

New York City schools to reopen amid explosion of coronavirus cases, hospitalizations, deaths

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New York City's Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio's plan to reopen the city's schools next week, which was announced Sunday, is a direct threat to the lives of the students, parents and teachers involved. Moreover, it is a warning to the working class in the United States and internationally that even as numerous coronavirus vaccines are nearing completion, workers and youth will continue to be sent into workplaces and schools to needlessly get sick and die.

De Blasio's plan was summarized on his Twitter account, where he noted that all 3-K, Pre-K and K-5 students will resume in-person learning beginning Dec. 7, followed by all grade levels for students with disabilities on Dec. 10.

The order came amid an explosion of daily coronavirus cases and hospitalizations in the city, which have both more than doubled in the past month, along with a 50 percent increase in daily deaths during that same period. They demonstrate that there is no medical basis for the school reopenings.

Indeed, a key part of de Blasio's new plan is the abandonment of the earlier three percent coronavirus positivity threshold that was crossed in the city on Nov. 11, which triggered the school closures earlier this month. Instead, in the wake of the city's positivity rate rising to 3.6 percent, the students will be given "weekly COVID-19 testing," with little concrete information provided as to what will occur when outbreaks in various buildings inevitably occur.

The school reopening is being aided and abetted by Anthony Fauci, the nation's leading infectious disease expert and a member of the White House Coronavirus Task Force, who commented Sunday on ABC's "This Week" that, "the default position should be as best as possible, within reason, to keep the children in school and get them back to school." Fauci, regarded as one of the most trustworthy public health officials by various opinion polls, justified his comments by claiming that reopening schools is

safe because the spread of COVID-19 among children is "low."

The good doctor certainly knows better. A recent report from the American Academy of Pediatrics found 1.04 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 among children as of Nov. 12. Moreover, the study found that the majority of these cases occurred in the wake of the initial school reopenings in August and the refusal of school administrators and local governments to switch to remote learning when cases in their communities began to rise.

Such empirical data did not stop de Blasio from also calling for all schools in the city to, "wherever possible ... move to 5 day a week in-person learning," meaning the effective end of hybrid learning and the possibility of teachers and students physically distancing while in the classroom. De Blasio continued, "We want our kids in the classroom for as much time as possible," and then magnanimously claimed, "Our families do, too." This last comment was met with derision and outrage on social media, exemplified by one teacher commenting, "This is absolutely insane."

There is no doubt an element of insanity in de Blasio's plan. The inevitable result will be death on a mass scale in New York City, as, teachers, students and their family members begin dying just in time for Christmas.

More importantly, however, is the deeper class logic at play. From the perspective of the ruling elite, which the mayor of New York City, the home of Wall Street, is among the foremost representatives, schools must fully reopen in order to act as holding pens for children in order to get their parents back to work. Only then can the process of extracting surplus-value from the working class recommence in full, further enriching the American oligarchy.

Such policies are laying the groundwork for school reopenings nationwide. If schools are deemed "safe" in New York City, the former world epicenter for the pandemic, even as cases and deaths are rising, it will supposedly be

“safe” to fully reopen schools in other cities where the coronavirus is raging, such as Chicago, Detroit and Los Angeles.

As in New York City, there is no basis anywhere for school or workplace reopenings. The 7-day average of daily new confirmed cases remains above 165,000, even with the dip in reporting caused by the Thanksgiving holiday, up from 82,000 at the end of October. Deaths have similarly spiked from 850 to just under 1,500 a day in just four weeks. Hospitalizations from COVID-19 are at an all-time high of 93,238.

The decision to reopen New York City schools is all the more irrational knowing that one or more vaccines will be ready to distribute either in December or early next year. The *New York Times* counts six vaccines that are approved for limited use and 13, including those by Pfizer and Moderna, that are undergoing or finishing up large scale efficacy tests. This makes all the more necessary the most far-reaching measures to contain the spread of the virus and save lives until a vaccine is widely available.

Instead, reopenings in New York and nationwide are being pushed even harder. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) estimates that, if mandates continue to ease as they are nationwide, there will be more than 3,000 deaths caused by COVID-19 every day by Dec. 21. This amounts to nearly 89,000 needless deaths by the New Year and up to 400,000 more deaths by March 1, for a staggering total of 650,000 deaths from the pandemic in the United States alone.

Such projections do not account for what will happen if hospitals are no longer able to care for all their patients, a distinct possibility. The crowded waiting rooms full of dying, panicked people reminiscent of hospitals in Wuhan, China, when the coronavirus first emerged in January will become the daily reality for all of America a year later.

Workers, parents, students and youth must take action to save their own lives. As the *World Socialist Web Site* and the New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee warned on Nov. 19, “the closure of schools is a temporary maneuver, and the unions and Democratic Party will work together to ensure that schools reopen as soon as they deem it politically viable.” That prognosis was borne out in only ten days.

The statement also made clear that one of the key elements of the inevitable reopening would be the marshaling of the news media, the political establishment and the trade unions to force teachers back into schools. Wasting no time, the United Federation of Teachers retweeted de Blasio’s reopening plan and wrote in support of it that, “The mayor’s reopening plan will enable our most vulnerable students to receive in-person instruction as early as Dec. 7,” further

claiming that the reopening will only be “in parts of the city where transmission rates remain low.”

No support can be given to such statements, especially coming from the organization which played such a filthy role downplaying the threat of the virus in May. An emergency fight must instead be waged to keep schools closed and to shut down all nonessential business, in New York City, nationally and internationally, to save lives while a vaccine is being completed, with full compensation for all lost wages to workers and small businesses.

More than 273,000 Americans have already needlessly lost their lives as a result of the homicidal “herd immunity” policy being pushed by Democrats and Republicans alike. A further 400,000 must not be allowed to perish after being forced back on the job, wondering whether or not they would have been able to receive the vaccine if they had been able to hold on a little longer.

Where production is essential, it must be overseen by workers’ rank-and-file safety committees working closely with medical professionals to ensure safe working conditions and the provision of full protective gear, with no concern for profit.

Such measures must be combined with a massive investment in public health care infrastructure, including the broadest possible program of testing and contact tracing to contain and isolate the virus. A global vaccine production and distribution network must be established in order to efficiently and freely provide the vaccine to all, with no regard for corporate interests or the rivalries of nations.

Above all else, capitalism must be abolished. It has proven utterly incapable of dealing with the threat of infectious diseases, and mass death will continue as long as this outmoded social system exists. The working class must take power into its own hands, guided by a revolutionary socialist program.



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