

“There’s absolutely no safety for my children”

Los Angeles-area parents denounce union-backed drive to fully reopen schools

Hong Jian, Kimie Saito
4 June 2021

By the end of April, all schools within the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the second-largest district in the US with over 600,000 students, had opened for at least partial in-person learning.

The reopenings could not have taken place without the collusion of the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA), which told teachers and parents that a slight decline in coronavirus cases in April meant that schools were perfectly safe to resume in-person learning. Sham votes were conducted, telling teachers that they either voted to return under terms reached with the district or under conditions solely of the district’s choosing. No options were provided to continue remote learning.

While the UTLA and LAUSD forced teachers into classrooms knowing it would result in serious illness and death, parents and students have, for their part, largely refused to return to in-person learning. This has led to a major political fiasco for the district and by extension the Democratic Biden and Newsom administrations, which have undertaken a massive push to reopen schools to fully reopen the economy at whatever cost in suffering and death.

According to an analysis conducted by the *Los Angeles Times*, a full month after schools reopened, only 7 percent of LAUSD high school students and 30 percent of elementary students had returned to classrooms. This has led to a major push by outgoing Superintendent Austin Beutner to pressure students back into classrooms this fall while promising full-time, in-person learning for all students regardless of the state of the pandemic. “The best place for students to learn is a classroom at school,” Beutner said last week.

This effort is aided and abetted by the UTLA and

especially by its national parent union, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The AFT, with more than 1.7 million members, is launching a campaign to push children and teachers back into classrooms, entitled “Return, Recover and Reimagine: Toward A Renaissance in America’s Public Schools.”

In a May press release, AFT President Randi Weingarten falsely claimed to speak on behalf of teachers, stating, “Educators have yearned to be back in school, with their students.” Expressing the nationalist and pro-capitalist character of all the trade union bureaucracies, she added, “The United States will not be fully back until we are fully back in school. And my union is all in.”

The mad drive to reopen classrooms while more lethal variants of the coronavirus circulate worldwide, and while the US itself recently surpassed 600,000 official deaths, has provoked enormous opposition from parents, teachers and students. A recent proposal in Los Angeles to lengthen the school year was dead on arrival due to a barrage of opposition from parents and teachers. Parents themselves have also begun organizing groups online to oppose bringing their children back into unsafe classrooms.

The *World Socialist Web Site* recently spoke to a member of the Facebook group, “Our Voice: Communities for Quality Education Group.” The group description states, “OurVoice is a new bilingual (English/Spanish) Facebook Group for parents, students, educators, education leaders, and everyone who is interested in shaping the future of public education.” They have stated that the government, school district and unions did not consult with or listen to parents when they decided to reopen schools for in-

person learning for the final two months of the school year.

The WSWs spoke with Ms. Franco, who has four children, two of whom are students in South Gate within LAUSD. One child, 12, is attending South Gate Middle School, and her son John, 16, attends South Gate High School. An older son is serving in the Marines.

Recently she attended a Zoom meeting featuring a representative of state Superintendent of Instruction Tony Thurmond's office, who was trying to convince her that parents should send their children to school. He said, "The schools are safer than your home."

This directly contradicted comments made by UCLA pediatrician Jennifer Brazier Peralta, an advisor to LAUSD Superintendent Beutner, who recently stated, "Children can still get very, very sick from COVID."

Ms. Franco said the official's statement angered her, noting, "I told him, 'Don't tell me your schools are more safe than my house, especially when I've been volunteering at more than 700 schools. I have a lot of evidence that can prove what conditions are really like inside the campuses.'"

Parents are concerned not only with the COVID-19 pandemic, but also the epidemic of school shootings, including in districts like LAUSD. Ms. Franco said, "There's absolutely no safety for my children. They have been victims of bullying. There are gangs, fights and drugs. Of course, my kids are worried. That's why we decided to continue school from home. There is no safety. My daughter just texted that another South Gate student got shot on April 30. His name was Luis Gutierrez, and he was 17 years old."

Ms. Franco said she had attended a number of meetings with school officials, and had made a point of asking what would happen if children brought the virus home and infected their parents? She said, "Nobody knows how to answer me. Nobody wants to bear the consequences."

Another parent from OurVoice told the *LA Times*, "It would be devastating to see my daughter Ashley sick." She added, "But if she is asymptomatic and she infects me without knowing it, like many children, then if the cancer did not end my life, the coronavirus could kill me... Being a Latina, being low-income, living in a poor neighborhood, having chronic illnesses and having only one income brings me closer to death."

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) has been thoroughly inadequate on campuses, much like school supplies during normal times, leaving teachers to once again fend for themselves and their students. Not only were teachers not provided with adequate PPE, but air filtration systems were not upgraded, and in some cases didn't even work.

As of this writing, there have been 3.78 million COVID-19 cases in California and 63,013 deaths. Of those, there have been 1.24 million cases and 24,201 deaths in Los Angeles County alone.

According to the Los Angeles County Department of Health (LACDH), on June 4 there were 234 new cases in LA County with 14 people succumbing to the virus, while there were 253 hospitalizations. As of May 28, 73 percent of residents over 65 have received both doses of the vaccine. Among those 16 and over, LA County has just reached 53 percent.

In other words, the population of Los Angeles, like every other region of the US and the world, is nowhere near the estimated 80 percent threshold needed for true immunity even if natural immunity from previously-infected individuals is taken into account.

On May 22, the LACDH issued a press release which declared that the B.1.1.7 UK variant had surpassed the California B.1.427/429 variants as the dominant strain in LA County. They stated that 53 percent of the specimens analyzed were of the UK variant and none were of the California variant. Six new cases of the P.1 Brazilian variant and one of the B.1.351 South African variant were also detected.

The LACDH has stated that LA County will ease capacity and distancing requirements along with the state of California on June 15, as well as adopting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) revised masking requirements for vaccinated individuals. This in practice universally lifts mask requirements, as there is no method to determine whether a person is vaccinated or not.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)