

Second call-in meeting of the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee attracts large audience across the US

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Over 150 educators, school employees, and other workers throughout the US and internationally participated in the second online meeting hosted by the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee on Saturday, August 29, in order to organize the immense opposition to reopening schools.

Educators and workers from New York, Florida, Michigan, Indiana, Oklahoma, Colorado, Texas, Arizona, California, Hawaii, and many other states, as well as Britain, Germany, and South Korea participated in the meeting.

The opening reports at Saturday's meeting focused on the dire conditions facing teachers, school workers and students throughout the country and internationally, issuing a call to action to build a network of rank-and-file safety committees in every school and neighborhood.

Nancy Hanover, editor of the *World Socialist Web Site Educators Newsletter*, introduced the meeting and remarked that the "Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee is taking a stand to save lives, to close schools, advocate for science, mobilize the working class, and prepare for what must quite inevitably become mass strike action."

Hanover noted that the call to form rank-and-file safety committees among teachers and school workers is taking root in places like Duval County, Florida, with plans to establish other committees throughout the US in the coming weeks.

Evan Blake, a former special education teacher in Oakland, California and member of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), outlined developments in the deadly drive to reopen the schools, noting, "School reopenings began in late July and are continuing and deepening each day. There have been at least 3,000 infections officially tied to school reopenings at nearly 900 schools. But the lack of testing and the fact that districts and states are covering up outbreaks and threatening to fire teachers who reveal cases in their schools means the real number of infections in schools is likely well over 10,000 by now."

Blake also emphasized that the current struggles facing educators and school workers take place in a highly political atmosphere, one in which both the Trump administration and the Democrats, with the help of the trade unions, are both

facilitating the full reopening of schools and the broader economy amid a deadly pandemic.

He said, "The division of society between the working class and the powers-that-be cannot be more naked. The American working class has been devastated by the economic crisis from the pandemic and is increasingly hostile to the back-to-work campaign being carried out by both parties. There is growing anticapitalist sentiment in the working class, particularly among the youth. The situation is incredibly explosive, and the reopening of schools has vastly accelerated this radicalization. The struggle of educators has now become the focal point of the class struggle."

Following these remarks, Dr. Benjamin Mateus spoke on the latest scientific studies pertinent to the reopening of schools. He noted the recently updated guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which are meant to limit testing even further.

Remarks were given from educators and supporters internationally, pointing to the global character of the deadly reopenings and of the struggle facing educators, school workers, students and their families. Christoph Vandreier, the deputy national secretary of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei, the Socialist Equality Party in Germany, spoke on the mounting opposition to the parallel campaign to reopen schools across Germany.

Bradley, a theater teacher in Duval County, Florida spoke about the recent formation of the Duval County Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee and discussed their 10 demands. Bradley denounced the efforts by Florida's Education Commissioner Richard Corcoran to prosecute teachers who protest or strike, while noting that the situation is now life and death for teachers. "There is so much fear, but as this goes on there is also so much outrage. As teachers are having to choose between risking their jobs and risking their lives, more and more are willing to risk their jobs."

Another teacher in Duval County Public School District, who said she recently resigned, expressed support for the demands put forward by the Duval County Educators Rank-and-File

Safety Committee. She said, “I was one of the very first teachers to resign on the day we had to go back to work. ... I’m very frustrated with the suppression of the data. ... We are not allowed to say which cases or how many cases we have in the schools. ... Everything stinks to me, it’s just rotten. ... I chose to leave, but I knew that I had to stay in the fight.”

An English teacher from Hawaii commented on the dire conditions facing school reopenings in her state, noting that many special education teachers and students are currently in face-to-face instruction. “These teachers deal with the students with severe disabilities, feeding them, toileting, and they do not have adequate PPE. These are essentially triage workers, and they need to be equipped just as if they’re in an ICU unit in a hospital, and that is just not happening.”

David Brown, a special education teacher in Oakland and a member of the SEP, spoke on the need to build independent rank-and-file safety committees, stating, “This is a pandemic, which by definition is not a local problem. Without a scientific, nationwide and really international strategy for the containment and eradication of this virus, any return to in-person instruction cannot be safe whatever level of community transmission you have locally.”

Having participated in and written on the 2018 Arizona teachers strike and the 2019 Oakland strike, David outlined the lessons from these experiences on the role of the unions in suppressing and isolating genuine mass opposition among teachers. He laid out the role of the unions in facilitating major cuts and austerity to public education under both Democrats and Republicans.

“We’re fighting for our right as teachers to a safe workplace. We’re fighting for the right of our students to a safe and effective education,” David noted, adding, “The money is there to eradicate this disease, to enact major campaigns, increase testing, increase health care to contain it. Any effort to try to force us or students back before that’s done is essentially saying that the right of these billionaires to profit is more important than our basic social rights.”

He called for uniting the broader working class, saying, “We have to incorporate not just the people who are in the teachers union but the teachers who are outside the unions, the janitorial staff, the parents. Every worker who wants to fight in defense of public education and in defense of safety has to be organized and brought into this, and we cannot limit our fight to local district contracts.”

The call-in meeting also had participants from other sectors of industry. An autoworker from the Gladstone Faurecia Rank-and-File Safety Committee in Columbus, Indiana, spoke in support of educators and called for the need to broaden the struggle to all workers.

“I know the teachers are going through the same thing. We formed our committee because the company is putting us in danger every day. They don’t care. All they care about is the dollars. They want us to go back to work, they refuse to follow

doctor’s orders. They want to use us up, and when we are useless to them, they want to kick us to the curb, just like the teachers. When the coronavirus gets you, they want to kick you to the curb. We are being forced to work in factories where the coronavirus is not under control. The companies are not looking out for us, so we have to look out for ourselves.

“Whether it’s the Democrats or the Republicans, it doesn’t matter. They’re pushing us all back to work. We have to be interested in our own welfare, in our brothers and sisters. We have the same monkey on our backs.”

Referencing the American Civil War, the autoworker stressed the need to unite the entire working class, saying, “It’s like Abraham Lincoln once said, ‘A house divided against itself will fall.’ In 1970, the truckers decided they did not like the way they were treated. They decided to band together, and they called for a nationwide strike. The President went on the TV and said they had to go back to work. They didn’t listen to the President, and they were right because what ended up happening is they brought the country to a halt.”

He added, “I don’t think it’s right to put teachers and kids in danger when they don’t have to be. We all need to stand together. We all need to put this country to a standstill to save lives.”

Jerry White, labor editor for the *World Socialist Web Site*, closed the meeting with a call to action. He said, “I want to encourage everyone here: It is necessary to build rank-and-file safety committees as the spokesmen, as the voice of the working class, to expose the spread of the virus, to rally support, to unify educators with logistics workers, autoworkers, hospital workers and every section of the working class. This is a class struggle. On the one side, the working class is fighting for life, while on the other side are the corporate interests and the two corporate-controlled parties.

“All workers in America and around the world have the same interests. We have to develop and prepare for a national strike, as the brother said, to shut down the country and to spread it in fact internationally.”

The Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee urges all those who agree with the need to carry out this fight to contact us today, join our Facebook group and make plans to attend our next online call-in meeting on Saturday, September 5, at 3pm EDT.



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