

Corporate media and both big business parties press to reopen schools in California

Melody Isley
23 February 2021

The Los Angeles Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee is meeting this Thursday to organize the opposition to school reopenings throughout LA County. Register and invite your coworkers to attend the meeting!

In California, there is a concerted push by the corporate media and both big business parties to reopen schools statewide. Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom aims to resume in-person instruction by April, in line with the Biden administration's timeline and as part of a broader effort to completely reopen nonessential workplaces across the state.

The mainstream media is fabricating the false narrative that the overwhelming majority of parents demand that schools reopen. Headlines in the *Los Angeles Times* and other papers have highlighted the position of a right-wing minority of parents calling for reopening, while exploiting the mental health crisis facing students as a battering ram for this campaign. Other columns have questioned the need for vaccinating teachers and downplayed the new and more infectious COVID-19 variants spreading throughout the country.

The mainstream media has given amplified coverage to the so-called #ReOpen movement, which advocates for an immediate return to in-person instruction through protests, media circuses, and performative legal action. Contrary to the narrative that this campaign is being led by disgruntled parents, in reality it is led by the Republican Party and prominent conservative personalities.

Not coincidentally, state Republicans have gathered an estimated 1.7 million signatures in favor of a recall vote for Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom, which they have fueled in part through demands for reopening schools.

Over the winter, California became the epicenter of the global pandemic, averaging more than 40,000 new cases each day from December through January. By the end of this week, the state will hit the grim milestone of more than 50,000 deaths, with more than 3.54 million cases reported in the state—a case total larger than Germany, Canada, and Japan combined.

Los Angeles, the most populated county in the state with

roughly 10 million residents, has reached more than 1.18 million cases alone, and 19,904 deaths as of today. Following the betrayal by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) earlier this month, which resulted in school reopenings beginning last week, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has emerged as the most significant battleground in the fight to reopen schools.

Other major cities on the West Coast led by Democrats that are pressing to reopen schools include Long Beach, San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose, Oakland, Portland and Seattle, each of which would set a precedent and lead to further reopenings throughout the surrounding regions.

On the legal front, the right-wing Center for American Liberty attempted last month to revive a lawsuit against Newsom in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals which presses for school reopenings. The suit and the appeal were filed by the Center's CEO and Founder, Attorney Harmeet Dhillon, who also happens to be a well-known Republican National Committee (RNC) Committeewoman and a regular guest on Fox News.

The suit, *Brach v. Newsom*, was first launched last August and argues that Newsom breached constitutional guarantees of due process and equal protection by issuing a school closure order last July. The case, closed in December 2020, is being revived to bring further media attention to the manufactured GOP fiction that there exists massive anger against distance learning during the pandemic.

The Republican Party believes that the issue of school reopenings could be their ticket to regaining seats in Congress that they lost in 2020 and 2018. Representative Tom Emmer of Minnesota, Chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee, stated in a recent press conference, "I made a big deal out of the fact that messaging has to be about schools as we go forward." The GOP is also funding advertisements denouncing Democrats for being insufficiently aggressive in reopening schools.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported heavily on a poorly attended protest staged in front of the West LA Federal Building last week, which claimed to represent at least 20

different LAUSD schools, as well as schools in the more affluent Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District. According to video and photo documentation, the crowd numbered no more than one hundred attendees. This was followed by a protest by a few dozen parents who conducted a “Zoom blackout” in which they did not allow their children to participate in their virtual classes for the day.

It is no coincidence that the kind of attendees at these events are largely from affluent areas that have been able to mostly avoid the devastation of the pandemic. Parents from the wealthiest zip codes in the United States, such as Santa Monica, Beverly Hills, Malibu, and the Pacific Palisades, were in attendance at these events and are the most frequently cited in articles claiming parents want in-person instruction.

More common, though receiving significantly less media coverage, are protest events opposing reopening, such as a recent car caravan rally in Los Angeles on February 20 called “Not My Child, Schools Aren’t Safe.” The event, whose organizers falsely framed school reopenings as a racial issue, was supported by more than 200 students, teachers, and parents. One teacher interviewed by local news at the event expressed the sentiment of many teachers, stating, “We miss our kids, we want to return to work. We just want to wait until it’s safe for everybody.”

While there have been difficulties in adapting to online education, parents have expressed overwhelming support for teachers and most are carrying through with online education knowing that this prioritizes the health of their families, school workers and educators.

According to data gathered this month, the vast majority of parents currently believe that their children are receiving the kind of education they prefer during the pandemic. In a national poll by the University of Southern California, called the Understanding America Study, the data revealed that 75 percent of parents are satisfied with the type of instruction their child is receiving at present, with almost 90 percent satisfaction among parents whose children are in fully online instruction.

According to another poll, the National Parents Union Survey, 42 percent of parents list “no new cases of Covid-19 being reported in [their] area” as an absolute necessity in order for them to feel safe sending their student to school. Forty-two percent of parents also would choose online-only education as their preferred method of instruction for the rest of the school year. The poll found that 71 percent of parents also believe that the quality of their child’s education is currently “excellent or good.” It is of note that 54 percent of parents polled also regularly worry about “being able to make ends meet” during the present crisis.

The real push to reopen schools is not coming from

parents, but from pro-corporate agenda of both big business parties, supported by the trade unions at the local, state and national officials. The ruling class and the political stooges of the financial elite choose not to follow science-based policies to stop the pandemic. Instead, they do everything they can to reopen the economy before the pandemic is contained, sacrificing the lives of workers and their families in the process.

In California, the Democratic Party is relying on the manufactured opposition of the Republicans and the media as a pretext to implement school reopening policies that the Democrats fully support. Governor Newsom announced this week that the state would put aside 10 percent of vaccine doses for teachers, as a performative measure to meet the calls by teachers unions for school staff to be fully vaccinated before students return to campus.

Newsom recently hailed thousands of campuses that have reopened for “not waiting around,” cynically stating that this homicidal policy would “support working women and single moms in particular.” The Democratic Party elite has its cross-hairs set on LAUSD, the second largest district in the country with 665,000 students. While LAUSD Superintendent Austin Beutner recently stated schools would reopen “no later than April 9,” Newsom has urged, “we can do this now.” Newsom also asserts that “perfect” safety in schools should not be used as an “excuse” to remain closed in the middle of a pandemic.

Teachers must come to understand that in their efforts to prevent deadly school reopenings, they are in a fight against the entire capitalist system. Every arm of the ruling class and its state apparatus, as well as the media and the trade unions, are being deployed as a bulwark to get teachers to accept the “reasonable risk” of death.

We urge California educators, parents, and other sections of workers to join and help build independent rank-and-file committees throughout the state, as part of an expanding network of such committees across the US and globally. These democratic organizations fight to put the lives of teachers, students and families first. They are preparing for general strike action to close all schools and nonessential workplace, while providing full economic security for all workers affected, until the pandemic is contained. Register and invite your coworkers to attend the next meeting of the Los Angeles Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee this Thursday!



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