

Learn from the CTU's betrayal in Chicago! Build committees nationwide to stop school reopenings!

Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
20 February 2021

Last week, the struggle to keep learning remote to save lives reached an inflection point. The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) successfully rammed through its sellout agreement with Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot to begin the phased reopening of schools in the third largest school district in the US.

Following the politically orchestrated betrayal that relied on the direct intervention of the Biden administration and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued its latest unscientific guidelines on school reopenings last Friday, allowing schools to open “at any level of community transmission.”

The effort to reopen schools in Chicago was aimed at shifting the relationship of class forces in the United States as a whole. In fact, a majority of Americans think teachers should be vaccinated before schools are reopened, and 57 percent polled support waiting until the fall to reopen schools.

We know that the many truly essential workers in health care, logistics, manufacturing and transportation should be inoculated first. We are not essential workers, and the reopening of schools is in no way socially necessary before the pandemic is under control.

But the Democrats and Republicans are not guided by the health needs of the public and investing in improvements to remote learning to lower class sizes and ensure broadband access. Instead, they are meeting the demands of the banks and major corporations at the expense of everyone by sending parents back to work, which means children under 14 must be in school.

No one believes the cynical lies about educational equity coming from Mayor Lightfoot, whose party has

privatized public schools by expanding charter schools and deprofessionalized teaching over decades. Wide sections of the district are in shambles. Unsafe conditions have long persisted, including crumbling infrastructure, vermin and filth.

A number of political and strategic conclusions must be drawn from our experience in Chicago.

First, for the districts not yet forced open—Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Long Beach, Baltimore, Memphis, Detroit, Boston, Las Vegas, San Diego, San Jose, San Francisco, Seattle, Portland and more—rank-and-file committees must immediately be built that will raise the demands to keep learning remote and support households and small businesses so that the disease transmission rate falls.

Educators are a section of the working class—a class far stronger, more numerous and collectively smarter than the tiny elite profiting off our exploitation. But we must be scientifically and politically well-informed and well-organized. We must recognize who our allies are in the parents, students and workers of the region who also face unsafe workplaces and indifferent or hostile bosses.

Our committee is part of a network of rank-and-file safety committees formed across the US and globally in auto, education and logistics industries, which are preparing for general strike action of all workers to close nonessential workplaces and schools in order to contain the pandemic.

In pushing for reopening in Chicago and nationwide, the teachers unions—the AFT, National Education Association (NEA) and their state and local affiliates like the CTU—have taken the side of capital against us, the education workforce they claim to “represent,” and

against science and the public health needs of the general population.

With the unions complicit in the ruling elite's policy of social murder, our committees oppose in the clearest and strongest terms the financial aristocracy's unchallenged power to determine social policy. This is not simply a matter of our commitment to serving the educational needs of children and youth, but as a section of workers who are stewards of public education as a social right and for the public good. The "left-wing" apologists for the AFT, who claim some safety precautions are better than none, are just as culpable for the illness and deaths that will follow from the reopening.

Our educators rank-and-file safety committees are the political and organizational expression of the growing demand for policies based on science and progress.

The Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee will carry out the following tasks in preparation for the next phase of struggle:

- **Expanding the committee to include more CPS schools, parents and high school students whose school reopenings are now being planned.** The broadest preparations must be made to shut schools and prevent reopenings, as educators and leading public health experts anticipate numerous outbreaks in the coming weeks.

- **Reporting on classroom and building conditions and bringing to light the realities of the return to buildings.** We can do this in ways that protect teachers from being victimized by CPS or other districts—as well as the CTU and other unions—for speaking out where there are concerns.

- **Uniting teachers across all area districts.** Suburban teachers support the CPS teachers' fight for safety, and they need our support as well. The unions work to divide us, district vs. district, and our committee's capacity to unify teachers and school workers makes it a critical center of both information sharing and organized resistance to the return to in-person learning.

Preparing a general strike to shut schools and nonessential workplaces. Our fundamental aim is to stop the spread of COVID-19 and put an end to the needless suffering and death. We demand full compensation for all workers affected by lockdowns and the resources needed to vaccinate the population, address the social needs of students and parents, and provide high-quality remote learning until the pandemic is brought under control.



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