

Oppose the unsafe reopening of colleges and universities!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (US)
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As the COVID-19 virus rages across the US, killing thousands of people a day, hundreds of K-12 schools, colleges and universities are beginning to resume in-person classes. This will bring thousands of students and educators together in school buildings and on campuses in the upcoming spring semester.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in the US, the youth and student section of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), is resolutely opposed to the reopening of schools. The reopening of schools is a criminal act that will only stand to add thousands of names to the horrific toll of death from the pandemic.

The experience of the fall semester has produced incontrovertible evidence that in-person learning led to an increase in community spread, hospitalizations and deaths. In particular, towns and cities with colleges that reopened for in-person learning, or which, for one reason or another, allowed large numbers of students to return to their dorms, quickly became some of the worst hot spots in the country.

Data compiled by the *New York Times* recorded almost 400,000 known coronavirus cases linked to American universities and campuses from March to December last year.

Among 101 counties with large universities or colleges (university counties), which accommodate 29.4 percent of the US population, only 22 percent implemented fully remote learning for the fall. These counties experienced a 17.9 percent decline in mean COVID-19 incidence during the 21 days before through 21 days after the start of classes, a change from 17.9 to 14.7 cases per 100,000. In that same period, university counties with in-person instruction saw a 52.6 percent increase in incidence, from 15.3 to 23.9 cases per 100,000. Counties without large colleges or universities saw COVID-19 cases decline 5.9 percent.

Now, as the pandemic is killing over 3,000 people a day, the highest death rate since it started over a year ago, schools are moving forward with the same reckless plans.

In the Washington D.C. area, American University plans on doubling its number of in-person courses. George Washington University will allow 1,600 students to reside on campus in the spring, compared to 500 in the fall. Georgetown University will double the number of students living on campus to 1,000 while keeping all classes virtual.

Texas A&M University at College Station held primarily in-person classes in the fall and will continue to do so in the spring. More than 2,700 cases have been recorded at the campus, or 4 percent of the student population of 67,679. Despite having a five-tier program for campus operations during the pandemic, university administrators are only carrying out the second-lowest tier, titled "Initial Operations."

The State University of New York (SUNY) system, which includes

29 state universities and 30 community colleges, is operating under a policy "that will allow campuses to safely return to in-person instruction for the spring semester." Students returning to campus will be required to submit documentation showing that they have completed a seven-day quarantine or had a negative COVID-19 test before returning to campus. Additionally, in-person courses will begin on February 1 after being fully remote for a short period.

The University of California at San Diego (UCSD) welcomed approximately 1,000 new undergraduate students to live on campus for its winter quarter. UCSD will implement mostly online courses and states that less than 10 percent of undergraduate classes will be held in person in outdoor classrooms. Students, however, will live together in dormitories.

In addition, some institutions in areas with more stringent guidelines have emphatically pushed for the approval to reopen their campuses. Among these are the University of Southern California, Harvey Mudd College and Pomona College—all in Los Angeles County, where ambulance crews have been told to not take patients with little chance of survival to overflowing hospitals.

The political forces and social interests behind the back-to-school campaign

Behind these reckless decisions is a broader campaign, spearheaded by the Trump administration but now continued under Biden and supported by both parties, to reopen the economy and prevent any loss in corporate profits. There is no doubt that in the fall universities were also driven by profit concerns (having in mind tuition, college sports, dormitory real estate contracts, etc.), prioritizing their bottom line over the health and safety of students and the broader community.

After securing a multi-trillion-dollar handout for the rich through the CARES Act in March 2020, the ruling class implemented a policy of "herd immunity" that allowed the coronavirus to circulate without restraint.

Sending workers back to work required sending their children back to school. The schools were opened. When major outbreaks inevitably occurred, they were often covered up, downplayed and obscured. Whistleblowers were silenced, or worse, persecuted, as in the case of Rebekah Jones.

In college towns, school officials tried to shift blame onto students. Contrary to claims of university officials, the rise in COVID-19 cases linked to campuses is not explained by a relatively small number of

young people ignoring social distancing measures.

The conditions in K-12 schools, let alone in college dorms, are completely incompatible with social distancing. Furthermore, older college-age students often work in industries that increase their chances of contracting the virus. In fact, more than 1.1 million undergraduates work in health-related occupations, according to census data. Nearly two-thirds of restaurant workers are 34 or younger, and the same age group accounts for nearly half of grocery store workers.

