

The conspiracy to reopen schools

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On Sunday, Democratic Party Mayor Bill de Blasio announced that New York City would abandon its school safety guidelines and reopen schools even though COVID-19 is surging out of control throughout the city.

In moving to reopen schools, de Blasio simply ignored the city's rule that schools would be closed when the test positivity rate exceeded three percent. The rule was initially put in place in an effort to contain mass opposition among teachers to the unsafe reopening of the school district. Not only is the rate above three percent, it has risen to nearly four percent.

The mayor's decision, backed by the unions, is driven not by considerations of science or public health, but by the demands of Wall Street. The ruling class wants schools open to house children under unsafe conditions so that their parents can go back to work, also under unsafe conditions. The reopening of schools in New York City, the country's largest school district, sets the pattern for the entire country and is intended to enforce the ruling class policy of "herd immunity."

De Blasio justified his actions with a single sentence: "We know first of all studies consistently show that younger kids are having less of a negative experience, and there's less concern about the spread when it comes to younger kids."

This is a bald faced lie. All reputable scientific surveys contradict his claim that there is now "less concern" about the spread of COVID-19 in schools. A study published just two weeks ago in *Nature*, which is among the world's foremost scientific journals, found that closing schools is one of the most effective ways to contain COVID-19.

The study, "Ranking the effectiveness of worldwide COVID-19 government interventions," was published by researchers at the Medical University of Vienna, Austria. As more data comes in, it has become clearer that school closures do prevent the spread of COVID-19. It notes that "school closures in the United States have been found to reduce COVID-19 incidence and mortality by about 60 percent. This result is also in line with a contact-tracing study from South Korea, which identified adolescents aged 10–19 years as more likely to spread the virus than adults and children in household settings."

Nature article cited a study in July published by the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, "Association Between Statewide School Closure and COVID-19 Incidence and Mortality in the US," which found that "school closure was associated with a significant decline in both incidence of COVID-19... and mortality."

In other words, closing schools saves lives. Moreover, the study, by researchers centered at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, found that "states that closed schools earlier, when cumulative incidence of COVID-19 was low, had the largest relative reduction in incidence and mortality."

The results from the South Korean contact-tracing study referenced by *Nature* were published in October in the journal *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, which is overseen by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

There was another study published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* on October 25, "COVID-19, children and schools: overlooked and at risk," by Zoë Hyde, an epidemiologist at the University of Western Australia. She found, "Children may be more susceptible than originally thought and could play a role in community transmission." Hyde insisted, "Schools must not remain open for face-to-face teaching in the setting of substantial community transmission."

This is in line with the recommendations of both the World Health Organization and CDC against reopening schools if there is a wide and growing spread of COVID-19 in the broader population, as is currently the case in New York City.

De Blasio's announcement follows a weeks-long campaign in the US media, led by the *New York Times*, to falsely claim that opening schools is safe, allegedly based on "new" scientific studies.

On October 22, the *Times* published an article, "Schoolchildren Seem Unlikely to Fuel Coronavirus Surges, Scientists Say," which declared that "schools do not seem to be stoking community transmission of the coronavirus." The *Times* article did not cite a single study published in a peer-review journal to support the conclusion argued in its headline, relying on isolated quotes from individuals and

non-peer-reviewed sources.

Moreover, anyone who actually reads the article would conclude that its headline was simply tacked on by an editor, since it contradicts much of what the author actually says. The article notes that “trends for older children... suggest a greater chance for infections to spread.” Describing the situation in Sweden, it states, “Teachers in schools with older children had double the rate of infections compared with those who taught remotely.”

The *Times* followed up its distorted news coverage with an editorial on November 11 demanding: “Keep Schools Open, New York.”

The campaign by the *Times* is contradicted by previous articles published by the *Times* itself. On May 5, Apoorva Mandavilli, the author of the article cited above, wrote in “New Studies Add to Evidence that Children May Transmit the Coronavirus” that “experts said the new data suggest that cases could soar in many US communities if schools reopen soon.”

In late September, the *Times* reported the existence of a plot by “top White House officials” to pressure “the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention this summer to play down the risk of sending children back to school.”

As a result of the administration’s unprecedented effort to subject the CDC to political pressure, the CDC published a statement on July 23 titled, “The Importance of Reopening America’s Schools this Fall,” which declared, “Scientific studies suggest that COVID-19 transmission among children in schools may be low.”

The CDC’s statement was universally condemned by doctors and scientists as a craven capitulation by one of America’s leading scientific agencies to political pressure from the White House. In a backhanded admission that the document was a pseudo-scientific travesty, the CDC removed the statement from its website on October 28, and it has never appeared on any government website since.

The link to the removed document now redirects readers to an updated CDC guidance, which correctly states that the “comparatively low risk for hospitalization and death among children themselves must be contextualized to the risk posed to teachers, school administrators, and other staff in the school environment.” The statement adds, “The risk of teachers, school administrators, and other staff in the school is expected to mirror that of other adults in the community if they contract COVID-19.”

The campaign to reopen schools is now being spearheaded by the Democratic Party. There is no doubt that among those calling on de Blasio to insist on a reversal of the decision to close New York City schools was President-elect Joe Biden.

The incoming Biden administration is opposed to any coordinated measures to stop the spread of the virus, and it

has repeatedly rejected a nationwide lockdown and closure of non-essential production as the disease rages out of control. Whatever their tactical differences, the Democrats and Republicans are both committed to the ruling class policy of “herd immunity,” of which the opening of schools is a central component.

With the widespread roll out of vaccines just months away, the sacrifice of a single life unnecessarily is unconscionable! Teachers, parents and the working class as a whole must oppose the effort to sacrifice their lives so that the financial oligarchy can make even more money.

The working class must intervene to enforce emergency measures to stop the spread of the virus. Hundreds of thousands of lives are at stake!

The Socialist Equality Party is spearheading the fight to build rank-and-file safety committees, independent of the unions and both big business parties, in every school and workplace. These committees must establish, and are establishing, connections with every other section of the working class to organize a common fight against the ruling class response to the pandemic.

Schools must remain closed and non-essential production shut down. The trillions of dollars handed out to Wall Street and the corporations must be seized to provide full income to all workers affected and fund programs necessary to ensure that all students receive the highest-quality online education.

The fight against the pandemic is, ever more clearly, a political struggle of the working class against the Trump administration, the Democratic Party and the entire ruling class. It is a fight to reorganize economic and social life on the basis of social need and not private profit. It is the fight for socialism.



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