

“Since school has been remote, no teachers have died.”

Montgomery, Alabama uses CDC guidelines to unsafely reopen schools

Emma Arceneaux
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The Alabama Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee is hosting a special meeting at 2 p.m. CST this Saturday, February 27, which is open to all educators, parents, students and other workers. Dr. Benjamin Mateus, who has written extensively on the COVID-19 pandemic, will discuss the political motivations behind the new CDC guidelines on school reopenings, how they are at odds with the science, and answer questions from attendees. Register today and share this event widely with coworkers and on social media !

Montgomery, Alabama Superintendent Ann Roy Moore announced Monday that teachers must return to school buildings as of March 29, with students following in early April. The policy reversal takes place amid a spike of over 1,250 new COVID-19 cases in the state and after at least 30 Alabama educators have lost their lives to the virus.

Throughout the fall and winter, Montgomery educators have mounted protests against being forced to work in COVID-infected, dilapidated school buildings. As deaths mounted in late January, including four within a single week, some educators staged a sick-out and the district retreated to allow mostly remote teaching. The announced reopening at the end of March takes place in tandem with the reopening of schools by Democrats across the US, as demanded by the Biden administration.

In her letter to inform employees of their imminent return, Moore claims to be using “the research from scientists, guidelines by the Alabama Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.” She adds that the supposed “safety measures” of returning faculty before students and staggering students’ return will “allow time to prepare to return face to face in the safest possible manner. MPS staff and students will continue to practice social distancing *as much as feasible* ” (emphasis added). In

reality, the virus continues to spread throughout Alabama schools. Alabama’s COVID-19 K-12 Dashboard has recorded 2,686 cases in the past two weeks alone.

Moore’s announcement, and the CDC guidelines which she cites, blatantly ignore one of the most important factors in determining the safety of a building: ventilation and air quality. Educators in Montgomery have reported to the WSWs the terrible state of heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems in their schools, which result in widespread mold and mildew. The US Government Accountability Office estimates that 41 percent of school districts need to update or replace their HVAC systems.

It is imperative that the working class understands the latest CDC guidelines, which are being used across the US as a weapon to force teachers and students back into deadly classrooms as the pandemic rages out of control. We urge educators, parents and students to attend Saturday’s meeting with WSWs science writer Dr. Benjamin Mateus to learn about the unscientific character of the CDC guidelines and why closing schools is one of the most effective measures to prevent the spread of the disease.

As Dr. Mateus wrote in a recent article on the CDC guidelines, “A review of the guidelines’ references indicates many of the selected studies are of limited significance and use biased surveys done in a specific school over a limited time frame. Many provide no concrete context or understanding of how the coronavirus passes through children and schools in the community settings.

“The guidelines highlight studies conducted early in the pandemic, when schools globally were closed as an initial response to containing the spread, deriving conclusions that are no longer valid. They have uncritically accepted

claims made in studies that children were not vectors at home, while ignoring the cautionary remarks made by their authors that their findings might be flawed as children rarely present with symptoms.”

The CDC is now working under the thumb of the Biden administration, which has set as its primary domestic policy goal the reopening of all schools nationwide by the end of April. Despite speaking in a different tone of voice, Biden is continuing the same deadly policy of the Trump administration: open schools as soon as possible, so parents can return to work to produce profits for the financial oligarchy.

“It’s atrocious,” one Montgomery teacher told the WWS. “Why are we coming back at the end of March when clearly the numbers are continuously rising as far as COVID cases? As we can see, since school has been remote, no teachers have died. They only died when we were teaching in-person.”

She noted that Moore also wants all children to take standardized tests in person, stating, “They haven’t been at school in a year, but she wants to test them, she wants them to fail. They want every child to test in person, all the 6th graders in for two days. That’s 20 children in a classroom, piled on top of each other. No way you’ll be able to distance.” This punitive policy is also in line with Biden’s Department of Education ruling this week that standardized tests will be mandatory this year, a direct reversal of one of his campaign pledges.

The teacher continued, “There’s no way we can stop this deadly virus from infiltrating the schools. We already know the ventilation system is poor and they already told us they weren’t going to replace it. We have mold and mildew all in the air ducts. They’re saying wait until the summer to fix it. OK, then wait to the summer and don’t make us go back.”

Dr. Mateus also recently wrote about the glaring omission of aerosolization in the CDC guidelines, noting, “In its push to support the Biden administration’s efforts to open schools rapidly, the CDC has altogether negated the nature of aerosolization of the virus. Its guidelines make no mention of these transmission mechanisms. The CDC has nimbly backpedaled to emphasizing respiratory droplets and surface contamination as primary modes of infection. Its schematic makes this evident: universal masking, the physical distancing of six feet when possible, handwashing and respiratory etiquette.”

Superintendent Moore cites the reduction in cases in Montgomery as evidence that it is safe to reopen. Of course, this is a misrepresentation of the situation. It was

just announced that the number of confirmed cases of the B.1.1.7 strain, which is known to be more transmissible and more deadly, has increased nearly three-fold in the state, from eight to 22. The true extent of this new strain is unknown, but it is set to become the dominant strain in the US by late March. Dr. Karen Landers of the Alabama Department of Public Health pointed out that most laboratories in the state do not have the ability to conduct sequencing, which is how the variants are detected.

The district is also pressuring parents to send their children back, saying, “We are encouraging families strongly, whose children have not done well with virtually, to return.” Since the beginning of the pandemic there has been no coordinated plan or funding to invest in the highest quality virtual education. Instead, the very same people who claim to be concerned about the health and well-being of students have sabotaged remote learning. The students whose “performance” is in question are no doubt those who lack the basic resources required to learn remotely, such as high quality internet and computers.

Moore says the buildings are “cleaner than ever” and “loaded with supplies.” In reality, not a single school in the district has been retrofitted with the proper ventilation systems that are a prerequisite for clean, safe air. She also claims that a partnership between MPS and Alabama State University will enable 800 employees to be vaccinated this week. This represents only 17 percent of the district’s employees.

Science is on the side of educators, who are fighting internationally to put an end to the homicidal drive to force them and their students back into coronavirus-infested classrooms. We urge readers to attend Saturday’s meeting, invite your coworkers, and help expand the network of rank-and-file safety committees. Only the mobilization of the working class, united behind a program guided by science and human need, is capable of putting an end to the pandemic and securing the future of public education.



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