

Pennsylvania educators demand an end to Facebook censorship and dangerous in-person learning

Pennsylvania Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
30 March 2021

The Pennsylvania Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee meets weekly on Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. EDT. Please join us this Thursday and invite your co-workers and friends. To find out more and sign up to join our committee, click here.

The Pennsylvania Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee condemns Facebook's decision to threaten teachers groups opposing unsafe school reopenings and demands that Facebook lift its restrictions against Dr. Benjamin Mateus and others who have been censored.

On Monday and Tuesday, March 22 and 23, Facebook threatened two groups—Illinois Refuse to Return and Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee—with being shut down for sharing information that is opposed to the unsafe reopening of schools amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

This action is in line with the efforts of the Biden administration, local Democratic and Republican officials, and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA) to push the deadly resumption of in-person learning and silence opposition.

Facebook's action was in response to group members who posted comments opposed to the pseudoscience being used to justify these reckless policies. Specifically, the post exposed the use by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of a study co-authored by Brown University economist Emily Oster that justified the loosening of guidelines and claimed that children are not at high risk for COVID-19.

The full text of the post is as follows:

A person like Emily Oster who has been advocating right wing fashion for schools to open and repeatedly getting it wrong who has no training in public health and infectious diseases should be a red flag for the CDC to use her study. This is no better than the hydroxychloroquine hype promoted by the flawed French researcher to treat COVID-19. Yet, the CDC and congress put on a deadly show for all Americans and teachers. 'We will manipulate statistics and promote bad data and sell it as sound science to get you back in

the classrooms!'

Dr. Mateus was notified that the posts were a violation of Facebook's Community Standards and that it had been removed. Benjamin Mateus is the pseudonym used by a practicing physician in the US with extensive clinical experience. Over the past year, he has written dozens of articles on the coronavirus pandemic for the *World Socialist Web Site* and exposed, on the basis of science, the manipulation of data about COVID-19 by corporations and the government to justify the premature and deadly reopening of businesses and schools.

In addition to articles and social media posts, Dr. Mateus has spoken at many national and regional meetings of the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees, including at a meeting of our committee in Pennsylvania. Most recently, he has exposed the CDC decision to loosen its social distancing guidelines in classrooms. The censorship of Dr. Mateus is part of a broader drive to silence criticism of the push to re-open schools and the entire economy.

? In Florida, data scientist Rebekah Jones was fired from her job and arrested for refusing to publish doctored information on the extent of the state's COVID-19 outbreaks.

? The School District of Philadelphia has had to develop a dashboard to report COVID cases since August, but it has refused to do so.

? In Maryland, Wicomico County teacher Mary Laurenzano died of COVID-19 last week, yet the school district refuses to acknowledge that her death was caused by the coronavirus.

? No national database or reporting is kept of infections and deaths from COVID-19 among educators and students.

? School districts, county and state officials refuse to broadly test students in order to prevent the true picture of the pandemic from being known.

These moves are not accidental but rather comprise a targeted campaign to prevent people from knowing the full extent of COVID-19 outbreaks in schools as new and more contagious variants are taking hold in the population.

The entire political establishment, the mainstream media and

the unions, which falsely claim to represent teachers, collectively push the falsehood that it is “safe” to reopen schools. This is a criminal policy; this is social murder.

Philadelphia is completing the process of reopening all of its Pre-K to Grade 2 classrooms and has set a plan to resume fully in-person teaching by the end of April. In Pittsburgh, the last remaining school district in Pennsylvania to reopen, in-person classes for Pre-K to Grade 8 students begin on April 6.

The pandemic is growing, despite tens of millions of people being vaccinated. Over 22 states are reporting increases in daily infections. Pennsylvania has reached the grim milestone of over one million infections and over 25,000 deaths.

The fact that infection rates are rising even as people are getting vaccinated can only mean that the more contagious variants of COVID-19 are spreading uncontrolled and that the criminal decisions to resume in-person learning and the lifting of other restrictions on nonessential jobs and services are having a disastrous effect.

After in-person learning was resumed in Philadelphia, the 14-day average of new infections has jumped 37 percent, and the test positivity rate has increased from less than five percent to 6.8 percent.

In Springfield School District in neighboring Delaware County, where in-person teaching has resumed to four days per week, the high school has been unable to complete a full week of instruction because of COVID-19 outbreaks, which have placed 130+ students in quarantine at present. In addition, 50 teachers at Edmentum, the company the district contracted for its Virtual Academy, were summarily laid off Friday, March 19, with absolutely no warning.

New Jersey now has the fastest growing outbreak in the country, with a test positivity rate above 10 percent. In Baltimore, the 14-day average of new infections is up by 70 cases a day.

Since taking office, the Biden administration has pushed to reopen schools in order to send parents back to work making profits for Wall Street. Biden, like his predecessor Trump, cares only about the profits of the corporations and banks and is willing to risk the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people.

The record of the AFT and its state and local affiliates in facilitating school reopenings is absolutely clear.

? In Chicago, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) along with the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) went against rank-and-file teachers’ 71 percent vote to strike and worked out a deal with the city to force teachers back to work.

? In Los Angeles and Oakland, union officials defied the wishes of their membership and forced teachers back into in-person instruction.

? In Cleveland, union leaders pushed the reopening of in-person instruction, just days after 500 school building representatives voted overwhelmingly to continue virtual instruction.

? Last week, AFT President Randi Weingarten explicitly

stated, “We’re not going to fight to keep the schools closed.”

? In Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) never gave the teachers the right to vote.

? In Pittsburgh, union officials offered teachers no discussion at all about returning to classrooms.

It is vital for educators and staff to ask themselves why are the AFT and NEA playing the role of enforcers in the reopening of schools? Why, not just in Philadelphia but throughout the country, are the unions collaborating with school districts in forcing teachers back into unsafe classrooms?

The answer is that at a fundamental level, the AFT, NEA, and all their state and local affiliates like the CTU, along with unions in every industry, no longer represent the interests of their members. Over a decades-long period, they have been transformed into corporatist entities that are tools of the corporations and the state.

For their role in disciplining the working class, the union officials are rewarded with a lavish lifestyle through the dues checkoff system, while overseeing numerous pension and health care funds. In 2015, AFT President Randi Weingarten had a total compensation of \$497,118.

The Pennsylvania Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee is the only force in the state organizing the opposition of teachers to the deadly betrayals of the unions. We are part of a growing network of committees throughout the US and worldwide, which are democratically controlled by their members. These committees work to unite educators with Amazon and other transportation workers, workers in auto and basic industry, and all sections of the working class, to fight for a shutdown of schools and nonessential industry in order to contain the pandemic. We demand the following:

? For the immediate closure of all public, private and charter schools and all nonessential production to stop the spread of COVID-19.

? All decisions about school openings and closures must be overseen solely by rank-and-file educators and parents in consultation with scientific experts of their choosing.

? Full funding for internet access, technology and all resources needed for high-quality remote instruction.

? Full income protection to all parents and caregivers who stay home with their children.

? No loss of income for educators who choose to stay home.

? For free speech and the protection of whistleblowers.

Join and help build this committee, and take up these demands today by signing up at wsws.org/edsafety!



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact