

Michigan educators call for unity with Chicago educators in fight to close schools

Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
7 February 2021

The Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee expresses its full support for the Chicago teachers' struggle against the dangerous and indeed criminal drive to resume in-person instruction in Chicago Public Schools (CPS). Their determined fight to save lives and resist the "herd immunity" policies pursued by the entire political establishment is the spearhead of a growing movement of educators and all workers throughout the US and globally.

The pandemic has brought to the surface and exacerbated the enormous social chasm between the rich and the working class, which has been growing for decades. The aim of the back-to-school drive is to reopen the economy and get parents back to work producing profits for Wall Street, no matter what the cost in human lives. The back-to-school drive is the central domestic policy of the new Biden administration and the Democratic Party. Just as much as the Republicans, it is a party of the corporate and financial elite.

The capitalist press is engaged in a propaganda campaign—led by the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*—falsely claiming that schools are safe. In fact, the overwhelming body of scientific evidence proves that schools are major vectors for the spread of the disease. The COVID-19 pandemic has already killed nearly half a million people in the US alone and is expanding daily. New and more infectious variants are spreading largely undetected throughout the country.

Studies globally that have shown that closing schools is among the most significant measures to reduce infections and deaths from the virus. Since schools in the United States reopened in the fall, the death toll in the US has more than doubled and is rapidly heading to half a million people.

The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) is making every effort, in collaboration with Chicago's Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot, to suppress educators' resistance to a policy that will inevitably result in a massive increase in deaths among teachers, students, their families and the wider community.

Instead of upholding the demands and protecting the lives of rank-and-file members, the CTU bureaucrats agree with Lightfoot and the Biden administration that schools should reopen during the pandemic before community-wide inoculation against COVID-19.

We have faced the same sort of miserable compromise here in Detroit, where the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT) and Detroit's Democratic Mayor Mike Duggan agreed to reopen "Learning Centers" and schools at 25 percent in the fall. This was a slap in the face to teachers, who at an August membership meeting voted 91 percent for a "safety strike" and to go completely virtual.

It has proven disastrous for educators, students, parents and the entire working class, forcing Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer to shut down schools again in November. In Michigan, as of Tuesday, the state had 566,630 confirmed cases and 14,797 deaths since March.

Whitmer plans to have all schools reopened for some in person learning by March 1st. According to the Michigan Department of Education website, 399 Michigan school districts, including Detroit Public Schools Community District, the state's largest, are already offering full in-person instruction. Only 291 are fully remote or online, a decrease of 109 districts since December. Meanwhile, there have been repeated outbreaks at schools in Michigan, including 1,400 school-aged children in the Upper Peninsula.

There must be a coordinated fight against this

murderous back-to-school policy. We call for general strike action to close all schools and nonessential workplaces, which is the only way to contain the pandemic while the population is safely vaccinated. Our committee has fought to unite educators with autoworkers, health care workers and more.

To accomplish this requires a united struggle of teachers and workers of all industries against the entire political and economic system. Chicago teachers must build the Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee as the center of opposition to the miserable deal the CTU is attempting to sell to reopen schools. You must orient toward other sections of workers throughout the city and metro region, and with educators and other workers across district and state lines.

The National Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, to which both we and the Chicago committee belong, supports your struggle. Rank-and-file committees throughout the country, including in Los Angeles, San Diego, Northern California, Texas, Alabama, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, as well as internationally in Germany, the UK, Sri Lanka, Brazil and Australia, are doing everything to mobilize support for Chicago teachers.

We call for all educators, autoworkers, health care workers, service industry workers, food production workers and all workers to form rank-and-file committees to resist the betrayals of the unions and to pave the way for a united struggle.



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