

New York Democrats and unions prepare to herd unvaccinated children into school buildings

Sandy English
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The New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee is fighting for a complete closure of schools as one step in eradicating the pandemic, while demanding ample support for remote learning and full income protection to allow parents to stay home with children. Our committee will meet this Tuesday, August 24, 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, parents and students in New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey to register here and invite your coworkers and friends.

As the Delta variant of SARS-CoV-2, which now accounts for 95 percent of new cases in New York, continues to spread, Democratic Party politicians, educators' unions and the corporate media are engaged in a full-throttled effort to ensure the opening of school buildings for over 2.6 million K-12 public school students in New York state, including over a million in New York City.

Earlier this week, New York City's Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio told CNN anchor Anderson Cooper in an interview that, "We need our kids back in school, I'm adamant about this. We're not having remote as we had last year."

This comes at a time when the positivity rate for those tested for COVID-19 has risen again to 3 percent statewide and nearly that level in New York City. The number of pediatric hospitalizations in the state in the last few weeks has quadrupled. Nonetheless, schools are set to open on September 13 in the city and after Labor Day for most districts in the rest of the state.

To stem the broad opposition of educators and parents to in-person schooling, de Blasio mandated vaccination for all teachers on Monday. Incoming Democratic state governor Kathy Hochul has indicated that the state may impose a similar measure.

The mandate will do little to prevent infection in tens of thousands of children, which in turn will facilitate the community spread of the Delta variant throughout the city, particularly among poorer under-vaccinated neighborhoods. As in the rest of the country, all children under 12 are not vaccinated.

The number of breakthrough infections of the Delta variant in vaccinated people, the high viral loads that the vaccinated can carry and the impossibility of maintaining the already inadequate three feet of distance between students mandated by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) simply do not factor into the calculations of the state and city.

Without doubt, the most scurrilous role in New York's school reopening plans is being played by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) in New York City and the New York State Teachers Union (NYSUT) in the rest of the state.

Earlier this month, UFT president Michael Mulgrew bragged at a press conference about his subservience to the school opening program of de Blasio and then-Governor Andrew Cuomo. "When we opened up schools in a pandemic before there was even a vaccine, we went and did it," he said, adding, "Come September, I fully expect us to be open." In response to educators who need medical accommodations, Mulgrew said, "Some will get approved, and some will not. But a medical accommodation does not mean work from home. Okay? I've been straight with everyone on that for quite some time. Last time, that's what it meant. It's not going to mean that this year."

Even more vile is a television and digital media ad produced by NYSUT and paid for by a grant from the national American Federation of Teachers (AFT), which began to air statewide on Monday. In the ad a mother asks, "Why am I sending my kids back? Let me show you. Kids always learn better in classrooms with hands-on instruction than online," she says. "More social interaction means kids are healthier, happier and learn better ... and doctors and health advisers say schools are safe with protocols in place and experts monitoring everything."

The slick ad is a pack of lies. Children will not be healthier and happier when they get sick or infect their parents and grandparents with the Delta variant. Protocols, such as masking or social distancing may or may not be in place and will not be regularly applied if they are. Doctors and health advisers have regularly warned of catastrophe if schools are opened and experts will monitor nothing, except perhaps on districts' web pages.

As the NYSUT ad shows, the back-to-school campaign is being spearheaded not only by the lie that children are safe if they are masked and if their educators are vaccinated, but also by the claim that students must return to school because of learning deficiencies with remote education over the last year. De Blasio pushed this line in his interview with Anderson Cooper: “We saw the tremendous limitations of remote for our kids ... not just educationally. For their social and emotional well being, for their physical well being, our kids all are coming back to school.”

The *New York Times* published a semi-hysterical editorial on Saturday, which feigned concern about the loss in learning, particularly for working class children in the last year of remote instruction. “In the United States,” the *Times* wrote, “a growing body of research shows that the suffering of poor children during the pandemic was compounded by the fact that their schools were more likely to remain closed than schools serving higher-income students.”

The haphazard and poorly funded remote learning implemented by the Democrats—who refused to levy a single penny from Wall Street, as well as the poorly planned and irregular shutdowns of non-essential businesses without significant compensation to small businesses or parents and other caregivers who had to stay with children, had, in many cases, an impact on learning outcomes. New York City, for example, never supplied computer equipment to all of its students and never provided full access to high-speed Internet. The city and the state, much less the federal government, never considered a program of vastly increased mental health care for children, let alone any other section of the population.

But for the *New York Times*, the voice of the affluent upper middle class as well as the very wealthy in the Democratic Party, to decry the “suffering of poor children” during the pandemic is an obscenity. This is the newspaper that has long supported brutal austerity and school privatization and then marshaled every pseudo-scientific claim to force working class children and their educators back into decrepit and poorly ventilated buildings before any vaccine at all had been developed and distributed. It is now simply promoting another propaganda argument for big business to open the schools and get parents back to work—regardless of the cost in children’s lives.

Anger at the reopening plans among parents and educators in New York is widespread. One science teacher in Queens told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “My school will be overcrowded, and we will absolutely not be able to maintain three-foot distances. And the lunchroom is going to be overcrowded with maskless students in the hallways passing shoulder-to-shoulder like subway rush hour. And we can’t say that kids are going to be wearing quality masks or that they’re going to be worn properly. It is a recipe for disaster.”

Shutting the schools, though, is not enough to eradicate the virus. Opposition to school reopenings needs to be a part of a

global plan that includes mass vaccination, lockdowns of non-essential businesses and income support to workers who cannot work. Educators and parents in New York must adopt this strategy and reject all efforts at simply “mitigating” the effects of the virus.

The Movement of Rank-and-File Educators (MORE), a caucus in the UFT associated with the Democratic Socialists of America, has called for a remote option but is opposed to teachers launching a rebellion against the UFT and uniting with parents and students to prevent the opening of the schools.

The remote option is the program of sections of the Democratic Party that seek to allow schools to be opened but to head off a confrontation between parents and teachers on the one hand and the ruling establishment on the other. It is not a viable plan for the suppression and eradication of the virus and belongs to the tactic of “mitigations” that has been proposed by the Democratic Party. It is no accident that 61 members of the New York City Council voted for a resolution calling for a remote option.

Mitigation stands in stark contrast to the program of eradicating the virus put forward by the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee. The committee supports the international public forum sponsored by the *World Socialist Web Site* on Sunday, which included four leading scientists who outlined the methods that must be adopted on a world scale to protect the population from COVID-19. This includes mass vaccination, social distancing through the shutdown of non-essential businesses and activities, including in-person K-12 and university instruction, and support for workers and parents who stay home with their children and a program of scientific education for the working class.



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