

American educators speak out against school reopenings

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Over the course of the global COVID-19 pandemic, children and teachers in schools have continually had their health put at risk by the reckless, unscientific policies of the government, as well as local offices and school districts. This summer, the Delta variant has come to be understood as profoundly dangerous and highly contagious, even among vaccinated people.

Children under 12, as of now, are unable to be vaccinated and are one of the most at-risk groups facing the Delta variant. In the first week of August, it was reported by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control, and the National Institutes of Health that more children were being hospitalized now than at any other point during the pandemic. Unvaccinated children, even if asymptomatic, could become highly effective carriers of the virus, and spread the disease to their teachers, caretakers and family members.

But the worst case scenarios are becoming increasingly common as the United States prepares to send more than 50 million mostly unvaccinated children back into schools this fall. In a warning of what is to come, the American Academy of Pediatrics reported that from July 29th to August 5th, COVID-19 cases among children increased by 93,824 cases, with children representing 15 percent of all reported cases in the United States that week.

The *World Socialist Website* spoke with educators from across the United States about the impact of the unscientific pandemic policies of officials, and what reopening means for them and their students.

After finishing a whole year of online learning, **Steve, a teacher in Northern California**, explained, “The whole campaign to reopen the schools, in-person and with no masks, is a cruel joke against teachers, students, cafeteria workers, bus drivers and families.

There are enough resources to continue with online instruction. We just completed a whole year when teachers were able to develop this kind of work. And every school district, especially LAUSD, is awash with money from COVID funds from the government.

“My main thing is why is elementary coming back? There hasn’t even been a vaccine developed for these young children under 12. The middle and high school kids have it. Come on! The kids in K-5 cannot get vaccinated. If they get it, it’s going to be an absolute disaster, not only for the kids but also for the teachers and families. Look, it’s science. This is a highly infectious disease that is hitting the population. It’s a huge tragedy. And to hear that Randi Weingarten [president of the American Federation of Teachers] is pushing it, all I’d say to her is, ‘Why don’t you come into our classrooms and do some substitute time? Why not?’ See what we’re going through.”

A special education teacher in Detroit, Michigan expressed fear about returning to school, for herself, her family and her students. “I’m confused how we can space 30 students in a class with 3 feet spacing. I’ve never had a space in a general education class. I usually go in and sit in an empty student desk. After the teacher gives the instructions I would go around and help other students. At this time, I don’t feel comfortable, nor would I be doing that. I’m at the point to where I may have to go out on medical, because I’m scared.”

“[Biden says,] ‘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?’ Screw the economy, my life is on the line. Why should teachers and students be used as bait? They are saying they don’t care about our lives. If I wanted to risk my life I would have joined the military not become a teacher.”

Kuhea, a public school teacher in Hawaii, described the reopening in her area, “The rise in coronavirus cases, 472 new cases today in Hawaii, is not surprising given the premature reopening of the islands to tourism and schools. The rush to open the economy soon after vaccinations was foolish and irresponsible. Tourists are being baited to come to Hawaii with ridiculously low air fares. It’s a stampede on the islands. The tourist industry is shamelessly rebounding at the expense of people’s well-being and safety. And so many of our students whose parents work in the tourist industry are now vulnerable.

“Public schools are advising three feet (not six feet) distancing, ‘when possible,’ which is ludicrous. Schools are in session with full classrooms. Governor David Ige has reinstated limitations on public gatherings, but there are no restrictions on the number of people traveling to the islands. Maui Mayor Victorino requested of Governor Ige and the Department of Education that in-person classroom learning be postponed but public school began as scheduled anyways.” Restrictions limiting indoor and outdoor gatherings will not apply to schools. Since K-12 schools reopened August 3, there have been at least 105 confirmed cases among staff and students in schools across the islands.”

Sandra, a middle school teacher from New York state, discussed her frustration with the lack of resources and imagination being put into online education and safe learning. “Why are we not reimagining new ways for students to learn that do not put so many people at risk of illness or death? There can be a way that students can receive childcare without putting so many teachers and other students at risk. It is essential that learning continues but there are many ways students can learn without sitting in a traditional classroom all day long, breathing in the same stagnant air. Educators should be put on a pedestal for how hard they work, how crucial they are to families and how essential they are to providing students with life-long skills, yet educators are treated like their lives do not matter.”

DJK, a teacher from Tennessee, said, “Students in my district are returning to classrooms without any COVID mitigation protocols, including a mask mandate. At our district’s opening day breakfast, the school superintendent crowed that school would reopen

to traditional learning: no masks, no hybrid instruction, no social distancing. The superintendent led the packed room of mask-less educators in cheers and applause.”

“What kind of world are we living in that we cheer the ending of safety measures that prevented countless deaths last year and would no doubt prevent more deaths as the Delta variant leads the latest surge of the pandemic and is targeting our children?”

“I can imagine no greater indication that capitalism is in crisis than when a society chooses to sacrifice the lives of its children for the sake of the economy and profits. Parents and teachers must demand that schools close to in-person instruction until COVID-19 and its increasingly virulent variants are eradicated.”

These statements illustrate the determination of teachers to fight back against the reckless subordination of human life to capitalist private profit. Educators, parents and students across the United States must oppose the deadly return to school, and demand the immediate closure of in-person schools, and the devotion of proper resources to safe, online education and support for students and their families.

We urge all educators, parents and students seeking to fight for lives over profits to sign up today to join and build a rank-and-file committee in your workplace, in unity with similar committees across the US and internationally.



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