

Oppose the cancellation of remote learning in New York City and worldwide!

New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
26 May 2021

The New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee condemns the decision by New York City's Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio to prematurely end remote learning this fall in the largest school district in the US.

This decision, which was followed by a similar announcement in Los Angeles, is meant to set a precedent for all Democrat-led cities to fully resume in-person learning before the pandemic is contained. It coincides with the rapid lifting of all COVID-19 mitigation measures, including masking of children and adults in public indoor spaces, and the full reopening of non-essential public venues, including sports arenas and movie theaters, as part of a propaganda campaign to portray the pandemic as over.

There is enormous opposition to these policies. In New York City, parents have kept roughly 600,000 students learning safely at home, defying the enormous pressure by the politicians and the media to send them back into schools.

The horrific experience of the working class in India, across Latin America and even in wealthier countries such as Japan shows that the pandemic remains a dire threat to the health and safety of the international working class.

By official tallies, roughly 3.5 million people have died from COVID-19 worldwide, with 12,091 deaths on May 25 alone. Over 606,000 have officially died in the US, and despite the vaccination effort, the seven-day moving average of daily new infections in the US stands at roughly 25,000. On average, 550 people are dying each day from COVID-19 across the country. All of these figures are widely recognized as huge underestimates, with the *Economist* recently placing the global death toll at 10.2 million people.

De Blasio's plan to fully reopen schools does not call for students to be vaccinated, and so far just over half of all New York City teachers have been vaccinated, according to the *New York Times*. While the city brags that the citywide test positivity rate has hovered at one percent recently, the lowest level since last September, millions have not forgotten that those low rates were followed by a steep climb in late October that did not begin to abate until April 2021. Positivity rates reached as high as 15 percent in some parts

of the city. According to the Department of Education's minimal testing program, 25,767 students and staff have officially tested positive for COVID-19.

The development of more contagious and potentially vaccine-resistant variants of the virus remains a threat to the world's population, including in the US. Under circumstances where less than half of the American population has been vaccinated, and a fraction of that in poorer countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa, mitigation measures must be redoubled, not abandoned, and vaccination must become a massive worldwide effort.

We oppose the efforts of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), working at the behest of the Biden administration, to relax masking requirements for vaccinated people, who may become carriers of the virus and easily spread it to the unvaccinated. Since no proof of vaccination is required, this spells disaster. Already Walmart, Trader Joe's, Whole Foods and Walgreens have abandoned nationwide masking. We also oppose the CDC's decision to stop investigating mild cases of COVID-19.

Similarly, we oppose the opening of theaters to full capacity by Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo and the dropping of mask requirements for children in city summer programs by de Blasio.

All of these actions by the Democratic Party are motivated by an interest to fully reopen the economy as quickly as possible in order to maximize profits for Wall Street, regardless of the cost to human life. The *New York Times* put this most plainly, writing, "Many parents will also be able to return to work without supervising their children's online classes, which could prompt the revitalization of entire industries and neighborhoods."

Revitalization for whom? Over the past year, the world's billionaires saw their wealth grow by 60 percent in the "greatest acceleration of wealth in history," according to *Forbes* magazine. But the greed of the capitalist corporations and financiers is insatiable. The working class must churn out ever more profits, even if the risk is sickness and death.

As he has for the past 16 months, de Blasio is leaving

science behind and replacing it with what amounts to state lies in service to Wall Street. During a press conference on Monday, he said, “We’ve got to understand we’re leaving COVID behind. We can’t live in the grip of COVID the rest of our lives.” De Blasio is playing on the considerable exhaustion and economic distress of New York City workers, including parents and educators, that he and his party have created with an entirely insufficient and mismanaged response to the pandemic.

An especially destructive role in reopening schools has been played by the trade unions. At every turn, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) has assisted the Democratic politicians with their reopening efforts, including the dropping of any city-wide test positivity bar for closing the schools. The bureaucracy headed by President Michael Mulgrew, whose annual salary is roughly \$300,000, has run roughshod over the immense opposition among educators.

In his response to de Blasio’s ending of remote learning this fall, Mulgrew gave him his full support, saying, “There is no substitute for in-person instruction. New York City educators want their students physically in front of them.”

At the national level, American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten, former head of the UFT, stated on May 13 that, “There is no doubt: Schools must be open. In person. Five days a week.”

The attacks on the health and safety of educators, parents and students are by no means limited to the pandemic. It was recently revealed that the Metropolitan Labor Council (MLC), a body made up of representatives of all New York City municipal unions, including the UFT, will unilaterally change the current Medicare program for retirees to a cut rate, privatized program called Medicare Advantage, thereby reducing physician choice and costing retirees thousands of dollars in out-of-pocket expenses. The purpose of this union-backed privatization scheme is to save the city billions of dollars at a time when older workers are suffering immense repercussions from the pandemic.

As we have since the outset of the pandemic, the New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee insists that high-quality medical care is a social right of every single worker, whose costs must be borne by the very wealthiest Americans.

We say that the unions and the Democratic party have been completely exposed, not only by the dropping of all safety measures and declaring the pandemic over, but by their entire conduct during the last 16 months.

In August, we formed this committee to take up the fight that the unions and the Democrats opposed: for the shutting of schools, full income protection for parents that stayed at home with their children, and ample PPE for essential workers. We said that the working class must declare its

political independence from the misnamed “unions” and prepare for a general strike.

Today, new organizations of the working class, rank-and-file committees, have been founded all over the world in a number of job categories, including among educators, autoworkers and Amazon workers in the US; students in Germany; educators and transit workers in Britain; educators in Turkey, Canada and Australia; and tea plantation and health care workers in Sri Lanka. On May 1, the International Committee of the Fourth International founded the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to unite these committees and coordinate their struggles worldwide.

The IWA-RFC is at the center of the developing fight against the ruling elite’s willingness to allow the pandemic to rage. We call on all New York City educators, parents and students to join our committee, in unity with similar committees around the world organized through the IWA-RFC, which are taking up the fight to protect the safety and lives of the international working class.

We demand the following:

- Fully remote learning for educators and students until at least 80 percent of the population is fully vaccinated and the spread of the pandemic is contained, as determined by trusted epidemiologists and scientists.
- Full funding and resources for high-quality remote learning, including high-speed broadband access for all and expert technical support to train and assist educators.
- A massive expansion and international coordination of vaccination programs, to ensure that the world population is quickly and safely vaccinated. This must coincide with the implementation of programs to provide universal testing, contact tracing and the safe isolation of infected patients, to track and contain the pandemic.
- The closure of nonessential workplaces, while providing full financial and social support for parents who must stay home with children until the pandemic is contained.
- The re-implementation of all COVID-19 preventive measures, including masking and the closure of sports arena and theaters, will full support to small business owners.
- Restitution of high-quality medical care for city worker retirees.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact