

New York City educators call for action to stop in-person schooling and save lives

New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
4 March 2021

New York City's Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio, with the collaboration of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), is now actively preparing to open high schools for face-to-face instruction in the largest school district in the US. The new Chancellor of Schools, Meisha Porter, recently pledged, "I promise we'll do everything to reopen schools, starting with high schools."

Under conditions in which the New York B.1.526 variant of COVID-19 is spreading largely undetected throughout the city, the drive to reopen all schools will escalate the deadly conditions confronting educators and the entire working class.

On March 1, UFT president Michael Mulgrew told a meeting of the union's Executive Board, "We are in conversations about high school openings. We have a formula and know how many people we need."

The drive to reopen high schools takes place immediately after the unsafe return of over 62,000 middle school students last week, after their teachers returned to schools across the city.

The situation is dangerous and the threat of death to educators, students and their families is real and growing every day. There are presently 164 buildings closed because of COVID-19 cases discovered among students and staff school across multiple classrooms in just the last week.

Over the last seven days in February, the city recorded 26,657 new cases of COVID-19 in the city. Even the inadequate testing of the Department of Education has revealed that at least 992 students and staff have been diagnosed with the disease in the last two weeks.

The new strains of the virus that have spread around the world in the last five months are making the situation even more deadly.

The Brazilian P1 variant, which has infected tens of thousands and killed thousands in recent weeks in the city of Manaus, a previous hotspot of the disease in mid-2020, has now been detected on the East Coast of the US. This strain has been noted for reinfecting people who have already had COVID-19.

The South African variant, the most vaccine-resistant, has been recorded in both New York and Massachusetts. Along with the reopening of college campuses across the country, especially in New England, the conditions exist for this variant to spread rapidly.

The opening of schools under these circumstances is part of a concerted plan by the Biden administration, which is being spearheaded by the Democratic Party nationally, to get parents back to work so that profits can continue to flow to major corporations.

In this process, the unions have played the most critical role. American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten recently told the *New York Times* that she now spends 15 hours per day on the phone with the White House, the CDC, local mayors and union heads orchestrating the national campaign to reopen schools.

Last month, the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) signed an agreement with the administration of Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot to open schools despite widespread opposition from Chicago teachers. 37,000 students returned to classrooms this Monday, with more slated to return throughout this month. Heading up this policy was the leadership of the CTU, the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE), some of whose leadership is aligned with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).

In New York, where the UFT has attempted to paralyze the ability of educators to shut down schools

since March 2020, the “opposition” caucus affiliated with the CTU, the Movement of Rank-and File Educators (MORE), has now issued a set of conditions by which they will endorse the reopening of New York City schools. Every educator knows that the UFT’s pledges to open schools “safely” are worthless, and that such an endeavor defies basic scientific principles of airborne viral transmission. To suggest that the UFT and MORE’s limited measures can protect educators is a total lie.

The only safe solution open to educators is to organize a general strike across the city with the aim of shutting down schools and non-essential businesses until the population is vaccinated. As part of this campaign, the New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee demands:

- Full income support for parents while they stay at home with their children.
- The hiring of thousands of educators and full funding for adequate computer equipment and infrastructure to facilitate remote learning.
- Full income support for non-essential workers and the unemployed.
- Mass hiring of healthcare workers and the expansion of medical facilities.
- Maximum safety conditions for essential workers, including logistics and transit workers, to be determined by their own rank-and-file safety committees.

The vehicle for accomplishing such demands are rank-and-file safety committees, independent of the corporatist unions and democratically controlled by workers themselves. We call on educators, parents and all workers in the tri-state area to immediately begin building such committees independent of the capitalist political parties and the trade unions.

Our educator brothers and sisters in Chicago, Los Angeles, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Alabama, Texas, and Michigan have formed committees like ours, and committees have been built in auto plants and Amazon facilities across the US and globally.

Just as the pandemic is a global phenomenon, so must educators and all workers unite on a global basis. Our strength lies in common goals and action with workers in the United Kingdom, Germany, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Turkey and other countries who have formed their own independent action committees to halt the spread of

COVID-19.

The conditions exist for a rapid development of working class opposition to the conditions of illness, death, mass unemployment and economic dislocation and structural collapse, as was particularly evidenced in Texas in the last two weeks. The critical task is to build new organizations to channel this opposition into a powerful, broad-based movement of the entire working class, which our committees are fighting to develop. We urge all New York City educators, parents and students to join and build this committee today to stop the pandemic and save lives!



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact