

Biden falsely downplays dangers of COVID-19 in schools

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Speaking at a CNN town hall event in Milwaukee on Tuesday, US President Joe Biden made a series of patently false statements about the threat posed by COVID-19 to children and their parents. Biden's false claims were aimed at convincing educators, students and parents to resume in-person learning, even though schools are major vectors for the spread of COVID-19.

In a chilling exchange with a second grade student rightly concerned that she might catch COVID-19 and possibly infect her parents, Biden flatly lied, stating, "You're not likely to be able to be exposed to something and spread it to mommy or daddy."

Numerous scientific studies have proven the exact opposite of Biden's claim. A study published last month by Dr. Simona Bignami of Montreal University and Dr. John F. Sandberg of George Washington University found that infections in children between the ages 10 to 19 preceded the increase in cases among adults aged 30 to 49. This means that infected children were infecting their parents, not the reverse. The study concluded, "The transmission of COVID among children of school age does not appear to be the consequence, but rather an important determinant of the general level of infection in surrounding communities."

Another recent study from southern India, published in the journal *Science* on November 6, also found that children spread the virus among themselves and adults. Even the politically motivated guidelines released last week by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) acknowledge that children and parents can spread COVID-19 to each other.

Biden issued another bald-faced lie, telling the second grader, "Kids don't get ... COVID very often. It's unusual for that to happen." He added, "You're in the safest group of people in the whole world."

In reality, over three million children have been

infected with COVID-19 in the US alone, representing 13 percent of all cases, and millions more have been infected worldwide. In recent weeks, there has been an unexplained surge in cases and deaths among children suffering from Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C), with the proportion of those patients admitted to hospitals needing intensive care increasing to 90 percent. Over 2,000 children have suffered from MIS-C in the US, and 30 have died, according to CDC figures.

Little is known about the long-term effects of COVID-19 on children, making school reopenings a medical experiment involving over 50 million students. The dangers are intensifying daily, as more infectious and lethal variants of COVID-19 are spreading largely undetected throughout the population, with the B.1.1.7 UK variant forecast to be dominant in the US by late March.

Biden's lying statements serve a political purpose. The unprecedented levels of debt accumulated during the pandemic and the massive stock market bubble must be undergirded by the exploitation of the working class through the production process. As has been the case throughout the pandemic, the aim of reopening schools is to ensure that parents return to unsafe workplaces in order to produce corporate profits. It is for this reason that the campaign to reopen schools is intensifying each day and has become the central axis of the class struggle.

At Tuesday's event, CNN host Anderson Cooper noted statements made last week by White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki that the goal of the Biden administration is to reopen schools only "at least one day a week." Biden responded, "That was a mistake in the communication," adding, "The goal will be five days a week."

Biden's statements make clear the centrality of reopening schools and the lengths to which the ruling elites will go in their pursuit of this homicidal policy. While this was first spearheaded by Trump and the Republicans, Biden and the Democrats now seek to finish the job, recklessly trying to reopen the majority of all K-8 schools by April 1. In fact, the Trump administration was forced to retract the same lies Biden has now issued regarding children's ability to contract and spread COVID-19.

Wednesday's CNN event was Biden's most direct intervention into the campaign to reopen schools, which has largely been implemented by the corporate media and local Democratic Party officials, most notably Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot.

Since Biden's inauguration, the propaganda campaign to reopen schools has rapidly escalated. Almost every day, the print and broadcast media have issued editorials, news articles and featured reporting falsely portraying most parents as clamoring for schools to reopen, depicting teachers as selfish and distorting science to justify reopening schools.

In reality, wherever schools have reopened, most parents have opted not to send their kids back, knowing full well the enormous dangers posed. Educators have rightly opposed the reckless reopening of schools not out of self-interest, but because they understand that schools are major vectors for viral transmission throughout their communities.

An inflection point in the ruling class campaign to open schools came last week when the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) successfully rammed through its sellout agreement with Mayor Lori Lightfoot to begin reopening schools in the third largest district in the US. Following this highly orchestrated betrayal—which involved the direct intervention of the Biden administration and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten—the CDC issued its unscientific guidelines on school reopenings last Friday, allowing schools to open “at any level of community transmission.”

The focus has now shifted to Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Long Beach, Baltimore, Memphis, Detroit, Boston, Las Vegas, San Diego, San Jose, San Francisco, Seattle, Portland and other major Democrat-led cities across the US that have not yet fully reopened their schools.

Each of these cities is now a battleground in which educators and the entire working class confront staunch enemies in the corporate media, the Democratic Party and their backers in the teachers unions. As the abject betrayal by the CTU makes clear, no confidence can be placed in the unions, which are thoroughly pro-capitalist and integrated into the Democratic Party.

On Wednesday, Philadelphia School District Superintendent William Hite was forced to push back the reopening date from next Monday, February 22, to March 1 at the earliest in the face of enormous opposition from teachers and parents.

Philadelphia educators must take full advantage of this time and do everything they can to organize opposition independently of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT), whose President Jerry Jordan has made clear he accepts the basic framework that schools can reopen. Teachers should join and help build the Pennsylvania Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee.

Educators in Los Angeles, Detroit, San Francisco, Chicago, New York City, Memphis, Baltimore, San Jose and San Diego should join the rank-and-file committees that already exist, and those working in other districts should contact the Socialist Equality Party to form a committee in your district. Such committees have been formed throughout the world and are preparing for general strike action to close all schools and nonessential workplaces, in order to contain the pandemic and save lives.

The most critical task is building a revolutionary leadership to arm the coming struggles with a socialist program, demanding the expropriation of the pandemic profiteers and the reallocation of their vast wealth towards providing universal health care, high quality remote learning, financial support for nonessential workers to stay home and all the other social needs of the working class.



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