

New York City educators, parents and students must organize a strike to close all schools!

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

The New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee is fighting to unite educators with parents, students and the broader working class to prepare strike action to close all schools and nonessential workplaces. We urge all those who want to join this struggle to send us your contact information today.

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to return the New York metropolitan area to the worst days of the spring, when hospitals overflowed and thousands lost their lives. The disease is once again positioned to take the lives of thousands of working people in the coming weeks and months. Hundreds of thousands more will be impacted by the deaths of loved ones and extended recoveries for those who survive.

On December 16, New York City had a seven-day average test positivity rate of 5.71 percent. New York state had a daily positivity rate of 6.21, and Connecticut's rate stood at 7.41 percent. On Saturday, the most recent day available, New Jersey had a statewide positivity rate of 13.08 percent. Each of these rates indicates high levels of community transmission throughout the tristate area.

Both New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio have stated in recent days that it may be necessary for a full shutdown in light of the rising test positivity rates. On Tuesday, de Blasio suggested that a lockdown may not include schools, telling the media, "Right now, we're seeing extraordinary success in keeping our schools safe. I want to keep them open."

Despite the surge in cases, de Blasio has announced that 250 of the 875 schools that reopened on December 7 are now giving in-person instruction five days a week and that more will open in the coming days and weeks to full-time in-person learning. This is an intolerable attack on the health and safety of educators, students, their families, and the community at large. Increased classroom instruction will only lead to a faster spread of COVID-19 throughout the city and metro region.

Educators should reject with contempt the stated plans of de Blasio and Cuomo. The two Democratic Party politicians are only calculating what will be most useful to Wall Street and aim to forestall a social explosion by millions of working

people, who have been impacted by the mass death over the last nine months, who have been thrust into poverty overnight, or who are now witnessing the community spread of the virus by the opening of schools.

The continued opposition to the spread of COVID-19 means that the ruling elite will do everything it can to silence those who are fighting to close the schools. The violent raid on the home of Florida data scientist Rebekah Jones on December 7 and the seizure of her computer should serve as a sharp warning to educators that the truth about schools being vectors for the spread of the virus will be suppressed.

Jones was earlier fired by Florida's Republican Governor Ron DeSantis for refusing to lie about COVID-19 infections when she worked for the state's Department of Health. She now publishes *The COVID Monitor*, the most comprehensive database for tracking COVID-19 in K-12 schools across the US, which documents that at least 368,782 students and staff in K-12 schools have now been infected throughout the country.

The unsafe opening of schools in September and the reopening after a brief shutdown of the schools on December 7 were done against the will of the vast majority of educators, parents, and students.

Both campaigns to open schools were only successful because every faction of the Democratic Party supported them, while *The New York Times* deliberately downplayed the dangers posed. The most critical role was played by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT)—which gave its fulsome support for the reopening of schools—and all of its organized caucuses and factions that did nothing to genuinely oppose this campaign.

No educators or workers should have any sense of security because a vaccine is now in the early stages of distribution. Barring an intervention by educators and the working class to close schools and shut down nonessential production, in the coming weeks and months infections will rise and countless people will die or suffer permanent debilities because of COVID-19 infections.

To defend their lives and stop the spread of the disease, educators must assess the role of the UFT and the Democrats,

including their backers in the Democratic Socialists of America, who have made no calls to close the schools since September.

On Monday, the “loyal opposition” in the UFT, the Movement of Rank-and-File Educators (MORE), whose leadership is aligned with the DSA, explicitly ruled out a strike to shut the schools, falsely claiming that it takes months and years to organize a strike. In the manner typical of the pseudoleft, it blamed the teachers themselves for its own inaction and identified itself with the UFT.

Educators must reject this abject capitulation to the powers-that-be. Schools and nonessential businesses must be closed at all costs! Educators must take the lead in planning strike action to shut down the school buildings and supply parents with an adequate income to stay at home with their children until the population is vaccinated.

The New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee calls on teachers, parents, paraprofessionals, school bus drivers and all school workers, whether they teach virtually or in-person, at public or private schools, to set up committees of action to fight for their interests. Secondary school students must join these committees and play an active role in their functioning. College students, graduate student instructors and adjunct and full-time faculty must also join and plan mass actions.

We raise and will fight for the following demands for immediate industrial action:

- We demand an end to all in-person learning across K-12 public schools and for the suspension of all in-person instruction for public, private and charter schools and colleges in New York City and the Metropolitan area.

- We demand that all decisions on reopening schools be determined democratically by rank-and-file committees of educators, school workers, parents and students in each school, in collaboration with trusted scientists and health experts, and in coordination with representatives from Educator Rank-and-File Safety Committees across the city.

- We demand teachers and students be guaranteed the technology necessary to participate in their studies for the duration of the pandemic, including high-quality computer hardware and software and all other accessories. High-speed internet access must be provided to all families free of charge, by using the untapped resources of the telecommunications corporations.

- Halt all nonessential production! Until the pandemic is contained, only key industries such as food production, medical care and logistics should remain open. Workers in those

industries must be provided with the most advanced safety measures to prevent infection. All nonessential workers and laid-off workers must be provided with full unemployment benefits and access to free health care.

- We demand full employment security and wages for all workers in New York state and the metropolitan area and a reinstatement of the increased federal and state unemployment benefits and the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance that came from the CARES Act. The threat of layoffs, reduced hours and pay, and forced retirement issued by the mayor and cynically repeated by the UFT and Transport Workers Union, the union of MTA workers, underscores the reactionary character of the Democratic Party and its backers in the trade unions. We reject any form of austerity in the home of Wall Street and the center of world capitalism. The vast wealth of the financial oligarchy must be heavily taxed to pay for the health and safety of all workers and the education of the younger generation!

- We demand the immediate freezing of college tuition and abolition of student loan debt, as well as free housing and meals for all international students and others in need who wish to remain as residents on campuses during remote learning.

- We demand the immediate retrofitting of all classrooms and school buildings to ensure they have modern, high quality ventilation systems and air purifiers. The high rates of asthma and autism in the poorest parts of the city have been linked to terrible quality of air in poorly built buildings, with asbestos and lead residue being the most common. Such conditions in school buildings should not be tolerated.

To form a rank-and-file safety committee at your school or neighborhood to take up this struggle, we urge you to contact us today.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact