

# State and local government, mass media mount all-out blitz to reopen Los Angeles schools

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As Chicago teachers fight against that city's homicidal school reopening plan, the Los Angeles city government has mounted an all-out campaign to reopen schools in the nation's second largest school district. The campaign is in line with the school reopening plans of California Governor Gavin Newsom and with the Biden administration's plans to open schools across the country within his first 100 days in office.

On Thursday, LA City Council President pro tempore Joe Buscaino announced he would introduce a motion at next Tuesday's council meeting that would direct L.A. City Attorney Mike Feuer to file a lawsuit against the district to compel it to reopen as soon as possible. The move was supported by a Saturday opinion piece written by the *Los Angeles Times* editorial board entitled, "Start reopening California schools. Now." The article wrote, "In the absence of a demonstrated threat, there is no scientifically sound reason to assert, as Los Angeles Unified Supt. Austin Beutner does, that vaccination of all teachers and staff must be a prerequisite to bringing students back to the classrooms. Many teacher unions are demanding full vaccination before reopening, on top of other measures that health officials say are unnecessary."

Beutner, a former investment banker and state department asset in the Clinton administration, responded to the lawsuit threat, calling it a "political stunt." Beutner in fact agreed, however, with the need to reopen, only that the district couldn't do so immediately, while various limited coronavirus containment measures were in place at the state level. Said Beutner, "We are ready to reopen and want nothing more than to welcome children back to classrooms safely but we cannot break state law to do so."

The move by the LA City Council follows a similar lawsuit recently filed by the San Francisco City Council against its own district. The San Francisco suit was the

first of its kind in the state of California. City attorney Dennis Herrera, supported by Democratic Mayor London Breed, filed the suit on the grounds that the district had failed to "offer classroom-based instruction whenever possible."

Breed herself argued that the supposed suffering of ethnic minority children caused by remote learning should be answered by putting those same children and their families' lives at risk by returning to full in-person instruction. "Our kids are suffering, and the inequities that existed before this pandemic have become more severe," she said. "We have been a national leader in our response to COVID. Let's be a national leader in getting our kids back to school."

On Sunday, unions representing San Francisco public school employees caved in to the city's strong-arm tactics and announced a tentative agreement with the district to reopen schools depending on infection rate decreases. Although many details of the deal have not been revealed, Susan Solomon, president of the United Educators of San Francisco, noted, "How far apart are the unions and the district? At this point we think we are not very far apart."

The United Teachers of Los Angeles, which betrayed teachers' 2019 demands by rushing through a sell-out deal at the last minute with none of the class size reductions and nursing staff increases teachers and parents had demanded, is seeking to reach a similar agreement with the Los Angeles district. The UTLA, in opposing the campaign, has only requested that teachers be vaccinated before reopening rather than make any demands that schools remain closed under the pandemic is fully brought under control.

Both the San Francisco and Los Angeles reopening drives are part of a full-court press by Governor Gavin Newsom and the Biden administration to reopen schools.

Both peddle the fraudulent claims that campuses can safely reopen without vaccinating teachers and that school-aged children don't spread the virus in significant numbers. Last week, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, a member of the Biden administration's COVID-19 response team, stated that "vaccination of teachers is not a prerequisite for safe reopening of schools."

Newsom himself had also recently pledged \$2 billion in funding to help schools reopen as soon as possible even though just 7 percent of the state's population has received at least one dose of the coronavirus vaccine so far, with only 3 percent receiving a second dose.

Newsom is currently the target of a right-wing recall effort spearheaded by anti-vaccination groups and their supporters in far-right militia groups such as the Proud Boys. The recall effort has reportedly gathered 1.4 million signatures with more than 500,000 confirmed so far. The recall organizers must submit 1.5 million confirmed signatures by March 17 to qualify for the ballot, making a recall vote nearly certain later this year.

Adding additional pressure to the reopening drive was a Friday decision by the US Supreme Court forcing California to open churches for in-person services. While the decision allows state officials to limit building attendance to 25 percent capacity and forbid singing and chanting during services, it opens the door for fuller church reopenings, creating potential super-spreader events.

The SCOTUS decision, along with Newsom's school reopening drive, is being initiated under the pretext of declining COVID-19 case numbers in the state. Deaths from COVID-19, which typically lag behind infections, however, are still at the highest levels seen in the state since the pandemic began. As of Friday, 4,607 patients are hospitalized with COVID-19 with 28 percent of those in intensive care units. Health officials have also become alarmed over the increase in young patients with multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children, or MIS-C.

Seventy-five children have been diagnosed with MIS-C, which is a known complication of COVID-19 among the young. Symptoms include unrelenting fever and inflamed internal organs including the heart, lungs, kidneys, brain, skin, eyes and gastrointestinal organs. All of the 75 children with MIS-C had to be hospitalized with 44 percent of those treated in the ICU. One of the young patients has died thus far.

Despite this grim development, on January 27, Los Angeles County Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer

stated that elementary schools could reopen within a matter of weeks provided coronavirus daily case rates in Los Angeles decrease to 25 per 100,000 residents from the current 48. "I do believe it will take us two to three weeks to reduce that rate, and that assumes that everybody continues to do their very best, play by the rules to keep making sure that transmission goes down and not back up." Ferrer made clear that the schools could still reopen even if the county and state remain in the most severe purple tier coronavirus rating, meaning widespread and uncontrolled viral transmission within affected communities.

In fact, hundreds of teachers have already died from COVID-19 even with the limited amount of schools opened thus far. Nearly 300 teachers died as of last November alone. This number increased to at least 530 at the end of January according to data compiled by the American Federation of Teachers. One case attracting national and international attention was that of teachers in Montgomery, Alabama. Four Montgomery teachers died within a four day period in January, prompting teachers across the district to launch a sickout in protest, leading to the district returning to remote learning.

Los Angeles teachers and students need to be warned. The UTLA agrees with plans to reopen schools regardless of the ultimate cost in death as young children and teachers spread the coronavirus to their families and communities with many falling victim to the disease themselves. As with teachers in Chicago and Montgomery, Los Angeles teachers will only be able to oppose the reopening drive if they take action themselves. This must be part of an effort to expand their struggles as widely as possible, including preparations for a general strike to shut down schools and nonessential production.

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges all teachers and their supporters to join the Los Angeles Rank-and-File Safety Committee or other rank-and-file safety committees in their area. For more information about joining or starting a rank-and-file safety committee, click here .



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