval County Department of Health instructed schools they cannot publish "school specific data related to COVID-19" without their permission. Accordingly, the district's dashboard of cases went static. The action was taken after 24 cases were reported in the schools in just the first three days of in-person instruction.

This is a blatant attack on our rights to know the truth and to protect ourselves and our students. Governor DeSantis and other state officials have only one purpose: to hide the evidence of their crime, which is no less deadly than homicide.

The danger to teachers, parents and educators cannot be overstated. Among the biggest lies peddled by the

administration is that children are immune or relatively unscathed. Just in the last two weeks, more than 74,000 children in the US tested positive for the coronavirus, a 21 percent increase between August 6 and August 20. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, presently, there have been at least 442,785 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in this age group.

Florida itself confirmed almost 9,000 new COVID-19 cases among children within 15 days of schools reopening earlier this month. During the same 15 days, the number of children hospitalized due to COVID-19 rose from 436 to 602, and one more child died from the virus, bringing the state's total number of child deaths to eight.

In demanding the immediate closure of schools, the DCRFSC is taking a stand for children, parents and the community as well as ourselves. The fact that the Department of Health wants to censor data coupled with a lack of rapid testing before reopening schools, means that the real number of cases and deaths among children is likely far higher. The CDC has bent to Wall Street pressure and modified its guidelines for testing for COVID-19 on Monday. Deaths to staff, parents and the wider community will continue to skyrocket if we don't take a stand.

Our committee stands for "Full transparency. We demand daily reporting to the community on results and COVID-positive cases." This is nonnegotiable.

The suppression of information, attacks on the First Amendment rights and threats against the right of the working class to withhold its labor are measures of desperation. Corcoran, a spineless Trump acolyte, is channeling the growing fear of the ruling elite as social anger mounts. Educators and parents have rallied throughout the state against the deadly reopening of schools. The state's largest-ever demonstrations

occurred as some 10,000 Floridians marched against the police murder of George Floyd and mass unemployment and growing social inequality now combine to drive widespread opposition.

Teachers want to be in their classrooms doing the job they love! There must be no penalty for safeguarding our health and that of our students and communities. The DCRFSC program calls for: “No loss of income for educators who choose to stay home. Teachers will not lose their position at their school if they decide to remain virtual. Teachers shall be provided unlimited COVID-19 sick leave.”

This suppression of information on the pandemic has characterized the response of DeSantis, as it has the Trump administration. Notoriously, Rebekah Jones, a top Department of Health official, was fired by DeSantis in May after she refused to scrub the state’s COVID-19 data to diminish official cases.

The health department now cites Florida Statute 381.0031, ludicrously claiming that “disease reporting is confidential” and should be only “be made public when necessary to public health.” Clearly this agency is a rubber stamp for the politics of Governor DeSantis and Florida billionaires.

All scientific studies show that schools are inevitable vectors for widespread community transmission of the deadly disease. A recent study from the University of Florida confirmed that an infective aerosolized form of minute COVID-19 particles can become airborne and travel 16 feet or more, well beyond the recommended six feet for social distancing. These aerosols can also remain suspended in the air for hours in poorly ventilated spaces. The findings make concrete that all classrooms where children and teachers will gather are dangerous and deadly, particularly in schools that have poor ventilation or do not require the use of masks or social distancing.

All of these facts indicate that the only responsible plan is for the shutdown of all Florida schools, with full support to parents, students and staff until a safe return can be ensured.

Our power is in the working class. We call on all educators, parents, and students in Duval County, across Florida, nationally and internationally who agree with these demands to join with us. There is a growing sentiment for a national strike to halt the homicidal reopening of schools across the United States. We wish

to lend our strength to those around the country looking for mass action of the working class because our lives are at stake. We call on all workers—manufacturing, logistics, food processing, health care, public and private sector—in Duval County and nationally to support our struggle.

We call on you to help to save lives. We need your support! All schools and nonessential businesses must close! All workers, regardless of industry, must unify with us to make this desperately needed measure a reality.

The Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee has been formed to coordinate and facilitate the building of a network of rank-and-file safety committees in every school and neighborhood, to organize the immense opposition to the murderous plan to reopen schools. All those who agree with this perspective should contact us today, join our Facebook group and make plans to attend our next online call-in meeting Saturday, August 29. Register today and share the event widely with your coworkers!



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