

New York City must provide fully remote learning to protect children and the broader population!

New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
28 July 2021

The following statement was passed unanimously at a meeting of the New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee on Tuesday, July 27. We urge all educators, parents and students in the tri-state area who agree with this statement to sign up today to join and help build rank-and-file committees in your schools and neighborhoods.

New York City public schools and schools around the state are slated to fully reopen for face-to-face instruction this September, under conditions in which the COVID-19 pandemic is surging throughout the world with the global spread of the highly infectious Delta variant. New York City has seen a 136 percent increase in daily new cases over the past two weeks, and the test positivity rate has risen to 2 percent in the same period. The state has seen a 159 percent increase in daily new cases in the same period.

Children are particularly at risk from the Delta variant, which is forecast to account for nearly 100 percent of cases in New York City by mid-August. Children's hospitals in Arkansas, Missouri and a growing number of states are reporting the highest numbers of children hospitalized with COVID-19 since last winter's surge, while for the week ending July 15 there were an additional 236 children hospitalized with major complications from the virus.

Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio has announced that he will mandate mask wearing in schools, but this will undoubtedly be insufficient in the crowded conditions of New York City school buildings, particularly with the Delta variant. Already at least 157 classrooms in the system's Summer Rising program have been closed because of COVID-19 infections.

Throughout the pandemic, the teachers unions at the national, state and local levels have been accomplices

with the Democrats and Republicans in opening schools. The AFT, UFT and NYSUT have sought to keep educators at work and students in classrooms. The recently announced UFT program to send educators door to door to encourage parents to send their children to school only highlights the role that the union plays in supporting the interests of the Democrats and behind them Wall Street.

In large part the labor shortage that major corporations face now is due to the fact that parents have needed to stay home with their children during the pandemic, a practice which they are ruthlessly seeking to put an end to immediately. The drive to reopen schools this fall coincides with the ending of the federal moratorium on evictions this Saturday, July 31, and the cutoff of federal unemployment benefits on September 6, placing enormous financial pressures on parents to send their children to unsafe schools and return themselves to unsafe workplaces.

It is for these reasons that the New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee calls on parents, teachers and students to form independent rank-and-file committees at every school throughout the district to prevent the resumption of face-to-face learning in the fall. We believe a general strike of city workers is necessary to stop the spread of the Delta variant among the population.

We demand that all parents who must stay at home with children receive an adequate stipend, to be paid for by heavy taxation on the billionaires. We demand that high-speed internet and computer hardware be supplied to every child, also to be funded by the wealth of the richest New Yorkers.

This struggle to defend the health of working people must include the defense of retired city workers from the downgrading of their health care to semi-privatized and

cut-rate programs, such as Medicare Advantage. As early as 2018, this plan was negotiated behind the backs of workers by the de Blasio administration and a coalition of the city's municipal labor unions in the Municipal Labor Council.

The health care of workers, who have sacrificed years of their lives to public service, must be guaranteed every bit as much as in-service workers, students and the entire working-class population. We support the establishment of universal, high-quality health care for every working person, but we believe that this struggle must open up with the defense of retiree health care and safety from the pandemic. We demand the immediate restoration of the Medicare Bridge plans and rejection of Medicare Advantage.

In unity with rank-and-file committees across the US and globally, our committee issues the following demands to guarantee the health and safety of all New Yorkers and the broader population:

- Fully remote learning for educators and students until at least 90 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's 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 their children until the pandemic is contained.

- The re-implementation of all COVID-19 preventive measures, including masking and the closure of sports arenas and theaters, with full support to small business owners.

- Restitution of high-quality medical care for all city worker retirees.

The time is ripe to take up a fight for this program. Workers all over the world are now on an offensive against the employers. We believe that the courage and determination shown by the Volvo Trucks workers at the New River Valley plant in Dublin, Virginia, in their recent strike, and the fight taken up by the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee to spread the strike from

Detroit to Ghent, Belgium, and resist the sabotage of the strike by the pro-corporate United Auto Workers "union" shows the way forward for our struggle in New York.

This committee believes that the unity of in-service and retired educators, parents and students must be carried out on an international scale. We are affiliated with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), founded on May 1, which includes autoworkers, health care workers and Amazon workers all over the world. Rank-and-file committees of educators have been created not only in New York City, Chicago, Alabama, the West Coast, Michigan, Texas, and Tennessee, but also in Canada, Turkey, Germany, the United Kingdom, Sri Lanka and Australia.

In particular, this committee sends its solidarity to striking educators in Sri Lanka. We lend our support to the Teacher-Student-Parent Safety Committee (TSPSC), which is seeking to mobilize educators, parents and students against the sellout by the teachers unions.

The warning issued by the TSPSC and the Sri Lankan Socialist Equality Party could have been made about any recent struggle of workers in the world: "Despite the government's intransigence and threats, the unions continue to insist that pressure will force it to bow to teachers' demands. They are deliberately limiting industrial action, in preparation for shutting down the struggle."

We fully endorse this and pledge to redouble our efforts to stop the opening of schools in New York City and throughout the tri-state region, as well as the assault on retiree health care, by building a movement of the working class truly independent of the establishment political parties and the trade unions.



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