Maryland, Pennsylvania and Ohio educators call for struggle to shut down in-person learning

Pennsylvania-Maryland-Ohio Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
15 August 2021

The rapid spread of the Delta coronavirus variant and the reopening of schools in the coming weeks will produce further death and despair. The Democrats have joined with the Republicans in pushing the reopening of schools at all costs. The National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), which no longer represent educators, have joined in the push to have teachers and students in the classrooms. This is a policy of social murder.

Our committee, comprised of rank-and-file educators from Pennsylvania, Maryland and Ohio, recognizes that only the independent struggle of the working class can fight this deadly policy and issues this statement to call upon other educators, students and parents to join us in this fight. Sign up today to get involved or send us an email to attend our next meeting.

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The Pennsylvania-Maryland-Ohio Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee urgently calls upon educators, staff, students, parents and community members to join and build rank-and-file safety committees in your school districts to fight the deadly policy of reopening schools for in-person learning.

As classes are set to resume in the coming weeks, the COVID-19 pandemic is seeing a resurgence around the world and in the United States, putting the health, safety and lives of educators, students, and our communities at risk. The Delta variant has taken hold and is infecting children and responsible for a growing number of cases among people who are fully vaccinated.

Across the world the story is the same. From Argentina to France, South Africa to Indonesia, the Delta variant has caused explosions in cases and deaths.

The United States is experiencing the same wave of infections. Since July 1, daily average cases have increased more than ten-fold. Now the COVID-19 Modeling Scenario Hub, a consortium of researchers working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is predicting upwards of 4,000 deaths per week by October in the US alone.

In areas where classes have already resumed, cases among children are skyrocketing. Within days of classes starting in Georgia and other states, hundreds of students have been sent home with COVID-19.

Democrats as well as Republicans are determined to send students back into the classrooms for in-person learning in opposition to the scientific facts. Unvaccinated children will become infected, furthering the spread of COVID-19 back into their communities and falling victim to this deadly disease themselves. Ignoring these dangers, politicians from both parties are determined to have children in school and parents at work making profits for the wealthy.

In many regions, hospital beds and pediatric wards are filling up, if they are not already filled. Growing data points to other negative impacts on children caused by COVID-19. One recent study found that 4.4 percent of children who are infected develop Long COVID, defined as having symptoms for four weeks or longer. Another study showed that the fall in IQ for children with even mild cases is on par if not worse than lead poisoning.

In Maryland, where daily new cases have climbed 10 times to over 800 a day and are going up, Governor Larry Hogan, a Republican, has stated that schools will reopen, admitting that this is an experiment with our kids.

In Pennsylvania, where daily new cases have climbed 10 times to over 1,700 a day and are going up, Governor Tom Wolf, a Democrat, has stated that he will not order a shutdown of the schools or even order that students be required to wear masks or take other basic public health measures, such as social distancing, testing and contact tracing.

In Ohio, where the seven-day average of new cases is 2,050, Republican Governor Mike DeWine says all schools will reopen and opposes taking public health measures.

It has been a year since the push to reopen schools began last fall. None of the following problems that educators identified at that time have been addressed:

- Aging buildings with broken windows
- Broken or inadequate air and ventilation systems
- No protection for educators with illness or who have family members with illnesses
- Overcrowded classrooms
- Students crammed together in old and dilapidated school

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buses for long times

Last year, when schools reopened, only a small percentage of students attended, yet the pandemic skyrocketed into the fall and winter, and hundreds of thousands died.

Now students, the majority of whom remain unvaccinated, will be crammed back into overcrowded classrooms without any safety measures, completely at the mercy of the virus. Many districts have scrapped virtual learning options altogether, while other schools have outsourced virtual learning to faceless corporations in a blatant act of privatization.

This fall now offers an even greater threat to students than a year ago. Less than a third of students over 12 have been vaccinated, and those under 12 are still not eligible. Even the safety of a vaccination is not enough, as epidemiologists warn that even with half the population fully vaccinated, the Delta variant will spread even faster than last fall.

All efforts to contain the pandemic are being abandoned in favor of reopening the economy. How many more people must die in the name of protecting profit? As educators we reject the notion that our students must be orphaned to protect the financial interests of greedy capitalists.

The response of the teachers unions to the life-and-death issues facing educators, parents and students can be described as nothing less than criminal. Last week, AFT President Randi Weingarten declared, “The number one priority is to get kids to be back in school.” NEA President Becky Pringle has fully pledged the union’s support for the reopening of in-person instruction.

The head of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT), Jerry Jordan, has said that “This union remains committed to ensuring a full, five day a week, in person program for all of our young people,” and that he is “encouraged” by the CDC guidance.

What contemptible statements! No, the top priorities must be to protect children and to fully contain the pandemic.

Weingarten, Pringle and Jordan do not represent the millions of dues-paying educators. Rather, they represent corporate America which seeks to get people back to work no matter the costs. They are fully culpable in the policies that have led to mass suffering and death.

Last spring, it was the independent action of workers in factories and communities which forced the shutdown of businesses and schools. It again will take the independent action of workers to force the closing of nonessential businesses and schools.

Last fall, we formed our committee in opposition to school reopenings and the betrayal of our unions. We worked to organize educators across the country independently of the unions, the bosses, and the rotten politicians of the Democrats and Republicans. Our fight is to build a new labor movement in which workers will fight to win what they need, not what the ruling class determines they can afford to give us.

We maintain our demands that:

- Schools remain closed until the pandemic is contained and all students can be safely vaccinated.
- Vast funding be invested in online education and student services to ensure that all students can receive a quality education without risking their health and safety.
- Stop the spread of misleading and false information on the benefits and safety of the vaccine and importance of public health measures.
- A full investigation and accountability, including the criminal and civil prosecution and trials of any public officials, organization, institutions and media that promote or implement policies that lead to the spreading of the pandemic, sickness and death.

We as educators are well aware of the burden that closing schools has on students and their families. For this we say that all parents or caregivers who are unable to work to take care of their children must be given full income support until the end of the pandemic.

For those who argue that there is not enough money to pay for these demands, we call for the expropriation of the wealth of the pandemic profiteers who have made hundreds of billions of dollars from the suffering of millions, to pay for these necessary social programs.

The struggle for the lives and health of our students and fellow educators will not be achieved with appeals to the very same politicians who are carrying out this policy of social murder. Rather, it can only be realized by the mobilization of the broad mass of working people in a powerful social movement against this system.

We educators from Maryland, Pennsylvania and Ohio, call upon other educators, staff, students, parents and community members to join this struggle and build rank-and-file safety committees in your schools and districts to fight the deadly policy of reopening schools for in-person learning.

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