

As COVID-19 surges, the *New York Times* demands that schools remain open

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The COVID-19 pandemic is raging out of control in the United States. Every day sets a new record for the number of people hospitalized: 20,000 more COVID-19 patients currently occupy American hospitals than during the worst part of the initial outbreak in March.

New York, the epicenter of the first wave of the pandemic, has seen its daily number of newly confirmed cases increase from a low of under 500 in August to over 5,000 Friday, a tenfold increase. New York City proper has fared little better. New cases have quadrupled, increasing from less than 250 in August to a daily average of more than 1,000.

But as America's hospitals fill to capacity, and refrigerated trucks are brought in to house the bodies as morgues run out of space, the *New York Times* has had one central preoccupation this week: Keeping New York City's schools from closing to protect teachers, students, and their families.

All the pipes of the *Times*' "mighty Wurlitzer" have been humming in unison. The newspaper has cranked out editorials, op-eds and news reports claiming that schools are safe and there is no benefit to closing them.

In pursuit of this campaign, the *New York Times* has fully embraced the Trump administration's false claims that schools do not contribute to the spread of COVID-19. When the Trump administration put pressure earlier this year on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to claim that schools were safe, the *Times* rightly condemned this action, publishing an investigation in September showing that "Top White House officials pressured the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention this summer to play down the risk of sending children back to school."

Those guidelines, universally condemned by public health experts, declared that "COVID-19 poses low

risks to school-aged children, at least in areas with low community transmission, and suggests that children are unlikely to be major drivers of the spread of the virus."

The *Times* is now echoing the very lies that it had earlier condemned Trump for advocating. In a "news" article, the *Times* declares:

A mounting body of evidence from across the globe indicates that elementary schools in particular are not the superspreader sites they were once feared to be, though the science is more muddled for older children.

These claims are groundless. Numerous studies have shown the value of closing schools as a part of a comprehensive strategy to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in July found that "between March 9, 2020, and May 7, 2020, school closure was associated with a significant decline in both incidence of COVID-19 ... and mortality."

The *Times* is even more blunt in its editorial page. "Keep Schools Open, New York," proclaimed the *Times* editorial dated November 11, declaring, "Ending in-person instruction right now would be a mistake, given the evidence of how little the virus has spread there so far and the devastating consequences that would follow for academic progress as well as for working parents like subway operators and nurses."

Whenever the various departments of the *New York Times* act in concert to deliver a uniform set of talking points, the reader is guaranteed something nefarious is afoot. Whether the effort to sell the Iraq war to the American population on the basis of false accusations

about “weapons of mass destruction,” or its campaign to justify internet censorship with the claim that ‘foreign meddling’ is the source of America’s problems, the *New York Times* has been the conduit for one disastrous lie after another.

There is no greater master of this style than Nicholas Kristof, who has published the *Times*’ most explicit demand to date that schools be kept open, in an op-ed entitled “When Trump Was Right and Many Democrats Wrong.”

“In both Europe and the United States,” Kristof writes, “schools have not been linked to substantial transmission, and teachers and family members have not been shown to be at extra risk (this is more clear of elementary schools than of high schools). Meanwhile, the evidence has mounted of the human cost of school closures.”

Kristof’s professed concern about the “human cost of school closures” would have been more convincing had he once, during his long career, opposed the nationwide education budget cuts, implemented under every president since Ronald Reagan, that have permanently shuttered hundreds of schools and slashed hundreds of thousands of public education jobs.

None of the *Times*’ sudden concern over the schools has anything to do with the wellbeing of children. The *Times*—the voice of the Democratic Party establishment and a conduit for America’s national security apparatus—has only one goal in mind: keeping schools open as holding pens for children so parents will continue to go to work in factories and other workplaces, generating profits for American corporations, even as COVID-19 infections and deaths surge to new heights.

If workers or their children die as a result of this policy, their lives are seen as expendable, as are the lives of Afghans and Iraqis blown to bits by American bombs.

In March, The *New York Times* became one of the first advocates of “herd immunity” in the mainstream press, with a column by Thomas Friedman arguing for the unconstrained spread of the pandemic, declaring, “the cure can’t be worse than the disease.”

Within days, US President Donald Trump adopted this slogan to argue for the premature reopening of schools and factories.

Now, with Democratic president-elect Joe Biden

making it clear that there will be no national lockdown, Trump’s homicidal herd immunity policy is being openly embraced by the entire political establishment.

If the ruling class is allowed to have its way, the result will be a level of death far exceeding that of March. With the development of highly effective vaccines imminent, it is all the more critical that everything possible be done to contain the pandemic.

Workers must demand the urgent nationwide closure of schools and all nonessential workplaces, with the provision of high-speed internet and laptops to ensure high-quality remote education for all children. This must be coupled with the allocation of emergency funds to ensure that temporarily furloughed workers are provided the resources they need to remain home and help educate their children remotely until the pandemic is contained.



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