

Children's lives matter! Stop school reopenings!

Evan Blake
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Over the past six weeks, daily new COVID-19 infections have surged more than tenfold in the United States, with children under the age of 12—who are not eligible for vaccination—among the most threatened. Children now account for roughly 20 percent of all COVID-19 cases in the US, overwhelming pediatric hospitals throughout the country.

Dr. Aileen Marty, an infectious disease expert at Florida International University, told CNN Sunday, “Our children’s hospitals are completely overwhelmed.” She added, “Our pediatricians, the nursing, the staff are exhausted, and the children are suffering. And it is absolutely devastating ... our children are very much affected. We’ve never seen numbers like this before.”

Last week, Dr. Mark Kline, physician-in-chief at Children's Hospital New Orleans, similarly stated, “I am as worried about our children today as I have ever been.”

Epidemiologist Dr. Eric Feigl-Ding recently warned, “Let this sink in—1 percent of all #COVID19 confirmed cases in kids lead to hospitalization. Is that really an ‘acceptable’ level of kids morbidity that we will allow in society?”

In an Op-Ed published Sunday in the *Guardian*, Dr. Jorge A. Caballero wrote: “Given everything we know about the Delta variant and long Covid in children, it is immoral to send unvaccinated kids, teachers, and staff into classrooms. The Delta variant dramatically increases the risk of long-term disability or death for everyone, but especially for the 73 million children living in America. We need to adjust our back-to-school plans immediately.”

Despite the growing surge of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations throughout the country, including among children, the Biden administration is doubling down on its demand that schools fully reopen. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona stated Sunday on CBS’s *Face the Nation*, “50 million students across the country are ready to return to school in-person.” Many school districts have

already fully reopened in recent weeks, with the vast majority of districts slated to do so by mid-September with very limited or no options for remote learning.

On Friday, White House press secretary Jen Psaki stated bluntly, “We’re not going to lock down our economy or our schools because our country is in a much stronger place than when we took office.” She added, “We are not going back. We are not turning back the clock.”

The Democrats’ ruthless drive to reopen schools has prompted the Republicans to further scrap the most basic scientific measures, with eight Republican-led states banning any form of mask mandates in schools. The most fascistic policies have been implemented in Florida and Texas, with the former imposing financial penalties on any districts that implement mask mandates and the latter entirely eliminating contact tracing or quarantining of students in schools where outbreaks occur.

In response to the life-and-death struggle facing educators, parents and students, the teachers unions are once again dutifully serving the interests of the financial elite at the expense of their dues-paying members.

Speaking on NBC’s *Meet the Press* Sunday morning, American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten stated, “I’ve been around the country this week. I was in Florida, in Missouri as we’re pushing a full-court press for back-to-school.” Both Florida and Missouri have been among the worst-impacted states during the recent surge of the Delta variant, with hundreds of children hospitalized in each state in recent weeks.

When asked about teachers’ concerns over the efforts by eight Republican-led states to ban mask mandates in schools, Weingarten evaded the question, stating “They’re scared ... but they also know—let me just be clear. The number one priority is to get kids to be back in school.”

One of the earliest tropes of the COVID-19 pandemic, which the teachers unions have always accepted, is that

children are largely unaffected by the coronavirus and are unlikely to infect others.

Last December, New York City's Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio unilaterally reopened schools by falsely claiming, "We know first of all studies consistently show that younger kids are having less of a negative experience, and there's less concern about the spread when it comes to younger kids."

Immediately upon Biden's inauguration, Democrat-led cities and states across the US, with the full backing of the unions, advanced these same claims to fully reopen school. Biden spearheaded this campaign, lying to a second grader on national television by stating, "You're not likely to be able to be exposed to something and spread it to mommy or daddy." He added, "Kids don't get ... COVID very often. It's unusual for that to happen."

These lies, repeated ad nauseam by the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Wall Street Journal* and the rest of corporate media, had been scientifically disproven by mid-summer 2020 and are now totally exploded by the impacts of the highly transmissible and virulent Delta variant.

But the drive to reopen schools has never been based on science. It is, rather, motivated solely by the economic interests of the financial oligarchy. If children are not at school, then their parents have to stay home to watch them and are unable to work and produce profits for the major corporations. This has been a major concern throughout the pandemic, with Biden's top economic advisor Brian Deese recently stating that one of the primary factors behind the ongoing "labor shortage" has been a lack of "childcare and school, particularly for parents of school-aged kids."

The full reopening of schools, even with universal masking by staff and students, will lead to massive outbreaks due to the extreme transmissibility of the Delta variant. The same policies are being implemented by capitalist governments throughout the world, creating the conditions for a catastrophic surge of the virus globally and the development of more infectious, lethal and vaccine-resistant variants.

Hundreds of millions of children worldwide are at risk of becoming infected and spreading the virus throughout their communities in the coming months, further compounding the immense suffering and death from COVID-19. Already, an estimated 1.5 million children worldwide have lost a parent or guardian from COVID-19. Under these conditions, the continued advocacy of school reopenings is nothing less than

criminal.

The reopening of schools must be opposed by all parents, educators and students in a unified movement across the US and globally. The measures necessary to fully contain the pandemic—universal testing, contact tracing, isolation of infected patients, masking and vaccinations—must be implemented as part of a broader shutdown of all schools and nonessential workplaces to cut off the chain of transmission. If such measures were implemented on a world scale, the pandemic could be fully contained globally in a matter of months.

But such policies cut across the financial interests of the ruling class, which will continue to oppose lockdowns and all mitigation measures while cultivating the far right as a bludgeon against working-class resistance. Only through the mass intervention of the international working class, independent of the capitalist parties and their backers in the trade unions, will the measures necessary to eradicate COVID-19 be implemented.

The upper-middle-class union bureaucrats, typified by Weingarten, have proven to be utterly hostile to the interests of rank-and-file educators and all workers. They must be opposed through the building of a globally coordinated network of rank-and-file committees under the banner of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

In the US, Germany, Brazil, the UK, and every other country where schools are being reopened, the call must be made for nationwide teachers' strikes to stop this deadly campaign and mobilize the entire working class to prevent the needless suffering and deaths of children, parents and the broader population.



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