

Oppose the firing of Mitchell High School educators in Colorado!

Texas Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
27 April 2021

The Texas Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee demands that the Colorado Department of Education and the District 11 Board of Education immediately rescind the layoff of all teachers and schools staff at Mitchell High School in Colorado Springs.

Over 100 educators and staff members were notified in January that school administrators were laying them all off at the end of the school year and forcing any staff who wish to remain to re-apply for their own jobs. This is not just an attack on Mitchell High School educators, but a clear threat to all the state's educators, as it creates a precedent for mass layoffs.

In the face of this clear assault on educators, absolutely no effort has been made by the Colorado Education Association (CEA) to mobilize their 39,000 members against this action. Instead, local union officials effectively endorsed the action by telling Mitchell High School teachers to look for work elsewhere in case they were not rehired. The National Education Association (NEA), the CEA's parent union, has also not lifted a finger in defense of the Mitchell High School teachers.

These very same unions have sanctioned the reopening of schools in Colorado in the middle of a pandemic. This has led to an outbreak of COVID-19 cases in Colorado schools, which are currently the leading source of infections according to the state's website. As of April 23, there were 90 active outbreaks linked to schools.

Hundreds of educators have died from COVID-19 across the US, with the most recent count on Education Week putting the total at 924 active and retired educator deaths. Of these, at least 260 had a clear connection to school reopenings.

The Mitchell High School firings take place in a state

with a Democratic governor, state House of Representatives and state Senate. According to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) rating of schools—which the state determines by standardized tests, graduation and drop-out rates, college entrance exams and the rate at which standardized test scores improve—Mitchell is one of many schools that fall under the “priority improvement” designation. Along with “turnaround” schools, those in the “priority improvement” designation are required to decide “on a course of action for chronically low-performing schools and districts.” As of 2021, around 150 schools fall into these categories, referred to as the “accountability clock” in official CDE literature.

Under the designation “priority improvement,” officials are able to “Grant innovation status to provide flexibility from certain state and local rules.” What this means is removing state and local protections for teachers' jobs, placing schools under corporate governance, transforming institutions into charters, closing schools, and reorganizing districts—in other words, targeting teachers and benefiting for-profit entities.

The alleged concern for the education of children by local, state and federal politicians, which they use as justification for all manner of attacks, is fraudulent. The spread of COVID-19 among children and the general population is clearly linked to in-person learning and the deplorable conditions in schools, which everyone knows cannot possibly fulfill even the constantly eroding CDC guidelines for “safe schooling.”

The layoff of teachers and mad drive to keep open and reopen schools in the midst of the pandemic is an assault on the education of the working class, as teachers' struggles to provide the highest-quality education to all children are undermined, and schools

are increasingly turned into baby-sitting centers in order to bolster the profits of the financial elite.

In the interests of educators, parents, students and the working class as a whole, the Texas Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee advances the following demands:

All Mitchell High School workers laid off must be hired back with all the benefits and seniority that they had previously! This blatant attack on the entire faculty and staff at one school will be replicated in schools and districts across the US and globally, and must be rescinded.

Remove the “priority improvement” designation and the “accountability clock”! No to privatization or any other schemes that attack public education! Mitchell High School is one of many schools being attacked under the state’s “accountability clock,” which has nothing to do with “improving learning outcomes” but is rather a tool to attack schools. As such, it should be removed.

For the full funding of schools! For decades, school funding has been undermined, with the ruling class now treating schools not as institutions to develop young people’s intellect, knowledge and creativity, but as mere babysitting centers, so that they can continue to produce profit from parents in factories and workplaces. High quality public education is a social right. Class sizes must be reduced and thousands of teachers and aides hired to facilitate this, with full funding provided for remote education until the pandemic is contained.

Pay raises for educators! Education workers must have at least a 40 percent raise and yearly raises tracking with inflation. Teachers in Colorado are paid an average of \$53,000 a year in a state with a relatively high cost of living, with many teachers and support staff paid far less, and even forced to take second or third jobs, while billionaires in Colorado have become nearly \$10 billion richer since March 2020, according to *Forbes*.

Shut down in-person schools and non-essential workplaces until it is safe to reopen, as determined by rank-and-file educators and trusted scientists, with no loss of income for workers! The claims of a “safe reopening” have been proven to be false with the explosion of coronavirus in schools following reopenings in Illinois, Michigan, and Colorado. For the

health, safety and dignity of teachers, students and their parents, in-person education must be halted until it is deemed safe by the rank-and-file safety committees working with trusted scientists and public health experts. All medical accommodations made by educators must be accepted without exception, and educators afforded as many sick days as needed at full pay. Those forced to quit because of the dangers of working in-person during a pandemic must be allowed to return to their jobs at their previous pay, with all the benefits and accruals they had. No one should have to choose between their life and their livelihood.

Full income protection for parents staying home! Parents who cannot work because they are staying home taking care of their children must be provided full income. Unemployment and other forms of assistance must be increased and extended for those who are out of work, and a permanent moratorium put in place on evictions and home foreclosures.

For the elimination of standardized testing! Standardized testing is used as a tool for attacking public education and for victimizing teachers, not promoting the well-being of students.

We appeal to all educators, parents and students at Mitchell High School to build a rank-and-file safety committee and adopt these demands, in unity with our committee and an expanding network of such committees internationally. These committees of necessity must be independent of the unions and both big business parties. To get involved, go to wsws.org/edsafety.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact