

New York City Schools chancellor resigns as middle schools resume in-person learning

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New York City educators must organize to close all schools and prevent the deepening spread of the pandemic. The New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee is spearheading this fight, and we urge educators in the city and tri-state area to attend our next meeting at 7 p.m. this Wednesday, March 3.

Last Thursday, New York City—the largest school district in the US with over 1.1 million students—reopened 471 middle schools for approximately 62,000 students in grades 6-8. Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio had already sent back middle school teachers on Monday, and is negotiating with the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) to try to reopen high schools by the end of the year.

The volatility of the political situation, in which the Democratic Party has undertaken another highly unpopular step in opening more schools, was underscored by Thursday's resignation of the Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza.

The following day, it was announced that Carranza will be replaced by Meisha Porter in mid-March. Porter, who has been the executive superintendent of the Bronx since 2018, stated during her first news conference Friday that the city is “ready to go” on reopening high schools. She pledged to meet this goal before the end of the school year, in line with the Biden administration's campaign to reopen the majority of schools by the end of April.

On February 11, Carranza first announced that middle schools would reopen, the second phase of the city's plan to resume in-person learning at all schools in order to send parents back to work producing profits for Wall Street. In a message to parents, Carranza falsely stated, “We have developed strong practices to help keep school communities healthy and safe.” He bragged about the totally inadequate testing program in which

only 20 percent of students and staff are tested in each school on a weekly basis.

The level of trust parents had in Carranza and de Blasio has been reflected in the low number of returning students, with only 30 percent of parents opting for in-person learning since September.

The media have largely attributed the resignation to sharp differences Carranza had with Mayor de Blasio's handling of the school system's testing for gifted and talented programs and elite high schools that require an entrance exam for admission. The inequality in education after decades of budget cuts and underfunding of public schools has been framed entirely in racial terms by the Democrats, including both de Blasio and Carranza. Their solution of rationing quality education in the city has caused sharp divisions among these petty-bourgeois layers.

It is also likely that Carranza, knowing he would be replaced by a new administration in less than a year, sought to absolve himself of any responsibility for the wave of infections and deaths likely to hit city schools in the coming weeks as middle and high schools reopen. This mass reopening of schools coincides with the anticipated growth of more infectious and lethal variants of SARS-CoV-2, including a new mutation specific to New York City, B.1.526.

The campaign to reopen middle schools has had the fulsome support of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). With the collaboration of the UFT and its President Michael Mulgrew, de Blasio first reopened all public schools on September 29.

By early November, the seven-day citywide test positivity rate exceeded the 3 percent threshold that the UFT and de Blasio had negotiated for closing schools, prompting de Blasio to close schools. Only days later, de Blasio unilaterally reopened schools for K-5

students on December 7 with the support of the UFT. Both parties abandoned the 3 percent threshold and the positivity rates stood at 7 percent as middle schools opened Thursday morning.

Schools only closed last March due to the widespread opposition of educators, who threatened to carry out wildcat sick-out strikes. Despite the seriousness of the rapidly spreading pandemic, de Blasio argued in favor of allowing the schools to remain open. The slow response by the Democrats resulted in the city becoming the first epicenter of the pandemic in the US. The overall number of COVID-19 cases in New York City now stands at 712,389 with 29,088 deaths due to the virus.

Once again, de Blasio is now exploiting the likely temporary drop in the daily rate of COVID-19 cases to promote the reopening of middle schools. Mulgrew is reprising his role of cheerleader, recently stating, “These strict standards, and the requirement that buildings close temporarily when virus cases are detected, have made our schools the safest places to be in our communities during the pandemic.” He added, “They will continue to be the strongest protections for the health and safety of students and staff.”

In other words, the UFT is fine with sending another large group of students and educators back into middle school buildings that no amount of preparation will make safe.

Reacting to Carranza’s departure, Mulgrew praised him for his role last fall, “Richard Carranza was a real partner in our efforts to open school safely.” Mulgrew will surely find another “real partner” in Meisha Porter, who vowed on Twitter to “hit the ground running and lead our schools to a full recovery,” meaning full reopening as soon as possible.

Reflecting the thoroughly collaborative role that the pseudo-left plays within the teachers unions, after the middle schools had opened on Thursday a member of the Movement of Rank-and-File Educators (MORE)—the UFT caucus associated with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)—posted an article on their website titled, “We Should Wait To Open Schools.”

The article provides a list of demands for a “safe” reopening and nowhere mentions the urgent need for educators to organize collectively to shut down schools as part of a broader program to stop community spread

of the coronavirus. Similarly, Biden’s plan to reopen schools and the lies disseminated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are not raised.

There is a political logic in this. MORE is addressing the UFT and suggesting that with a series of safe-sounding but totally inadequate measures the UFT can negotiate a deal that MORE will endorse. In this appeal, MORE is following in the footsteps of its allies in the leadership of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), which recently negotiated a “safe” reopening of schools with Chicago’s Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot.

Educators must resist the deadly drive to reopen schools in New York City, across the US and internationally by building independent rank-and-file safety committees that will organize the most far-reaching and necessary action to immediately close all schools and nonessential workplaces while providing full economic security for all workers affected. We urge educators in New York City and the tri-state area who seek to implement this program to attend the New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee meeting at 7 p.m. this Wednesday, March 3.



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