The interests of the wealthy are undoubtedly represented in the university administrations across the US. There is no shortage of university regents and trustees with close ties to corporations and the political establishment, Republicans and Democrats alike. Those in the governing bodies of America's universities are acutely aware of the financial consequences that proper safety measures would have on their millionaire and billionaire friends.

Both factions of the ruling class are committed to exposing millions of Americans to the deadly virus for the sake of profit. Despite its pretensions, the incoming Biden administration refuses to implement measures that will minimize death until a vaccine is widely distributed. Biden has pledged to keep schools and workplaces open and warned of a "dark winter." That is to say that workers will continue to die by the thousands every day as the spectacular rise of Wall Street continues.

In terms of the pandemic, the incoming Biden administration's position and policies are largely the same as his Republican counterparts. Biden's plan consists of a limited mask mandate and promises of more rapid vaccine distribution. His advisers have already acknowledged that it will still be months before most people can get a vaccine, however, even if they meet their goals. They have ruled out shutting down nonessential production to get the spread of the virus under control and have declared that all K-8 schools will be reopened within three months.

At the same time, Biden has called for "unity" with the Republican Party in the aftermath of the failed fascist coup attempt on January 6, incited and abetted by leading Republicans. The central demand of the organizations mobilized by the Trump administration is an end to all restraints on the spread of the virus. While Democrats and Republicans differ on tactical questions, mostly over issues of foreign policy, they agree on one basic issue: no restrictions can be put in place that will curb the drive for profit.

The murderous policies of the ruling class are incompatible with democratic forms of rule. Already the giant social media companies, working at the behest of the ruling class, are engaged in an escalating campaign of internet censorship targeting the socialist left.

The latest act of censorship was Facebook's deletion of the official page of the IYSSE at the University of Michigan, along with the pages of leading members of the IYSSE and SEP, for four days without explanation. This comes on the heels of a week-long disablement of the IYSSE US Twitter account.

Such acts of censorship are a desperate response to the growth of popular opposition to inequality, social misery and the ruling class's disastrous response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has put profits above the protection of human lives.

To fight against these homicidal policies, workers must organize themselves as an independent social and political force. This fight is already underway. Facilitated by the *World Socialist Web Site*, workers have begun forming rank-and-file safety committees, independent of the corporate controlled trade unions like the American Federation of Teachers.

Capitalism stands exposed as a historically bankrupt social and economic system. The trillions hoarded during the pandemic by the billionaires must be seized in order to compensate workers and provide full funding for education; childcare for families in need; full income provided to all workers; and free, high quality medical care, including mental health care for all students and workers.

Schools and campuses have been turned into a battleground in which the lives of students, teachers and parents are at stake. In this battle, the interests of the two main classes in society, the working class and the capitalist class, stand most nakedly exposed. The working class stands for life, science and progress, while the ruling class stands for death, lies and profits.

Nothing can be resolved without a frontal assault on the wealth hoarded by the ruling class and the fight for socialism. The trillions that have been handed over to Wall Street and the financial oligarchy must be redirected to provide full unemployment benefits to all workers and universal access to health care and public education.

The IYSSE insists that this fight must be completely independent of the Democrats and the Republicans, along with the corporate-controlled trade unions. It must reject all efforts to divide the working class, whether through the fascist politics of Trump or the racist identity politics of the Democrats. It must fight for the international unity of workers in every country, who have the same social interests and the same class enemies.

Students and young people should proceed in this struggle with immense confidence. Over the past several years, workers and youth have proven their strength and willingness to fight in countless protests and demonstrations in defense of immigrants, democratic rights and against capitalism. There is enormous opposition in all sections of the working class to the homicidal policy of the ruling elites.

There is no doubt that workers and youth want to fight. What is needed, above all, is a political program, perspective and leadership. We urge all youth and students committed to this fight to get off the sidelines and make the decision to join the IYSSE, the student and youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party, and take up the fight for life, progress and socialism!

We urge youth who want to get involved to contact us today and sign up for our newsletter to get the latest updates. Help us share this statement widely among young people.



To contact the WWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)

The fight against the pandemic is the fight for socialism