

New York City Democratic mayor delays school opening a second time

Our reporters**18 September 2020**

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced on Thursday morning that he would delay the resumption of face-to-face instruction for hundreds of thousands of students from September 21 to September 29. Only students in schools that accommodate children from kindergarten to the 8th grade would open then, and middle schools and high schools would open on October 1.

The decision came after the self-described “progressive” Democratic mayor met with United Federation of Teachers President Michael Mulgrew and representatives from the school principals’ union. The mayor noted in a press conference that “Yesterday morning they raised real concerns about specific things that have to be done. We worked together in a respectful spirit to work through each and every issue.”

The “real concerns” were unquestionably not about the health and safety of teachers and students, but about the intense opposition to school reopening on September 21 by educators, school bus drivers and other support staff and parents.

Teachers, parents and others have organized demonstrations and other protests independently of the UFT all week long over dirty buildings, poor ventilation systems, and faulty testing and contact tracing. Over 60 educators who reported to buildings on September 8 for in-service work before students return have tested positive for COVID-19. Educators were outraged that they were not informed that they had worked with infected colleagues for days.

Social media has been filled with anger at both de Blasio and the UFT since September 1, when the organization cut a deal with de Blasio to open the schools for in-person learning on September 21 rather than on the original date of September 10. Under pressure from the ranks, the UFT leadership voted to

authorize a strike hoping to contain the anger of teachers, but quickly dropped any talk of a strike, and agreed to the opening.

This second delay is a tactical retreat by the city’s Democratic officials who are concerned that the UFT will not be able to contain the resistance of teachers and other school employees to the deadly reopening of the nation’s largest school district, which will imperil not only educators but the district’s 1.1 million students, their families and the city as a whole. Trump’s rush to reopen the schools, which is backed by Democrats like de Blasio and the governors of New York, California, Michigan and other states, is entirely driven by the profit interests of Wall Street and other corporations.

Mass opposition to schools reopening threatens to ignite a broad social struggle against capitalism. New York is suffering from the greatest rate of unemployment since the 1930s, with nearly a million New Yorkers out of work and food insecurity and homelessness at the highest levels ever.

Last week, the New York Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee was formed to unite and coordinate opposition to the deadly reopening of schools and to link up with educators and other sections of the working class.

The committee issued the following statement in response to the temporary delay:

The New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee rejects the new plan proposed by Mayor Bill de Blasio announced on September 17 and developed with the connivance of the United Federation of Teachers, to introduce a new, phased reopening of New York City schools.

The new plan only delays the return to school and the massing of hundreds of thousands of people in close quarters during a deadly pandemic without adequate protection.

The decision is an acknowledgment that the Department of Education is completely unprepared to open its school buildings in a manner that could prevent the mass infection of teachers and students.

All the promises of de Blasio and his chancellor of schools, Richard Carranza, have been exposed as calculated lies.

- Rapid and effective contact-tracing has been non-existent, and educators have been informed of the illness of colleagues they were in personal contact with only after a delay of days

- Dozens of photographs have been distributed on social media of the same filthy conditions in these buildings that have existed for years because of a shortage of supplies and custodial staff

- De Blasio and Carranza have done almost nothing to repair or replace the inadequate ventilation system in hundreds of school buildings. Air filters have only been issued in grossly inadequate amounts

All these conditions were exposed by educators and parents themselves. The opposition to school reopening was expressed by dozens of protests by teachers and parents outside of schools. Social media was filled with the opposition by educators not only to de Blasio, but also to the role of the United Federation of Teachers in lending critical assistance to de Blasio in opening the schools.

Confronted with the threat of widespread actions in opposition to school reopening, the UFT and the Democrats in City Hall were forced to backtrack.

Educators, parents, and students themselves must decide when it is safe to open the schools, not the Department of Education. This can only be done by committees of educators, school workers, parents and students that have broken from the trade unions and Democratic party and will not compromise with those running the schools.

We demand:

- The immediate closure of all public, private and charter schools and university campuses in New York City!

- Full funding for public education, frequent mass testing and effective contact tracing, replacement of school ventilation systems, free high-speed internet access and computer equipment for online instruction!

- Full income protection to all parents and caregivers who stay home with their children!

All educators and parents around the US who would like to take up a fight against the unsafe reopening of schools should attend the national online meeting on Saturday.



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