As CDC dumps social distancing

Data shows schools are fueling third surge of COVID-19 in Michigan

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Next online meeting of the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee: ***Saturday, March 27****. Register now at* ***wsws.org/edsafety***

A third surge of the COVID-19 pandemic has begun in Michigan, fueled by huge numbers of outbreaks at K-12 schools and school-related sporting events. Daily new cases in the state have nearly tripled since their low one month ago, climbing from 1,045 per day on February 20 to 2,998 per day on March 20. During this period, the number one source of new COVID-19 outbreaks in the state was K-12 schools.

According to Covid Act Now, Michigan's overall rate of infection is 1.23, meaning that on average a person who catches COVID-19 in Michigan will infect 1.23 other people, the highest such rate of any state in the US. In St. Clair County—where cases doubled in one week after its schools switched from hybrid to fully in-person learning on March 1—the rate is 1.47.

At a press conference on March 19, the state's Chief Medical Executive Dr. Joneigh Kaldhun revealed the extraordinary fact that "in January and February, local health departments identified 315 outbreaks associated with different sports teams" related to schools or recreational clubs. "We are going in the wrong direction," she said, explaining that the highest increase in cases statewide has been observed in children aged 10 to 19 years old.

Michigan is also the state with by far the highest per capita rate of the more infectious and lethal B.1.1.7 variant of the virus, whose transmission has been especially associated with school sports. The variant has now been detected 756 times across 31 of the state's counties.

Not only new variants but horrifying medical afflictions associated with COVID-19 have appeared in the petri dish of Michigan's schools. Ninety-five Michigan children have now developed MIS-C (Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children), a condition seen only in children who catch COVID-19 in which a child's brain, heart, kidneys and other organs swell and malfunction.

Last month, 10-year-old Dae'Shun Jamison of Shelby beat MIS-C but tragically lost both arms and both legs. Fourteen-year-old Honestie Hodges of Grand Rapids did not survive.

Any rational person would conclude from these facts that face-to-face learning and school sports must be stopped immediately, in order to contain the spread of COVID-19 and save countless lives. Instead, officials at the local, state and federal levels are fighting to open schools where they remain closed and to reduce to insignificance any remaining safety policies.

Michigan's Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer is leading the charge to reopen all of the state's schools amid the new surge. At a February 24 press conference, she articulated the position of the ruling class that "without schools, the economy is hamstrung" because "working families are spread too thin."

This is a reference to parents who have left the workforce during the pandemic to stay home with their young children so they can attend school virtually and safely. Later that day, Ann Arbor Public Schools, one of the state's largest districts, reversed its decision to remain virtual for the rest of the school year, instead demanding that teachers and students return to classrooms starting March 25.

On March 9, Whitmer signed House Bill 4048, which requires higher income school districts to be open face-to-face 20 hours per week by tomorrow, March 22, in order to receive some state funds. Districts like Bloomfield Hills in suburban Detroit, which was not planning face-to-face instruction for 20 hours per week until April, had to rush their reopening plans to meet the deadline or miss out on millions of dollars in funding.

What are Detroit's "learning centers"?

In Detroit—the poorest big city in America, where before the pandemic half of all children were already living in poverty—economic blackmail against teachers and parents is also the order of the day, although here it takes a somewhat different form.

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Starting in August, Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) Superintendent Nikolai Vitti began offering a bribe of $750 per quarter to individual teachers who agreed to return to in-person learning. Hardly any teachers accepted, and most schools remain closed for in-person learning.

But through a linguistic magic trick, Vitti has opened so-called "learning centers" in some of the school buildings—in reality, teacherless warehouses for impoverished children whose parents cannot provide food and learning conditions for them at home. Children are coaxed into the unsafe school buildings with the promise of two free meals a day and are given a laptop with which they can receive virtual instruction from teachers, who are safely teaching online.

"It's like The Hunger Games," said Barbara, a teacher at an elementary school on Detroit's west side. "They get free breakfast and lunch if they come in. That's a big pull," she explained. "Our school is open with a few teachers. In the learning center, where there are 180 kids, there are no teachers, and they are unable to take attendance, let alone enforce social distancing."

From a medical standpoint, a "learning center" provides the same pathway for COVID-19 to spread as a school that is open. But for Detroit's ruling elite, it achieves the only real goal of the return to in-person learning: warehousing working class children so that workers can be herded back into Detroit's auto factories and other industrial workplaces--which are themselves Michigan's second largest vector for COVID-19 after schools.

The CDC vs. science

Under these conditions, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has updated its "Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools" by *reducing* the recommended distance between children to a minuscule three feet.

Previous guidelines called for distancing of at least six feet. But according to CDC Director Rochelle Walensky, "Six feet was among the things that was keeping schools closed, and in that context, science evolves." This cynical statement proves in practice the well-known socialist dictum that if the laws of geometry stood in the way of profit, the capitalists would try to refute them.

President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris endorsed this attack on science in a televised visit with Walensky at CDC headquarters on March 19, shortly after she had announced the change to the CDC's guidelines. "I hope this is the beginning of the end," said Biden, who has made school reopenings a top priority of his new administration, praising the CDC for "changing the mindset of the country." Harris thanked Walensky for "making difficult decisions right now."

While the president and his anti-science scientists ignore the disastrous school-fueled resurgence of COVID-19 in Michigan and across the US and congratulate one another on their "difficult"—actually, homicidal—decision to pack even more children and teachers into deadly classrooms across the country, educators expressed their opposition and disgust on social media.

"It wasn't safe at six feet. It's considerably worse at three feet," wrote a teacher in the *Teachers Against Dying* Facebook group. "The CDC doesn't care at all about science or safety—they are just a political tool."

Another teacher in *Michigan Badass Teachers* quickly pointed out: "The CDC relied on research that was conducted before the UK variant hit Michigan. And we know the UK variant is much more virulent than the original Covid." This is correct .

In the *Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee* Facebook group , a teacher noted: "Considering the measurement tends to be done from the middle of one desk to the middle of another, I equate it to no distancing at all."

Other comments were generally along these lines: "My school was already closer than 6 feet. I don't think any of it is safe"; "Our kids grab and touch each other all day. We're lucky if we get a few inches between them"; "I don't understand how feet matters when it's AIRBORNE. If you are breathing the air others exhale, it's a problem"; "Have you been to a sports event? Nobody enforces the mask rule. The kids play with it hanging off their chins"; "I doubt many schools can meet the adequate ventilation and I'm sure older schools can't"; "There's going to be another surge"; "It's all just seatbelts on a plane."

In April 2020, scientifically inclined people across the US and the world reacted with horror when President Trump suggested that they might be able to inject bleach into their veins to protect themselves from the coronavirus. Nearly a year later, teachers, students and parents are now learning that for Biden and the Democrats, too, no lie is too deadly for them to tell.

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