

New York governor closes some schools and businesses while COVID-19 infections spike

Alberto Escalera
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New York's Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo announced a new tiered system of restrictions on Tuesday in response to the rapid development of coronavirus hotspots throughout the state. The plan establishes a system of color-coded zones (red, orange and yellow) with varying degrees of restrictions on schools and nonessential businesses.

Within so-called red zones, schools and nonessential businesses would be shuttered for a minimum of two weeks, restaurants would be limited to take-out, and religious gatherings in excess of 10 people would be banned. Areas designated as orange and yellow zones would be subject to more limited restrictions.

New York City neighborhoods in south Brooklyn, central Queens and Far Rockaway, which had previously been designated hotspots by Mayor Bill de Blasio, as well as Rockland and Orange counties and the town of Binghamton, all located within two hours northwest of the city, will be impacted by the plan set to go into effect Friday. The emergence of coronavirus spikes within the state is by no means limited to these areas.

The plan announced by Cuomo is a political move intended to cast a negative light on his antagonist New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, who is also a Democrat. On Sunday, de Blasio called for the temporary closure of about 300 schools, as well as nonessential businesses within nine zip codes in the areas of Brooklyn and Queens. The positivity rate in all these areas has risen to double the three percent citywide threshold previously set by de Blasio to trigger a shutdown of all city schools. An additional 11 zip codes in New York City were placed on a "watch list" due to sharp spikes in positivity rates.

Both the Cuomo and de Blasio plans have received the blessings of the United Federation of Teachers

(UFT), which was instrumental in opening the schools in September. On Sunday, the UFT President Michael Mulgrew praised the governor, saying, "This is the right decision, one that helps protect our schools, our neighborhoods, and ultimately our city."

The recent case of a student at P373K, a school for children with autism and developmental disabilities in Brooklyn where many students cannot wear face coverings, underscores the unsafe conditions for hundreds of thousands of students and educators. A student attended classes for two days before being identified as positive, and staff at the school were only informed after directly calling the parent to inquire into absences. At least 13 students and staff remain quarantined.

Cuomo and de Blasio have long engaged in political squabbling. When asked during his Tuesday press conference about any substantive differences between his plan and the proposal previously announced by the mayor, Cuomo attempted to highlight the futility of attempting to isolate outbreaks by zip code given the common practice of youth and workers to commute across large areas of the city, as well as surrounding towns.

It has not been lost on New Yorkers that the governor's plan starts from the same fraudulent premise that it is possible to isolate clusters of a highly infectious disease by imposing targeted restrictions on certain communities, while at the same time carrying out the deadly ruling class's campaign to force workers and youth back to work and school.

The state's limited closure of schools and nonessential businesses was entirely predictable. Since the reopening of K-12 schools and colleges, thousands of educators and students throughout the state have become infected. Last Friday, state officials

acknowledged that at least 1,200 K-12 students and teachers were known to have contracted the virus since the start of the academic year in late August. To date, 150 educators and at least 38 students in New York City have contracted the virus since schools opened in September.

Referring to the limited school closures, one English as a New Language [ENL] teacher in Queens told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “It’s a little late. I’m working in one of the zip codes where we could possibly close, and we’re just waiting to hear. Right now, to protect life we can’t expose people until we have a vaccine or another means of stopping the virus. I just think that de Blasio is not about protecting life.

“There are instances all over social media where schools did not notify families [of a positive COVID test] or the students ended up notifying the teachers, and then the teacher brought it up to administration almost a week later. So now how much exposure do you have?

“In the classroom it’s almost impossible to stay six feet away from the students because we’re teaching the way we’ve always taught. It’s not safe at all. Some kids have a really hard time keeping the masks over their noses. Sometimes their parents are giving them an adult size mask. You can’t physically put your body in between them to stop them from playing together. It’s pretty crazy! So it’s only a matter of time before [the virus] spreads.”

With the start of in-person classes in New York City, opposition to school reopenings among rank-and-file teachers, students and parents remains high. Anger over the lack of PPE and other teaching resources, the sabotaging of remote learning, as well as the chaos generated by the district administrators’ staggering levels of incompetence continues unabated. Students and parents continue to “vote with their feet” as the number of students opting into fully remote learning continues to rise. Nearly 50 percent of the students, or 500,000, have elected to learn remotely and stay out of school buildings.

The teacher from Queens continued, “I’m one of the few ENL teachers in my school. We really need two full-time people and some part-timers to actually provide the services we’re supposed to. Right now, my boss just wants me to teach all the kids coming into the building.

“I explained to her that if I can do it remotely, I can service more kids. But she said no, so now I’m only giving the mandated minutes to about a third of the kids in the building. Basically, a lot of kids are not getting their mandated services because of the whole blended learning program.”

Brigitte, a teacher from the Bronx, added, “The teachers are saying I told you so. We told [de Blasio] from the beginning in August. He told us to go back at this time, then that time, and then he tried to do this on a rolling basis—and look what happened. He failed. The city is a gigantic hot zone again where teachers and parents and students are part of some experiment. I agree with the New York City Rank-and-File Safety Committee statement. It’s simple. It stated that the virus doesn’t know zip codes and addresses.”

She continued, “Now Donald Trump announced that there’s not going to be a second stimulus. I worry about my parents providing for their kids. I don’t care what anybody says. That little extra \$300 helped, but it ran out in six weeks. You cannot tell me that there’s a city official who didn’t get his full paycheck right now.”

The Socialist Equality Party urges all teachers and workers to join the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee to unite educators, parents and students, independently of the unions and both big business parties, to fight for a general strike to stop the ruling class’s murderous policies.



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