

“This will be a death sentence for more teachers, students, and their families”

US teachers denounce Biden’s deadly school reopening drive amid pandemic surge

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This is the first of a multi-part series of articles featuring interviews with US educators. Part two can be read here.

Over a year has passed since the initial cases of COVID-19 were reported in the US, and total cases and deaths have reached catastrophic levels. The death toll is over 575,000 in the US, nearly one-fifth of the global total of 2.9 million deaths. An estimated 31.2 million people have officially tested positive for the virus in the US, including over 3.4 million cases among children.

The Biden administration, with the help of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the corporate media, and the teachers unions, has deepened the policies of Trump to reopen schools, universities and businesses as the pandemic continues to spread. Significantly, the push to reopen the majority of schools throughout the US is now fueling an intensifying surge of more infectious and lethal variants across the country. Recent data from Illinois and Michigan have tied surges in cases directly to outbreaks in K-12 schools.

In the face of overwhelming evidence that school reopenings are playing a major role in the surge of the pandemic, on Friday CDC director Dr. Rochelle Walensky stated during a White House briefing, “As cases increase in the community, we expect that cases identified in schools will also increase. This is not necessarily indicative of school-based transmission.” Stressing that schools will remain open, she added, “We have not yet seen evidence of significant transmission of COVID-19 within schools when schools have fully implemented CDC guidance.”

The homicidal efforts of the ruling elite to force schools open has been met with mass opposition from educators, school workers and parents. The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with teachers throughout the US regarding Biden’s push to reopen schools by April and the recent surge in cases throughout the US.

A teacher in Tennessee commented, “Biden’s mandate to reopen all schools by the end of April, when half the country has less than a month of school left, will be a death sentence for more teachers, students, and their families. His order is so completely cynical, it provides no protections such as vaccinations for school staff and students, proper ventilation in classrooms, or security for teachers who cannot return to their schools because of high-risk vulnerabilities. No attempt has been made by the Biden administration to ensure the safety of our selfless teachers and our vulnerable children.”

Speaking on the enormous dangers with the present surge, she said, “Here we are, just a little over a year since the first significant wave of COVID hit New York City, and we are seeing the cycle starting again. This time, however, COVID cases are still at dangerously high levels and the vaccine rollout has been inadequate at best. More contagious variants of the virus are outpacing immunity, yet everything is being reopened and mitigation strategies are being relaxed. The reopening of schools now will undoubtedly accelerate the fourth wave of the virus to deadly new highs.

“As COVID numbers rose in my district last fall, the justification for keeping schools open was that kids don’t get it as bad, if at all. But even if only a handful of young people got seriously ill, there would still be medical bills to pay and lost wages for parents who stayed home with a sick child. This spring, we are contending with a very contagious variant that inordinately impacts kids.

“The unintended consequences of the elites’ pathological lust for profits will be workers who are forced to stay home, not to ensure their children are getting educated virtually, but to tend severely ill children. How many parents will become overwhelmed with medical bills, hospital bills, and potentially job loss because of a sick child? How will the economy hold up as parents have no choice but to stay out of work to care for their children? As children increasingly

become ill and perhaps succumb to COVID, I believe we will begin to see a backlash against the craven policies of capitalists.”

A teacher in Detroit told the WSWS, “It has been the case that schools would close with over five percent positivity. But as more people get vaccinated there is talk of something different. What we hear now is five to seven percent positivity rate would close schools.

“There is a lot of pressure being put on families right now to get the kids back in school. I think Detroit parents are more wary even than parents in the suburbs because of what happened early on. I hear parents saying, ‘we don’t want our kids in school’ especially with the rising numbers here in Michigan. Teachers have been able to get vaccinated but the children have not. So there is also the question, will the kids be getting it in school and taking it home to their families? I don’t know what they will do with this new variant taking off.”

Amy, a teacher in Norfolk, Virginia, noted, “I’m shocked. I thought when we got rid of Trump we would have more workers’ rights. I’m shocked that Biden’s first thing was to open up the schools. I’m extremely shocked that we opened up the schools in Norfolk prior to having full vaccination. I couldn’t understand why all of a sudden it was such a huge push to open up when we were so close to being fully vaccinated. After 52 weeks of being closed what’s four more weeks?”

Kuheha, a public school teacher in Hawaii with nearly 20 years of teaching experience, said of Biden’s push to reopen schools amid the surge of the pandemic, “It’s a mistake. One of my colleagues said that an acting principal, who also has over 20 years as a teacher, warned that COVID is coming. So get ready, especially because the reopening of tourism has made her location, Lahaina, a tourist magnet, a hotspot. That vice principal won’t publicly disagree with the Department of Education’s position to reopen and compromised safety measures, but her warning says otherwise... I support the shutdown of schools and non-essential workplaces, especially tourism, to contain the pandemic. Every teacher knows how a non-fatal cold virus or even uku [head lice] spreads like wildfire in the classroom without preventive measures.”

Alycia, a high school teacher with 15 years in Volusia County, Florida, wrote, “The fact that we are experiencing our ‘fourth wave’ of infection increases means something terrible has changed. While Americans have become a bit more lax as vaccines roll out, we have also seen schools reopening in areas where students had been learning virtually. There seems to be more confusion, not less, over how infectious children are. It seems that we do not definitively know, given that schools have been closed, and

states that have reopened do not accurately report infections or quarantines. We have no idea how this has impacted student learning. Biden has tried to be effective with vaccinations, but he has pushed for reopening despite the dangers and lack of knowledge.

“In my district, we require masks, provide synchronous learning (which is a joke) and teachers are given sanitizer to spray desks with. The cleaning has been questioned many times and the school I work in has been on the list of reported infections almost constantly. Quarantines aren’t reported at all and it seems a third of the class is out every day. Still, what’s done is done. If I were a school district superintendent in an area that has been virtual all year, I would simply maintain that. In Florida, the school year is almost over. I have long said that my district in Volusia will let teachers die at their desks, and whether it is from starvation or COVID that kills them is of no consequence to our leaders.”

Michael Hull, a former teacher in Texas and the founder of the Facebook group “Teachers Against Dying,” said, “Clearly, there is a link between school reopening and the rise of pediatric cases, along with the prevalence of new variants of coronavirus. Like his predecessor, Biden serves at the behest of Wall Street and large corporate donors. Back in November, his pandemic task force leader, Dr. Michael Osterholm, called for a lock-down and stimulus for working families. The stock market reacted negatively, so of course they reverted right back to the false ‘safe school’ narrative.

“The consequences of this deference to the owner class, who need a subsidized daycare for their employees, has been deadly. While the Democrats might be preferable to the increasingly fascist Republicans, the most one can hope for (even with super-majorities and a clear mandate from the American people to implement reform) is the Heritage Foundation’s corporate health care plan. Through their inaction and corporatism, they create the conditions for fascistic elements on the right to flourish.”

To be continued



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