

Mobilize the working class to halt school reopenings in New York City!

The New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
3 December 2020

The decision by New York City's Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio to resume in-person classes for Pre-K and K-5 students on December 7 is a flagrant attack on the safety and lives of educators, parents, students and all city residents, which will only accelerate the spread of the deadly COVID-19 virus.

Coronavirus infections, hospitalizations and deaths continue to rise across the city and its surrounding areas, but the corporate and financial powers and their political servants are indifferent to the mass suffering and death that their policies have created.

Educators have suffered enormous stress, and, in many cases, are exhibiting symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder after being forced into infected buildings or compelled to teach enormous remote classes for which their students have inadequate equipment and connectivity. Health care workers are being overwhelmed, and nurses at two New York state hospitals were forced to strike this week to demand more staffing and protective equipment.

The New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee calls for the broadest mobilization of educators, parents, students and the entire working class to halt the drive to reopen schools, provide all resources needed for high quality remote learning, and close all nonessential production while protecting the incomes of all affected workers.

With vaccines nearing the approval and distribution stages, all efforts must be made to protect the population and put an end to any further needless illnesses and deaths in New York, across the US and internationally.

When de Blasio rapidly switched to remote learning on November 19, only our committee warned that he would reverse course as quickly as possible. We wrote: "The New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee warns that 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."

The shuttering of school buildings was followed by a media frenzy denouncing the decision while propagating the unscientific claims that in-person classes are safe and school-aged children do not play a significant role in the spread of the virus. The *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and other corporate news outlets, along with such public figures as Dr.

Anthony Fauci, have pushed this lie as part of a concerted effort to confuse and disorient the population.

A mass of scientific evidence from New York City and internationally clearly refutes all such fraudulent claims.

As infections increased in New York City during November, the three age groups with the highest test positivity rates were children ages 0-4 (4.7 percent), 13-17 year olds (4.3 percent), and 5-12 year olds (3.3 percent). The positivity rate among children under 18, which exceeded that of all other age groups, has clearly played a major factor in the overall rise within the city this fall, as tens of thousands of students were sent back into dilapidated school buildings.

At the time of the suspension of in-person classes, 126 New York City public school buildings, many of which house more than one school, had been forced to close due to multiple COVID-19 cases. According to the most current Department of Education data, 3,000 public school students and staff have been infected with COVID-19 since the beginning of the school year, an undeniable refutation of the claim that schools are safe havens from the virus.

Beyond New York City, a growing body of epidemiological studies demonstrates that the suspension of face-to-face schooling contributes significantly to a reduction in the spread of COVID-19 and that school-aged children can in fact transmit the virus. Related research has shown that it is impossible to safely open schools to in-person learning without the suppression of community spread.

Despite their repeated claims to the contrary, Mayor de Blasio and Governor Cuomo repudiate science, which demonstrates a correlation between in-person schooling and rising infection rates. Their herding of teachers and students back into the schools, a precondition for herding parents back to unsafe workplaces, is part of a deliberate class policy to advance the interests of Wall Street and the financial oligarchy.

The United Federation of Teachers (UFT) has played a criminal role in facilitating these policies, abandoning all previous demands related to the safety of teachers and students while echoing the fallacy that in-person schooling is safe. On Sunday, the UFT retweeted de Blasio's reopening plan and expressed their support, writing, "The mayor's reopening plan will enable our most vulnerable students to receive in-person

instruction as early as Dec. 7.” They further claimed that the reopening will only be “in parts of the city where transmission rates remain low.”

In providing political cover for de Blasio and the Democrats, the UFT is reprising their filthy role in downplaying the threat of the virus in March, which led to an untold number of unnecessary deaths and infections and contributed to New York City becoming the epicenter of the pandemic in April and May.

De Blasio’s plan to stagger the resumption of in-person instruction by grade bands and impose full-time attendance on previously “blended” pupils is designed to undermine opposition to the unsafe reopening of schools. A forced return of K-5 teachers weakens the class unity of all teachers while the restoration of full-time, in-person instruction under conditions in which the overwhelming majority of families remain “remote” would only exacerbate class-size issues for the 25 percent of teachers currently with accommodations to work from home, pressuring them to return to buildings.

To prevent the deadly reopening of schools, everything now depends upon the building of an interconnected network of rank-and-file safety committees in every school and neighborhood across the city, completely independent of the UFT and the Democrats who are conspiring to reopen schools.

Every effort must be made to unite with nurses and health care workers, transit workers, logistics workers, and all those being forced to risk their lives and face unsafe conditions. A specific appeal should be made to nurses and frontline nurses in New York City hospitals, and the Albany Medical Center and Montefiore New Rochelle hospitals where nurses walked out this week.

The New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee will do everything in our power to help organize and coordinate the independent initiative of educators, parents and students toward the aim of halting school reopenings. We categorically reject the subordination of science to the interests of the capitalist class, and in particular, the promotion of the irrational, pseudoscientific policy of developing “herd immunity” without a vaccine, which is supported by both Democrats and Republicans.

To ensure the public health and safety of educators, parents and students and the highest quality education through remote learning, we advance the following demands:

1. For a complete halt to all plans to reopen the schools! Until the population is sufficiently vaccinated, no school buildings or nonessential workplaces should be open during the pandemic.

2. The immediate provision of all resources necessary for the successful implementation of remote learning! The most advanced computers, related equipment, and high-speed internet access must be given to all teachers, school support staff, students and their families.

3. For a comprehensive plan to rapidly upgrade all public school infrastructure! Every school must have safe

educational facilities, including the most modern heating and ventilation systems, and be equipped with adequate resources necessary to provide a rich, holistic learning experience for all children.

4. All workers must be provided with a comprehensive benefits package! Parents must be able to safely remain at home to care for and help educate their children for the duration of the pandemic, and all nonessential workers must be able to stay at home with economic security. Educators who require accommodations for preexisting conditions must be fully funded. These benefits must be funded through progressive taxation on the financial oligarchs of Wall Street.

5. For an extended and expanded moratorium on evictions and foreclosures! No worker should face the threat of eviction, especially during a raging pandemic.

6. For a vast expansion of health care funding and resources! Resources must be provided to increase medical staff, particularly nurses, at area hospitals to adequate levels. All health care and essential workers must be guaranteed the provision of the highest quality PPE.

7. For a freeze on college tuition and abolition of student loan debt! Free housing and meals within dormitories must also be guaranteed to all international students and others in need who wish to remain as residents of their post-secondary institutions during the period of remote instruction.

8. Full protection for undocumented workers and their children! This must include income support and free medical attention, as well as an immediate end to their persecution by federal agencies, such as the Immigration and Customs Enforcement gestapo.

We urge all education workers who agree with these demands and are committed to building a genuine opposition to the homicidal policy of unsafe school reopenings to join our committee today and fight to build rank-and-file committees at your workplace and neighborhood!



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