

West Coast educators call for united struggle with Chicago educators to save lives

West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees
8 February 2021

The Los Angeles, San Diego and Northern California Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees across the West Coast fully support the demand of Chicago educators to keep schools closed during the pandemic. Across the country, as thousands of people die every day, there is a bipartisan push to reopen schools against all medical science. The statement of the Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee “Keeping Chicago schools closed during the pandemic is not negotiable!” points the way forward to workers everywhere.

The conscious decision of the local, state and federal governments to pursue a policy of “herd immunity” through mass infection has created an entirely preventable health catastrophe. Initial lockdown measures were conducted without the necessary financial support to workers and small businesses to make them effective. Then they were removed without any plan for long-term containment, condemning hundreds of thousands more to die during the December and January surges. In California, daily average deaths quadrupled to 540 in January and have only modestly dropped to 480.

The City of San Francisco has taken the unprecedented step of suing their own school board for not having “sufficient” plans to reopen in January as hospitals have filled during a surge of the pandemic. There is no safe way to resume in-person instruction until the pandemic is contained. While there is community spread, opening schools will only exacerbate the crisis.

There is growing pressure to reopen schools as quickly as possible in Los Angeles, San Diego and other major school districts across California. After City Attorney Dennis Herrera sued the San Francisco school district, the local teachers union negotiated a

deal to herd teachers and students back into unsafe classrooms in the coming weeks.

In Salt Lake City, Utah, schools reopened on Monday after the Salt Lake City School Board voted 6 to 1 to reopen all grades including high school. In Washington and Oregon, many districts throughout the rural and suburban regions have already reopened with some form of hybrid or in-person instruction, claiming that vaccinating some teachers will make it “safe.” Portland and Seattle school district leaders are developing a phased reopening plan that will begin as early as March.

Throughout the world, dozens of governments are pursuing the same homicidal policy as in the US, placing profits before lives and pushing to keep schools open. Whether it is Boris Johnson in the UK, Bolsonaro in Brazil, the Grand Coalition of the Social Democrats and Christian Democratic Union in Germany, the Macron government in France, or elsewhere, the policy is the same.

The conscious decision of these governments to allow mass infections has undermined any effort to contain the pandemic. As the virus spreads it continues to evolve, resulting in more contagious and deadly variants of COVID-19 emerging in Britain, South Africa, Brazil and California. Further infections increase the chance that variants resistant to the newly developed vaccines will emerge.

Dr. Christopher Murray, director of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, recently stated, “There are serious concerns that with the spread of new COVID-19 variants, achieving herd immunity necessary to end the pandemic may be difficult if not impossible, but we may be able to bring COVID-19 under control if we continue to focus on the strategies that can keep transmission low—avoiding gatherings,

wearing masks, and other measures—while working to get as many people vaccinated as possible.”

Study after study demonstrates that school children can very effectively spread the disease to school staff and their families and that closing school sites is among the most effective interventions to reduce spread. Keeping instruction remote is essential to saving lives and containing the pandemic.

As in Chicago, educators on the West Coast confront unions that promote the fiction of a safe return to schools during the pandemic. The California Teachers Association (CTA), Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and others have issued a shameful document that agrees in principle to resume in-person instruction while positivity rates remain as high as 8 percent. As a condition they call on the legislature to prioritize school workers for vaccination. How wretched!

Reopening schools is dangerous for students, families, and by increasing the rate of infection, the community at large. Educators cannot agree to send more people to the hospital, ICU and morgue just because they offer to make us personally safe.

The exact same politicians who have for decades starved the public schools of desperately needed funds are now claiming that children are suffering under remote learning.

Even where schools have reopened there has been no return to normal under the pandemic. Major districts that have returned like New York City are regularly quarantining sites to contain new outbreaks. Instead of providing students a steady environment, they are bouncing back and forth between open and closed. Districts opening under a hybrid model have placed an unbearable workload on teachers, preventing the kind of focused attention that students need to succeed.

California hosts a high concentration of wealth and billionaires, the second highest number of Fortune 500 companies, and Elon Musk, who has become the richest person in the world. The wealth exists to fund quality online instruction, social support and financial assistance for workers and small business owners during the shutdowns.

We call on educators across the region to join and help build our rank-and-file committees to prepare a general strike to shut down schools and nonessential workplaces while demanding full compensation for all

workers and the resources needed to quickly vaccinate the population, address the critical social needs of students and parents, and provide high-quality remote learning until the pandemic is under control.

Endorsed by:

Northern CA Rank-and-File Safety Committee

San Diego Rank-and-File Safety Committee

Los Angeles Rank-and-File Safety Committee

Bilingual teachers from Oregon Willamette valley

Psychotherapist from Pierce County

Retired elementary teacher from Long Beach USD

Worker from Riverside County

Nurse from Lakewood, California

Substitute Teacher from Stanislaus County, California

Engineer from Santa Clara County, California

Child-care worker from Seattle, Washington

Teacher from Utah



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