

# Chicago educators to remain teaching remotely on Wednesday

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27 January 2021

*To close schools and fully fund remote learning, Chicago educators have formed the Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee. This committee is independent of the CTU and Democratic Party and aims to unite educators, parents, students and the broader working class to prepare strike action to close all schools and nonessential workplaces and guarantee full income. We call on all Chicago educators, parents and students to join our committee at [wsws.org/edsafety](https://wsws.org/edsafety).*

Chicago educators will remain teaching remotely starting Wednesday, as Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot backed off from threats to retaliate against teachers for refusing to report to school buildings this week. While Lightfoot's tactical retreat is due to the overwhelming hostility to the city's plan to aggressively push forward to reopen schools and other businesses in the midst of a still raging pandemic, her administration is only buying time while it works with the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) to get an agreement for the return of teachers and tens of thousands of students to schools on February 1.

As prospects for a Wednesday deal dwindled, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) officials announced to parents of Pre-K and special education cluster program students that they should not bring their children to school on Wednesday. These 3,200 students, as well as some 3,800 educators, have been in schools since January 11.

While clearly on the back foot, the city administration has remained intransigent about reopening schools next Monday. At a Tuesday evening press conference, Lightfoot told reporters CPS would "not expect them to violate the directive of their union." She also waved off questions about what the city might do if teachers continue to refuse to report to school buildings, saying,

"I don't want to speculate."

At the press conference and in a letter to parents, Lightfoot detailed new plans from what the district describes as a new "comprehensive plan" to address teacher concerns.

The new plan is barely an improvement over the current reopening protocols, which have already produced over 64 positive cases of COVID-19, even with the small numbers of students and staff in attendance. In response to charges of inadequate testing of staff, as well as lack of concern over community spread, CPS is now offering to test school-based workers twice a month instead of just once and is now offering free monthly tests just to students in the 10 zip codes where COVID-19 positivity rates are highest.

The district is also now claiming it will prioritize vaccinations for educators working in Chicago neighborhoods with the highest positivity rates, an almost meaningless promise given the low supplies of the vaccine. Even though vaccination of teachers—while returning students can still infect one another and their families—will do little to prevent the spread of the virus in working class communities, Chicago has been receiving only 34,000 doses of vaccine per week and has roughly 660,000 "essential" workers in the same vaccination priority group as teachers. Indeed, the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) canceled a number of vaccine appointments made by teachers due to confusion over the ramshackle and ad hoc signup system.

Also, CPS claims that it is expanding accommodations for educators who have health conditions or who are the primary caregiver to those with health conditions that could be seriously threatened. Significantly, the expanded accommodations would not apply to those who merely

live with someone who could be seriously affected, including spouses or other family members. Additionally, these expanded accommodations would be subordinated to any school staffing requirements, rendering this offer almost meaningless.

Retreating from its absurd use of case doubling rate as a public health metric for deciding when to close schools, CPS now says it will close individual schools if it can establish the transmission of infections across three separate “pods” and are not able to rule it out as an isolated incident; in other words, never. Its claims that it will revert to remote learning for the whole district if its own surveillance testing indicates the school district positivity rate is three percent or higher, but officials know they will never allow this to occur.

CPS also claims that it has “aligned” with the CTU on a system of school- and district-based Health and Safety Committees “charged with ensuring safety and mitigation measures are implemented appropriately and consistently.” Clearly an attempt by the district and the union to pull attention away from the recent formation of the Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, these labor-management schemes will be designed to ensure that complaints about safety go no further than that.

Even as it confronts growing teachers militancy and desire to fight the unscientific and murderous demands to return to in-person learning, the CTU is attempting to satisfy the demands of Lightfoot and the Democratic Party to reopen schools. Desperately seeking to avoid a strike out a fear that it could escape its control and escalate into a direct confrontation not only with Lightfoot but the new Biden administration, the CTU on Tuesday called for mediators to be brought in to broker a deal.

In a website post, CTU leaders laid out their paltry demands for “a health metric based on CDC guidance, a phased reopening, access to vaccinations for educators, and enforceable safety standards in school buildings, which have struggled to meet even basic needs for PPE, adequate ventilation and clean facilities.”

In other words, the union is prepared to not only jeopardize the health of its members by getting them back into schools before receiving the two doses of vaccine currently required for full effectiveness, the CTU is also willing to sacrifice sections of the working

class who have not been vaccinated, by bringing their children into schools where there is still community spread. As CPS CEO Janice Jackson has already admitted, “We can’t guarantee a COVID-free environment.”

The only way to prevent more unnecessary deaths is for teachers to take the conduct of this struggle out of the hands of the CTU, which is aligned with the Democrats and Biden’s back-to-school policy. The Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee is fighting to mobilize teachers, support staff and the broadest sections of the working class across the region to prepare a general strike to stop in-person learning, halt nonessential businesses and guarantee full income protection to workers and small businesses until vaccines are widely distributed and the pandemic is fully contained. Remote learning must be implemented at a high level by providing every student and educator with state-of-the-art technology.

All those who wish to join this struggle should sign up today at [wsws.org/edsafety](https://wsws.org/edsafety).



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