

“Every death is a catastrophe. We should be angry about this.”

Curator of *Earth Felt the Wound*, site tracking US educators’ deaths, speaks to the WSWs

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Earth Felt the Wound is a new website built to honor the teachers, administrators, cooks, secretaries, bus drivers and other K-12 personnel who have died from COVID-19 after being forced into unsafe work environments.

“Every death is a catastrophe,” Sudo emphasized to the *World Socialist Web Site*. He is the curator of Earth Felt the Wound and a former librarian, researcher, and data analyst. “I took the phrase from *Paradise Lost*. I wanted to convey that we all feel this. These educators went to college to teach children, not to sign up to die.”

There is no comparable resource anywhere in the US. Early on in the campaign to reopen schools, Trump’s Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos stated the government has “no role” in compiling the names of educators losing their lives to the homicidal return to classrooms. Likewise, neither the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the National Education Association (NEA), nor any other education union has sought to highlight this terrible toll among educators. All of the unions are partnering with states and districts to keep schools open while covering up the spread of the virus.

Kansas educator Alisha Morris developed a COVID-19 schools tracker but handed it over to the NEA in August. The union promptly buried it on their website and failed to keep it updated. *Education Week*, a media journal, has compiled a list. However, there is no accompanying information, only some black-and-white photos.

That it should fall to an individual to undertake this task is an indictment of the Department of Education, state and federal governments, the media, and the unions. Democrats and Republicans alike have concurred with Wall Street’s insistence that schools reopen and sought to cover up the terrible social cost of innumerable workplace-linked deaths.

Sudo’s work is, therefore, all the more impressive. It is a testament to the growing social anger across the US and world, as capitalism openly treats workers as dispensable. Sudo expressed his horror that educators were being sacrificed for “the economy” and that their lives were lost without recognition. Asking to use this pseudonym, Sudo said he does not want any attention for himself, but for the lives of educators needlessly snuffed out. His interview is edited for length.

WSWS: How did you go about this and why?

Sudo: “Someone needed to catalog these deaths and maintain a site. I have worked on the site since October, but just launched it. I wanted it to reflect the lives of our lost educators, and that’s why I designed it the way I did, with their faces front and center. I didn’t want a ticker; they are not just a statistic. But I am now up to well over 100, and I am just trying to highlight those cases where deaths occurred after the

school year had begun.

“I wanted their faces up front. Educators are supposed to be treasured. They are leaving behind lots of children and colleagues who will live with this trauma for the rest of their lives. That’s why I chose the title, *Earth Felt the Wound*; we all feel it. I’ve been in a dark place reading these obituaries, but I wanted to find photos which show these people living their lives with their families, friends, whoever.

“When searching for deceased educators, I perform Google searches using various parameters. I try to target especially the states that haven’t reported any or a lot of educator deaths, like Utah and Nevada, in case I missed something. Every day I spend several hours, looking multiple times a day for new names. The news is fragmentary; it’s tough to search comprehensively and I try to get corroboration. I go from one news article to another and follow all the prominent media in the states. I’ll hear rumors, but have to be patient, keeping a spreadsheet until I get confirmation. Others have died, and I’m waiting to see if an obituary comes out. Sometimes, the districts don’t want to put it out there; they may just note that someone died, and a name gets mentioned later.

“Obviously, my site is an undercount, and I don’t know by what order of magnitude. Not everyone who dies of COVID is put on the internet. The government should be keeping these records. These are educators dying, and our Department of Education should be honoring them instead of pushing out the misinformation that kids don’t spread the virus.

“I agree with the WSWs that this is homicidal. My friends and family also feel this is important.”

WSWS: What have you learned or been surprised by?

Sudo: “The callousness, the disregard. All summer, I followed the negotiations over the opening of schools. We were reassured, ‘Don’t worry, schools won’t open unsafely,’ then they all did. It was a creeping feeling of horror—they’re really going to throw these people out there? The hardest part to confront has been this callous disregard, of privileging economics over life.

“We have an oligarchy, and they want people to get to work. They sacrifice the workers. It keeps the engine running. The WSWs is right on point. In New England, we have liberal governors, but Democrats all want the economy open. I see nothing being done to protect the vulnerable. It’s true, as one of your writers said, the Democratic Party is where socialist dreams go to die; we saw that with Bernie Sanders. Whichever party you put in there, it’s not going to be good for the economy or the people in it with this insistence to open schools and nonessential businesses.

