

California educators, healthcare and logistics workers: Unite to stop COVID-19 and save lives now!

Northern California Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
29 December 2020

This is the founding statement of the Northern California Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee. Join our committee today at wsws.org/edsafety.

The bipartisan “herd immunity” policy of the US government has created an unmitigated disaster and California has become the new epicenter of the pandemic. Every day, tens of thousands of Californians are infected with COVID-19, leading to more preventable deaths. Since November 19, the state has reached new records for daily infections almost every day. The Southern half of the state has entirely run out of intensive care unit (ICU) beds. Under these conditions, Democrats in the state legislature are proposing “emergency legislation” in Assembly Bill 10, not to contain the disease but rather to force schools to conduct in-person instruction.

Urgent and far-reaching action is required! The Northern California Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee calls on all educators and school staff, as well as logistics workers, healthcare workers, Tesla autoworkers, and workers in all industries, to unite in a common struggle to save lives by stopping the spread of COVID-19.

We demand that all schools and all non-essential workplaces be closed immediately until the pandemic has been eradicated and workplaces and schools have been deemed safe by scientists, workers and educators. Resources must be made available to detect, contain and treat COVID-19 in the most effective manner possible, and to provide high-quality online education to all students and a substantial guaranteed income to everyone who has to stay home. Shutting down both schools and workplaces is critical to stopping the spread of COVID-19 throughout communities at large, because individuals traveling between households, schools and workplaces form an interconnected network of transmission. Epidemiologists have written extensively on this question in major peer-reviewed science and medicine journals like *Nature* and the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

It is a fact that every country around the world that has closed businesses and schools has had a fall in COVID-19 cases and deaths, and every country that has eased restrictions has had an increase. A comprehensive study published in *Science* this month found that closing schools and universities has been among the most effective policies worldwide to contain the pandemic.

Despite the wealth of scientific data demonstrating the necessity of closing schools, Democratic politicians across California have insisted that schools should reopen before the pandemic is contained. As San Francisco was rapidly running out of ICU beds, Democratic Mayor London Breed recently declared, “It is infuriating that our schools are not going to reopen for in-person learning in January.”

Democrats in the state legislature have pushed AB 10 as emergency legislation to require districts across the state to offer in-person instruction

while there is still “substantial spread” in their respective counties. For his part, Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom has responded to the pandemic with toothless measures that leave large workplaces open, a common source of new outbreaks, while leaving workers and small businesses struggling without assistance.

During the initial lockdown measures in May, billionaire Tesla CEO Elon Musk illegally restarted production at his Fremont plant, leading to entirely preventable outbreaks and paving the way for a broader reopening of non-essential businesses. Musk fired several workers who refused to return to the unsafe factory, while state and county Democrats allowed the blatant violation to take place with no repercussions, later declaring the plant “essential production.”

Musk has become the foremost pandemic profiteer, seeing his personal wealth grow from \$24.6 billion in March to over \$147 billion today. The \$120 billion Musk has accrued just since March is far more than the state’s entire proposed K-12 education budget for 2021, which sits at just \$99.7 billion.

While Newsom insists that school openings are a local issue, the state does not even publish enough data to make informed decisions. California, with 6 million school-age children, is one of 11 states that does not compile any information about outbreaks in classrooms at the school, district or state level.

In completely failing to mitigate and contain the pandemic, California’s politicians at the city, county and state level are simply following the lead of the fascistic Trump, president-elect Biden and news outlets like the *New York Times*, which have all insisted that expanding corporate profits is more important than containing the pandemic. Trump rapidly took up the *Times*’ demand that “the cure can’t be worse than the disease.” For Biden’s part, he has washed his hands of the problem, insisting that at least 100,000 more deaths are “baked in” and there’s nothing to be done to save them. Instead of emergency measures to halt the spread and increase hospital capacity, Biden proposes reopening all schools in the first 100 days of his presidency.

No less than their Republican counterparts, Democratic politicians across the country have embraced in-person instruction, with New York City, Chicago and Washington DC, joining the states of Washington and Oregon in resuming face-to-face education at the height of the pandemic.

These politicians have been aided and abetted by the teachers unions, which have opposed statewide or nationwide struggles to force school closures. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) have endorsed the fiction that schools can be reopened safely during the pandemic. Earlier this month, the presidents of several so-called “radical” union locals responsible for betraying major teachers’ strikes since 2018—including the Chicago Teachers Union, United Teachers Los Angeles and the Oakland Education

Association—penned a groveling letter to Biden calling on him to appoint an Education Secretary committed to pro-capitalist identity politics and a “safe reopening” of schools.

Last week, Biden announced he will nominate the pro-charter school Miguel Cardona as his new Secretary of Education. As Connecticut’s commissioner of education, Cardona fought to reopen schools this fall, leading to Connecticut having one of the highest per capita death rates in the country. Cardona is a long-time advocate of “school choice,” the slogan under which massive amounts of funds were transferred from public schools to privately-run charter schools, including unprecedented budget cuts under the 2008-2016 Obama-Biden administration.

Throughout California, there exists massive opposition among educators and school staff, as well as among parents and all sections of workers, to the homicidal policies implemented by the Republicans and Democrats. To unify this opposition, we are building fighting organizations that *we* control, and which are *completely independent* from the parties and organizations controlled by the capitalists who are profiting from our exploitation.

The Northern California Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee is joining rank-and-file committees in Los Angeles and San Diego in spearheading the fight to close all schools, stop the spread of COVID-19 and save lives throughout the state and region. We call on educators, students, parents and all workers across California to join us now and take up the following demands:

? **Fully fund high-quality online public education, including free high speed Internet access for all!** The state of virtual learning is a disgrace. High quality public education for all is a social right! Computer hardware, software, Internet access and adequate training and support must be provided to all teachers, students and parents for free. Class sizes must be reduced to no more than 15 for all grades. Tens of thousands of educators, staff and tech workers across California must be hired to make this a reality.

? **Full income protection for parents who choose to stay home!** Educators are not oblivious to the needs of parents, as the corporate-controlled politicians are. Full income must be provided to those who cannot work because they choose to stay home with their children. Unemployment benefits and additional forms of assistance must be increased to protect families, and a permanent moratorium put in place to stop all evictions and home foreclosures.

? **Permanently cancel teacher evaluations! Stop scapegoating educators for the social crisis!** Public education has been turned upside down by the pandemic, yet teacher evaluations go on as before. Virtual teachers are observed and penalized if students aren’t “highly engaged.” Absurdly, some teachers are still required to host “gallery walks” in empty classrooms. But the pandemic has only highlighted the long-established role of teacher “evaluations” as a means to blame educators for a social crisis over which they have no control.

? **Publish all existing information about the spread of COVID-19 in schools and workplaces in the most comprehensive and accessible form possible!** It is evident that behind the scenes, states are carefully tracking COVID-19 outbreaks everywhere. But the information, when it is published at all, is presented in fragments, as part of a conscious attempt to conceal and downplay the danger. In reality, COVID-19 outbreaks are *never* limited to one school, one household or one workplace. The opposite is true: *all* outbreaks are connected in *one continuous process* of transmission. To protect ourselves and our families, we require a complete and precise picture of the spread of COVID-19 in and across all locations, easily accessible to everyone.

? **Defend whistleblowers and all those who speak out against or refuse to work in unsafe conditions!** There is massive opposition everywhere, but many fear speaking up. They know they will be targeted for abuse and they know the unions will do nothing to defend them. All

educators, students, or workers who reveal, speak out against or refuse to work under unsafe conditions—whether in schools, factories, warehouses, hospitals or offices—must be defended against any victimization by employers or state officials. All workers who have been victimized must be rehired with back pay. We condemn the persecution of COVID-19 whistleblower Rebekah Jones, who has been hounded by Florida’s Republican Governor Ron DeSantis for her role exposing infections tied to K-12 schools.

? **Anchor benchmarks for reopening to levels of community transmission, not vaccination.** Vaccination is just one tool among many to control the spread of COVID-19. This pandemic could have been stopped in its tracks in March using the public health measures we’re calling for now. Since federal, state and local governments refused to implement these measures, the vaccine appears to be the most likely tool to achieve the level of disease eradication necessary to make school campuses safe again. Only after this vaccine and other public health and economic relief measures have halted the spread of COVID-19 can reopening begin. This requires the vaccination of all members of school communities, not just educators. School staff are safer when our communities are vaccinated, and our communities are safer when school staff are vaccinated.

In issuing these demands we make no attempt to reason with or play upon the consciences of the Democrats or Republicans, whether in Washington or Sacramento, nor the school boards, nor the existing trade unions. Instead, we appeal to our true allies in the fight to save lives and not profit: the American and international working class!

To shut down *all* vectors of transmission, and to make available the vast emergency resources necessary to treat the sick and provide for the needs of everyone until the disease is eradicated, requires the unification of educators as well as workers in key industries across California, the US, and internationally.

That is why the Northern California Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee is founded as the Bay Area-based section of a nationwide Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee network, which is growing and already includes committees in New York City (the country’s largest school district), Los Angeles (second largest), as well as San Diego, Michigan, Texas, Tennessee and Pennsylvania. Autoworkers at several plants in Michigan and across the Midwest have also formed new rank-and-file committees in the last year, and they are working with us. Internationally, we are connected to networks of committees of teachers and workers in the UK, Germany and Australia via the *World Socialist Web Site*.

We call on all educators and support staff, including bus drivers, teachers’ aides, secretaries, paraprofessionals, janitors, cooks, nurses, school psychologists, social workers and workers from all industries, to join our network and build rank-and-file safety committees in your school or workplace. Fill out the “Join” form at wsws.org/edsafety.

Don’t wait! The pandemic can in fact be stopped through rational and scientific action on the part of the working class. The fact that several COVID-19 vaccines are under development makes it all the more critical that every measure is taken to immediately contain the virus and save as many lives as possible until such a vaccine becomes widely available.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact