

Nevada's Clark County School District presses ahead with deadly school reopenings

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Clark County School District (CCSD)—the fifth largest in the US, which serves over 325,000 students in the Las Vegas metro region—is scheduled to resume in-person learning in the coming weeks. Teachers and support staff are slated to return on February 22 and Pre-K through 3rd grade students are set to return on March 1. The plan includes mandatory COVID-19 screenings for all employees but does not include any requirements or provisions for students to be tested at all, much less on a regular basis.

CCSD made the decision to begin reopening schools at a meeting in mid-December, after the district and the Clark County Education Association (CCEA) reached a tentative agreement on the staggered reopening of schools. The union is directly facilitating school reopenings, following the line of the Biden administration which has pledged to reopen the majority of school by the end of April, as well as his backers in the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA).

According to the *Las Vegas Review Journal* (RJ), CCEA Executive Director John Vellardita, said, “We think the agreement we have reached with the school district makes sense, because it’s an incremental approach to reopen the schools. The decision on when to open up is ... going to be made on the part of the school district. But being ready with a plan is absolutely critical.”

As is the case in Chicago, Washington D.C., Philadelphia and every other major school district, there is enormous opposition among rank-and-file educators to this homicidal policy. Expressing this opposition, CCSD substitute teacher Brandon Summers recently noted in a blog post, “I am employed (yay!) but I am expendable. I work as a vacancy sub who makes just enough to keep a roof over my head, put gas

in the car, and buy groceries.”

Summers added, “Teachers and students will get sick when schools reopen, and some teachers will probably die. The decision makers will be insulated in their offices and schools will have to manage the collateral damage.”

To prevent school reopenings, Clark County educators must immediately organize an independent rank-and-file committee to serve as the voice of opposition and unite with a network of such committees in Chicago, New York City, Los Angeles, Texas, Michigan, Pennsylvania and other states. This network of committees is preparing for a nationwide general strike to close schools and nonessential workplace until the pandemic is contained, while providing economic relief to all workers affected by these lockdowns.

In pursuing the reopening of Clark County schools, Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Jesus F. Jara has utilized the corporate media to weaponize the devastating mental health crisis afflicting young people in the region, which has resulted in 18 youth suicides.

Jara was prominently interviewed by the *New York Times*, CNN, NBC and other outlets, falsely claiming that remote learning has caused a drastic surge in suicides among young people. The *Times* article that features Jara carries the deceptive title, “Surge of Student Suicides Pushes Las Vegas Schools to Reopen.” The article omits the fact that there were more youth suicides in Clark County in 2018 than in 2020.

Reopening schools will deepen the levels of community transmission, and the number of deaths stemming from this policy will dwarf the number of suicides among school-aged children. Furthermore, these suicides are largely attributable not to remote

learning in-and-of-itself, but instead by the complete callousness of the ruling elite to the social conditions faced by students in the midst of the pandemic. The article's author, Erica Green, admits, "Adolescent suicide during the pandemic cannot conclusively be linked to school closures."

The cynicism and hypocrisy of Jara is underscored by the fact that CCSD has continuously cut its budget for years, reducing staffing levels among counselors and therapists and cutting other mental health supports.

Many comments written in response to Green's article, which were overwhelmingly negative, pointed to this hypocrisy. One stated, "I am sorry for all those who are enduring emotional suffering, but with all due respect... we have always had the highest suicide rate in the nation... long before covid. How many more will endure possible lifelong impeding health issues or die due to covid... because we try to reopen buildings too soon with a plan that has most of our district staff expressing much concern."

Jara has declared that science should decide when schools would reopen, but this claim—echoed by the corporate media—is a complete fraud. Numerous scientific studies have proven that schools are a major vector for the spread of COVID-19 and that their closure saves lives.

Since Dr. Jara initially proposed reopening schools, COVID-19 was declared the leading cause of death in Nevada for the month of December. There have been 279,256 confirmed cases, and as of Monday the number of deaths stood at 4,283. In January, 1,132 people died from COVID-19 in Nevada, more than a quarter the total number of people who have died from the virus in the state since the pandemic started.

There have been more than 100 deaths from the virus every week since the middle of November, while the months of December and January were the deadliest months. The test positivity rate currently stands at 17.4 percent, while the seven-day average of new cases is 1,057, with 9,172 infections per 100,000 people in the state at present.

The *RJ* article cited above also notes, "Hundreds of Nevada college students and staff have tested positive for COVID-19 since the state's outbreak began."

The dire COVID-19 statistics for the state of Nevada released since the agreement between CCSD and the CCEA make clear that schools must not resume in-

person learning.

That the CCEA went along with the proposal to resume in-person schooling is symptomatic of the indifference of the union bureaucracy to the lives of its members. That they have not called for the jettisoning of the agreement in light of recent statistics is criminal. Moreover, the CCEA has said nothing in support of Chicago teachers who are engaged in a life and death struggle to keep schools closed and save lives.

Teachers, parents, students, and all workers need to remain safe until the pandemic has been fully contained. Under current conditions, that means no return to in-person schooling, the closure of all nonessential businesses, while making small business owners and those who are unemployed financially whole.

Clark County educators must take matters into their own hands by organizing a rank-and-file safety committee independent of the CCEA, to fight for the immediate protection of workers and their families. Contact us today to begin forming a Clark County Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee!



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