

Youth and students: Oppose the deadly reopening of schools! Take a stand on the side of the teachers and the working class!

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (US)
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A catastrophe is unfolding at schools and colleges across the US as millions of students, teachers and staff are being forced to return to campuses for in-person learning amid the raging COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite overwhelming scientific evidence that in-person learning will lead to an increase in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths, hundreds of schools are moving forward with reckless reopening plans.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth and student wing of the Socialist Equality Party, condemns the drive to reopen schools. We call on students and young people in middle schools, high schools, and colleges to join our fight to oppose the unsafe reopening of schools! We urge students to take a stand on the side of teachers and on the side of life, safety, science and the working class.

A predictable and preventable catastrophe

The situation is deadly serious. Students and parents are being asked to sign liability waivers acknowledging the chance of death if they return to campus. Teachers are writing out their wills and obituaries. Meanwhile, parents are being forced to choose between sending their kids back to schools under dangerous conditions or losing their jobs and risk being thrown into poverty or homelessness.

For schools that have already opened, the situation has proven to be disastrous.

Within days of reopening, outbreaks of COVID-19 infections in Georgia, Delaware, Louisiana, Alabama, Hawaii, California and other states forced thousands of children and school workers to quarantine. The University of Georgia reported 821 new COVID-19 cases in the past week alone, adding to the 189 new cases reported the first week before.

The positive test rate for COVID-19 at Iowa State University doubled from an already alarming 13.6 percent during the first week of classes to a staggering 28.8 percent in the second. There are now hundreds of confirmed cases on the campus, and the state has become an international hotspot for the virus.

One administrator and professor at Yale University, Laurie Santos, the Head of College and a psychology professor, sent a chillingly honest message to campus residents last month: prepare for deaths. In an email to students she wrote, “[W]e all should be emotionally prepared for widespread infections—and possibly deaths—in our community. You should emotionally prepare for the fact that your residential college life will look more like a hospital unit than a residential college.”

The unfolding crisis was both predictable and preventable. There was every indication, both in the science as well as evidence from other

countries, that the premature reopening of schools would lead to more infections, more hospitalizations and more deaths.

The government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu justified reopening schools in Israel in May on the basis that COVID cases were low, falling from 750 confirmed cases a day to double digits. Within a few days of reopening schools, the virus was spreading on campuses and throughout communities. By late July, the rate had increased to more than 2,000 a day.

Well before the first school reopenings in the US, there were already dozens of scientific reports proving that children could not only spread the virus just as much as adults, but could also fall ill and even die. Despite this evidence, the ruling class, Democrat and Republican alike, moved forward with reopening schools and campuses.

Who is to blame?

The demand that schools reopen has been central to the ruling class campaign in every country to force workers back to work in order to pump out profits for the corporate-financial elite.

In the US, the main concern of the ruling class as the pandemic spread in the first months of the year was to organize an historically unprecedented bailout of the rich. This was accomplished through the CARES Act, which sanctioned the multi-trillion dollar handout to Wall Street.

Once this was completed, all energy was directed towards pushing an aggressive campaign for a return to work. The debt incurred by the bailout of the financial markets demanded a rapid end to restraints on the process of profit extraction.

However, in order for workers to return to work, their children had to be back in school.

Democrats and Republicans alike have shamelessly claimed that they are solely motivated by concerns about the academic and emotional needs of children. They claim that the risk of COVID-19 is not as great as the emotional and social toll that virtual learning may have on students. School districts and politicians have already begun shaming teachers into returning to school “for the well-being of the children.”

Who do they think they’re kidding? 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.

While the Trump administration has spearheaded this campaign, the Democrats are also responsible. The CARES Act was passed with almost unanimous bipartisan support in Congress. Former presidential candidate Bernie Sanders even hailed the bill as a boon for workers on the Senate floor.

Democratic governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, is leading the charge to reopen schools in New York, including New York City, which is the largest school district in the country. Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer is refusing to release information on where school outbreaks are taking place.

Furthermore, the campaign to reopen schools has received the full support from Democratic Presidential Nominee, Joe Biden. While Biden's tactics and rhetoric are different from Trump's, the fundamental conclusion remains the same: schools must reopen. In fact, Joe Biden's wife announced on Monday she would be beginning a multi-week "Back to School Tour" that will stop in ten cities.

The response of the entire ruling class has been clear since the start: profits over lives. Even as millions of workers remain unemployed, lining up for miles on end in food lines, and hundreds of thousands stand at risk of eviction, the rich are even richer than before. Nine out of the 10 richest US billionaires are wealthier now than they were a year ago, collectively receiving \$200 billion over the course of the past year.

Mounting working class opposition

The ruling class is terrified of the enormous opposition that exists to the reopening of schools.

There have already been brave efforts made by students and teachers across the country to oppose this campaign, including by students in Georgia who leaked videos and photos of unsafe conditions; a school-wide sick-out by students and faculty at Iowa State University; and countless demonstrations and petitions by teachers in Florida, Arizona, Oklahoma, Detroit, New York and many more.

Teachers, staff and students have taken the critical step in forming a network of nationally coordinated Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees, independent of the corporate controlled unions and both big business parties, to organize their struggle.

The IYSSE urges students to join these committees where they have already formed, and to help set one up in your area or at your school if there is not one already. These committees are fighting to unite all workers—educators, school bus drivers, janitors, maintenance workers, and other support staff, with students, youth and workers from all other industries—to carry out a nationwide general strike to prevent the reopening of schools and to save lives.

In the face of growing opposition, the ruling class will try everything in its power to divide workers along racial, gender, ethnic, and generational lines in order to force students back to school and workers back to work. This includes blaming students and youth for the outbreaks on campuses and pitting students and teachers against each other.

Students and youth must refuse to be used as pawns in the campaign of the ruling class! We urge students to take a stand on the side of teachers and the working class in this fight.

The fight for socialism

Only through the direct intervention of the working class, in the US and internationally, can this disaster be curtailed and lives and livelihoods be saved. The drive to reopen schools is only the latest among the most grotesque expressions of the bankruptcy of the socio-economic system that has produced the catastrophe: capitalism.

Schools and campuses have been turned into a battleground in which the lives of students, teachers, and parents are at stake. In this battle, the interests of the two main classes in society, the working class and the capitalist class, stand most nakedly exposed. The working class stands for life, science and progress, while the ruling class stands for death, lies and profits.

Nothing can be resolved without a frontal assault on the wealth hoarded by the ruling class and the fight for socialism. The trillions that have been handed over to Wall Street and the financial oligarchy must be redirected to provide full unemployment benefits to all workers and universal access to health care and public education.

The IYSSE insists that this fight must be completely independent of the Democrats and the Republicans, along with the corporate-controlled trade unions. It must reject all efforts to divide the working class, whether through the fascistic politics of Trump or the racist identity politics of the Democrats. It must fight for the international unity of workers in every country, who have the same social interests and the same class enemies.

Students and young people should proceed in this struggle with immense confidence. Over the past several years, workers and youth have proven their strength and willingness to fight in countless protests and demonstrations in defense of immigrants, democratic rights, and against capitalism. There is enormous opposition in all sections of the working class to the homicidal policy of the ruling elites.

There is no doubt that workers and youth want to fight. What is needed, above all, is a political program, perspective, and leadership. We urge all youth and students committed to this fight to get off the sidelines and make the decision to join the IYSSE, the student and youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party, and take up the fight for life, progress, and socialism!

We urge youth who want to get involved to contact us today and sign up for our newsletter to get the latest updates. Help us share this statement widely among young people.



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