

Oregon middle school teacher dies from COVID-19 within days of school reopening

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The Oregon Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee will be hosting a meeting with our sister committees across the West Coast at 2:00p.m. PDT on Saturday, May 22. We will discuss a strategy to fight for remote learning until the pandemic is contained in order to save lives. Register today and invite your coworkers and friends!

A beloved sixth and seventh grade language arts teacher, Samantha Fox, 46, died from COVID-19 last Saturday, May 8, in Estacada, Oregon. She passed away one week after contracting the virus, with no underlying health conditions. She had taught in the district for 20 years and leaves behind her mother, husband and two teenage sons.

Roger Cloud, Samatha's ex-husband, told local press, "You can't go anywhere in Estacada without someone coming up to talk to her." Her mother, Mary Beck, cried as she said that Samantha "took care of everyone. The entire family loved her dearly." She added that Samantha always had "a big smile" and was "fun to be with."

Fox's death marks the first recorded death of a teacher by COVID-19 in Oregon. Other education workers in the state have also died from COVID-19, including a volunteer for the North Clackamas School District who died in December, and a Joseph Charter School bus driver who died in September.

In recent weeks, case rates in Oregon and Washington have outpaced the national average. This comes in the aftermath of the March 5 issuance of an executive order by Democratic Governor Kate Brown demanding the reopening of schools, making Oregon one of the last states to resume in-person learning in the face of enormous opposition among educators.

Estacada School District has tried to absolve itself from responsibility for Fox's death, while the media

has seized on the fact that she was unvaccinated when she contracted COVID-19. Fox's last day teaching in-person was April 27. According to a spokeswoman for the district, 60 students have been told to quarantine. This number has been refuted by sources from within the school district, stating that by May 3 there are over 237 students in quarantine.

In their attempt to cover up the spread of the disease, a district spokeswoman said there is "no evidence" of spread in any of the schools even though cases continue to rise, and almost 11 percent of the district's students are under quarantine.

An educator who worked at the same school as Samantha noted on social media that on April 26, when schools fully reopened, two students and one staff member tested positive, which was reported to the Oregon Department of Education (ODE). However, by May 3 there were 14 students and two staff who tested positive, but this data was not recorded on the May 5 ODE report. This same source insisted that the principal of Samantha's school had tried to convince the students in Samantha's class that they had been infected outside the school.

Even though infection rates in Clackamas County have been in the "very high" category since April 10, the Estacada School District resumed fully in-person learning with three-foot social distancing on April 26. In doing so, they followed the pseudo-scientific guidelines issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and supported by all the teachers unions.

The ODE claimed that schools with a case rate of over 200 would have to resort to six-foot social distancing, but even this wholly inadequate guideline was ignored by the district. From the period of April 18 to May 1, the case rate in Clackamas County was 283.4

per 100,000, far above the 200 mark. From April 4 to May 5, the case rate exceeded 200 per 100,000, which should have necessitated abandoning the three-foot distancing guideline for six feet.

Local news outlets have attempted to blame Samantha for her own death, despite the fact that Oregon Governor Kate Brown and the ODE have done everything possible to spread the lie that schools are safe for in-person learning. Throughout the state, only 35.8 percent of adults are vaccinated, while virtually no young students have received a vaccination.

Commenting on the media's attempt to blame Samantha, a long-term substitute teacher in Oregon reached out to the *World Socialist Web Site* and wrote: "Most students are unvaccinated, and the biggest growth in cases now are among younger adults. When students become infected they can spread it anywhere ... to other students and school staff, who then take this home to families and communities. This is all about concern over spread ... so yes, blaming the teacher is a huge distraction."

The Clackamas Education Association has so far remained silent on this tragedy. The union waged no struggle whatsoever against the murderous return to in-person instruction. Most Oregon teachers unions fall under the authority of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), whose President Randi Weingarten gave a one-hour speech Thursday advocating the full resumption of in-person learning, stating, "There is no doubt: Schools must be open. In person. Five days a week."

The long-term substitute teacher continued, writing: "Samantha's death shines a very sad light on just why schools never should have reopened for in-person learning. Governor Brown put profit, politics and economics over lives and health. Our national unions betrayed us as they pushed for 'so-called' safe openings. There was never any such thing. Hundreds of COVID cases are reported each week in Oregon schools ... in students and staff."

This educator highlighted the total irrationality of the reopening drive, commenting, "While indoor gathering capacities correctly retain restrictions, schools are exempt ... it seems sacrificing our educators, children, and their families is not a problem for our state leadership."

It is not possible to know precisely the number of

educators who have succumbed to the virus since schools have reopened, with no federal tracking program ever established. *Education Week* has tracked 937 active and retired K-12 educators and personnel who have succumbed to COVID-19, undoubtedly a significant undercount.

The long-term impacts on children are incalculable. A staggering 10 to 15 percent of infected children suffer from "long COVID" symptoms, including fatigue, muscle and joint pain, headaches, insomnia, respiratory problems and heart palpitations.

Across the country in numerous states, schools are the number one source of COVID-19 outbreaks, with the state of Michigan bluntly admitting in the first week of March that schools are the source of the largest outbreaks. Similar figures have been cited in Minnesota, Colorado, Pennsylvania and other states.

The school districts, both capitalist parties and the teachers unions have conspired against the lives and health of teachers, students and the working class more broadly. The policies advanced by the ruling class make containing and eradicating the virus a scientific impossibility.

What is necessary is the building of new forms of organization, rank-and-file committees, to combat the homicidal opening of schools and workplaces. These committees, which are being formed across the US and globally, must unite workers across the world as broadly as possible. We urge all educators, parents and students in Oregon who wish to fight for these policies to sign up today to join the Oregon Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee .



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