“It’s criminal to have a country be so negligent to allow this virus to run rampant. Now everyone everywhere suffers because of the US policy. We have seen high-profile mutations already, and it’s possible that one eventually resists our vaccines. What happens to the people living in the underdeveloped world already the hardest hit?

WSWS: Why, in your view, does the pandemic continue out of control?

Sudo: “These deaths are basically homicides. Why? Stock indexes have never been higher. When we look at the sacrifice on the population level, we know statistically many will die. They have calculated that some people have to die, so kids get back to school so workers can get back to work.

“My site has an angry political component because this virus is politicized. Before I launched, I asked my wife what she thought about the site; and she said, ‘You sound angry.’ I said, ‘Good, we should be angry about this.’ I am angry about it.

“What matters most to our leaders—I think it’s been made pretty clear—is keeping the machine turned on. That means we need somewhere to house children so their parents can get to work, regardless of safety. You can’t have adults staying home because their kids aren’t in school. What profit does that generate?

“So, we opened up schools based on flimsy research and motivated reasoning. Even well-meaning public health experts, I think, believed the all-too-convenient fiction that children didn’t transmit SARS-CoV-2, as if this virus were dramatically different from other such respiratory viruses.

“So, I think you’re saying what needs to be said, that we need a culture, society, and world that values human life over dividends, and that’s worth fighting for.”

WSWS: You have a section in your introduction called Healthcare Inequality. You contrast the treatment given to educators with that provided to Trump, Giuliani, Chris Christie and others. Tell me what you learned.

Sudo: “Many people died because they were not afforded timely and responsive healthcare services. COVID-19 is a lethal disease, and anyone experiencing serious symptoms like shortness of breath should be hospitalized. Unfortunately, that is not the case. We have built a system in which people cannot be guaranteed to receive emergency and supportive care—unless they are establishment-level powerful.

“One COVID-infected educator I’ve been tracking (and who fortunately is doing better), 30-year-old Jacob Furse of Georgia, was hospitalized with shortness of breath, very high fever, low oxygen saturation, pneumonia—in short, all the things that make him at risk of dropping dead, necessitating hospitalization and ongoing monitoring. But the doctors sent him home because they had no beds for him, only to have him return a few days later in even worse condition. A system that cannot treat its patients according to best practices has already collapsed.

“It’s bad. You read about dozens of people dying at home even though they got to the hospital because they were sent home. One educator died in the ambulance going there.” Clarkster Toure, a deceased school bus driver from Texas, had to visit the hospital three times before its staff admitted her, the site notes.

“Our health care system isn’t built to accommodate over 100,000 patients with COVID, and some patients requiring months to recover. No, the healthcare system is meant to generate profit—to get people in and out as soon as possible. You wind up in a situation completely unprepared for something of this magnitude. But it’s a year later, and we are still unprepared. What was done over the spring and summer?

“These teacher deaths have created a window into what is going with our general health care system. No one should die from a virus like this in the developed world. How tragic it is to have the vaccine, but only a certain number of people can get the doses? Where is it?”

WSWS: Have you followed the attack on Florida data scientist Rebekah Jones?

Sudo: “The case of Rebekah Jones is beyond the pale. She exposed the manipulation of data, the fabrication in Florida. It was a heroic act to stand up to that system. You can call her a whistleblower, but it’s really truth-telling. In retribution, Governor DeSantis fired her. Then they sent officers into her home with firearms. And it’s not just DeSantis, but the way [the *New York Times*] discussed her, that she had an affair, etc. It’s irrelevant. In the end, she was a data scientist, and she exposed that her state was manipulating COVID data.

“We need more people like Rebekah Jones. She just didn’t get fired and go into obscurity; she set up her own website. She tried to follow it more responsibly than the state of Florida. Unfortunately, it has come down to individuals like Jones to do this kind of work.”

WSWS: What is your feeling about creating Rank-and-File Safety Committees to unify teachers with the entire working class to demand the shutdown of all nonessential workplaces, including schools?

Sudo: “Rank-and-file safety committees are a great idea. Early on in the pandemic, everybody had the rhetoric that we will be safe, but then they realized how much work and money that would be.

“Closer to the end of summer, nothing substantive was happening, just spacing desks three-five feet apart, not even the six feet. This virus is airborne; students and teachers need good ventilation. Instead of getting the air system retrofitted, they cracked a window or two. It was disheartening. So, it would be great for teachers to pull off rank-and-file safety committees or refuse to work.”

Educators can peruse *Earth Felt the Wound* here. We urge readers to send their statement of support to Rebekah Jones here, and join the fight for Rank-and-File Safety Committees.



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