

As de Blasio scraps all remote learning options for this fall

At least 157 New York City summer school classrooms closed due to COVID-19 outbreaks

Sandy English
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The New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee will meet this Tuesday, July 27, at 7 p.m. EDT to develop a plan to mobilize parents and educators against the full reopening of schools in September. We urge educators in New York, Connecticut and New Jersey to register here and invite your coworkers and friends.

Since the start of summer school in New York City earlier this month, 157 classrooms and two school buildings have been closed due to outbreaks of COVID-19. Summer school has become a test-run by the political establishment for the full reopening of schools on September 13. Normally, summer session is remedial, but this year the administration of Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio opened it up to all students, claiming that all students suffered learning deficits during remote learning. The program, called Summer Rising and funded largely with federal pandemic funding, has already enrolled over 200,000 students, the largest summer school program in the US.

The growing numbers of infections give the lie to the much-ballyhooed claims of de Blasio, New York's Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo and the rest of the political and media establishment, that the pandemic is over. The summer school infections demonstrate that the current plan of the de Blasio administration to mandate in-person learning for all of the roughly 1.1 million students in the largest public school system in the US this September will be a disaster.

The vast majority of New York City students will still be unvaccinated when school buildings reopen this fall. Packing students in the city's old and poorly-ventilated buildings, with the Delta variant spreading rapidly, will inevitably produce a surge in infections among children which will once again spread throughout the city.

One New York City educator who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* encapsulated the dangers posed by the full

reopening of city schools this fall, saying, "We should close the schools to quell the rising tide of COVID. It'll be many times worse than last year if we stay open and nothing else changes to affect the outcome."

One school in Brooklyn, P.S. 207 Elizabeth G. Leary, was closed last week because 11 classrooms have had COVID-19 infections. The neighborhood where the school is located, Bergen Beach, has a positivity rate of 3.4 percent. Citywide, the test positivity rate has risen to roughly 2 percent, while reported cases have increased by 205 percent in the last two weeks. New York state as a whole has seen an increase of approximately the same percentage, although state positivity rates have usually been regarded as less reliable underestimates than those made in the city. Last week, an overnight camp in a rural area about 100 miles north of the city reported 31 infections in children aged 7 to 11.

Despite the growth in infections, New York City and state continue to relax COVID-19 mitigation measures. Theaters and restaurants have reopened and large gatherings are now permitted. For its public hospitals, the city has mandated a choice of vaccine or weekly testing for its employees, but there are virtually no other institutions, including schools, that have implemented similar requirements. Masking remains optional in most public venues. On Thursday, in-person appearances became required once more for civil marriages. The city is also planning a program of large concerts in Central Park to promote illusions of "normalcy" in the city's population.

The gathering of roughly 200,000 children in summer school, the majority unvaccinated, would not have been possible without the connivance of the pro-corporate United Federation of Teachers (UFT), which represents over 70,000 school employees including teachers and paraprofessionals.

Not only has the union backed every attempt of the

Democratic Party to force educators back into school during the pandemic, but it is also actively promoting the city's plan for a full return to in-person learning this September. The UFT has initiated a new program that will actually pay educators from its own funds to visit the homes of students and urge them to return to school.

One New York City educator remarked on the role of the UFT: "It's disappointing. This union acts like management, when it's management they're supposed to be fighting on behalf of their membership. Workers aren't supposed to be fighting their union to get the protections that they need in order to do their job. But that's what it's become."

Among educators and parents, there is enormous opposition to the city and union's push to fully reopen schools. Last Wednesday, parents rallied in the Bronx to demand the continuation of a remote learning option for students, which has been ruled out by the Department of Education (DOE).

One high school teacher in Brooklyn told the WWS, "I feel like their priorities are screwed up. They're continuing on the path they were on last year, proceeding with no plan and hoping for the best. Their entire M.O. seems to be to never take any action that might spook either the commercial real estate industry or the hospitality industry. I think de Blasio believes his job is to pretend everything is normal in order to lure businesses back to midtown. For that reason, I think he is afraid to make a headline for offering a remote option for students. As for UFT leadership, they seem to be taking their cues from de Blasio (per usual)."

Another Brooklyn educator, raising concerns about recent Israeli data that shows that the effects of some vaccines may wear off over time, noted that this "has serious implications for this fall in schools. De Blasio, the DOE and UFT treat COVID vaccination as if it is sterilizing and doesn't deteriorate over time. But anybody vaccinated in spring will have very little or no protection by fall."

The first teacher quoted above added, "Unfortunately, I do not think increased COVID case counts will amount to any system-wide school closures under current city standards, which is frightful, as the silent effect of long term COVID in asymptomatic children is horrific.

"The city is a tale of two cities—in which rich and privileged families can sway the mayor's hold on an entire shuttered school system and are put high above the needs of the working masses, while poor working class folk who acknowledge that while school is doomed to reopen, ask for the tiniest of accommodations for their underprivileged children—and yet, still can't manage to get it.

"What will finally force the DOE to change their attitude is the amount of pressure working class parents apply. Remember that the DOE traditionally ignores the will of

working class parents. And that the same DOE played the COVID waiting game, rather than acting immediately to correct ventilation problems with MERV-13 filtration.

"Cuomo and de Blasio are putting dollars before deaths. Revenue is all that matters to them. Getting workers back into NYC to spend money on commuting, lunches, business meetings, etc. ... that's all that matters. Workers are seen as walking dollar signs, not people with children and families who need to protect their own. They've sold working families out to fill the holes in their budget gaps."

Commenting on the national political situation, they stated, "Biden is no better. He's a rudderless ship drifting in the wind. His stimulus program is already showing signs of failing and he has no bullets left to fire. It's going to end badly for him, with either a prolonged recession or a depression just in time for reelection. The CDC has caved under political pressure and lifted restrictions that should have stayed present."

The campaign to open schools and declare the pandemic over will encounter growing resistance from educators, parents and students. The WWS has set up Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees to do what the corporatist trade unions and capitalist politicians refuse to: shut down the schools and demand social supports for parents and all nonessential workers to stay at home with their children until the majority of the population has been vaccinated and the pandemic is suppressed. New York City educators, parents and students who wish to take up this struggle should sign up today.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wws.org/contact