

# Alabama educators demand emergency action to eradicate COVID

**Alabama Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee**  
**30 August 2021**

Alabama is seeing dramatically rising COVID infections in K-12 schools, with the Deep South state reaching a grim total of 12,222 deaths. State Health Officer Scott Harris reported last Friday, August 27, that mobile morgues were sent to Baldwin and Mobile counties to handle the increasing number of corpses, adding, “I don’t know how much longer we’re going to be able to do this. There is no room to put all these bodies.”

Meanwhile, US Air Force medical staff have been deploying to a Dothan-area hospital to cover shifts around the clock amid a flood of patients and a lack of medical staff. Alabama’s rolling seven-day positivity rate is 21.3, indicating a vast undercount of cases.

Schools have been open for a month and are fueling this highly deadly community transmission. Within weeks of the beginning of the school year, the virus took the life of honor student William George Fowler, 17, of Cullman, just north of Birmingham. Fowler, a senior, was a proud member of the Cullman Bearcat Marching Band where he was the percussion frontline section leader.

Cases among students and school staff are currently 4,337. Alabama schools are primed for viral transmission, with a statewide vaccination rate lower than that of El Salvador.

In a staggering display of pro-corporate callousness, Montgomery public schools have stated they will only close “when 50% of its students have either tested positive for COVID-19 or were in close contact with someone who did and thus have to quarantine,” according to the *Montgomery Advertiser’s* report last Friday.

State school superintendent Eric Mackey, who is carrying out this murderous policy, admitted, “It’s becoming more and more challenging to keep schools open. Every day we have more and more teachers and students going home after testing positive.” Montgomery, the state’s capital and the site of the historic civil rights struggles, is dominated by the Democratic Party, which is working in tandem with Republican Governor Kay Ivey to keep school open and parents on the job.

The Alabama Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee’s statement below points the way forward, demanding eradication of the virus, an immediate halt to in-person instruction and nonessential business and the defense of students, educators and the population. We urge educators,

parents and students to join us and to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

\*\*

The Alabama Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee demands emergency action to stop the wildfire of COVID-19 infections currently spreading in our schools and across the entire state. Waiting to close schools until the positive rate is 50 percent is literally murderous—homicidal. Our children are being sacrificed by big business.

On Friday, August 27, the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) reported 4,337 active infections in 52 of the state’s 143 school districts. With less than half of districts reporting, these highly alarming numbers are only a fraction of the actual infections among children and school staff. In three counties, more than 5 percent of students are sick with COVID-19. On Saturday, ADPH registered a two-day spike in community transmission across the state, a whopping 11,223 new cases, an unprecedented leap in cases.

We are witnesses to enormous human suffering, escalating since school began a month ago. Between August 1 and 18, ADPH recorded 8,462 recorded cases among children, over four times as many as the same period in 2020. On August 20, they released a statement on the pediatric health crisis, noting a record 50 children hospitalized with COVID-19, which is a 550 percent increase since July 15. There were at least nine children on ventilators in a single day.

Tragically, only weeks into the start of school, William Fowler, age 17, became the first known child to have died of COVID-19 this school year. Across the US, 24 children died in the most recent weekly reporting period of the American Academy of Pediatrics, twice the previous record set on August 5.

Alabama has also seen a horrifying uptick in the number of pregnant women being admitted to the hospitals and placed on life support due to COVID-19 infections. Last week, there were 39 pregnant women admitted to the University of Alabama at Birmingham Hospital, 10 in the ICU and seven on ventilators, numbers never before seen throughout the pandemic. Multiple women have died, lost their unborn children, or had to deliver pre-term.

Statewide, Alabama has made national news as we have run

out of ICU beds. There are currently negative 53 ICU beds in the state, up from negative 29 a week ago. Alabama Hospital Association President Donald Williamson told local news that “we’ve never been here before.”

There is also a serious shortage of medical personnel. Just as teachers have been driven to leave the profession or retire early due to the unprecedented demands and unsafe working conditions over the last school year, health care professionals have borne the brunt of this crisis. Alabama has 11,000 fewer registered nurses than it did only ten months ago! One nurse told the *Montgomery Advertiser*, “Nurses don’t want to volunteer to die, and in some instances, they feel like if they don’t go ahead and retire when they have the opportunity to retire, they are volunteering to die. It is a frightening work environment now.”

As for the schools, in addition to the explosion of K-12 cases across the state, we are already seeing the consequences of the chaotic and antiscientific school-reopening push. In Green, Lee and Colbert Counties, schools and entire districts have reverted temporarily to all-virtual learning after widespread outbreaks. Districts that began without a mask mandate have promptly reintroduced them as a last-ditch effort to curb the spread of cases. In Montgomery, where school started with masks required, there were still 200 known cases in just one week of class.

Last school year, Alabama lost at least 23 educators to COVID-19—including teachers, coaches, custodians, bus drivers, guidance counselors and principals. This year, if nothing is done to stop the current course of infection, we can expect more deaths of educators and of our students. We say NO.

A mask mandate is not enough. Experts are clear that the masks we commonly wear, including cloth masks and surgical masks, are totally insufficient against the Delta variant. Distancing is not enough, as the virus is an airborne disease and can quickly fill an entire room. Vaccination alone is not enough. Scientists have proven that unless vaccines are combined with other public health measures, the pandemic will continue, and the virus will mutate into ever more vaccine-resistant variants.

Above all, we reject the premise that this pandemic must continue. The strategy of mitigation—trying to use half-measures to slow the spread but ultimately telling us that the virus is “here to stay”—is both a failure and a lie.

We call for a program of global eradication, which is the only realistic way to address this health crisis and end the pandemic once and for all. Countries such as China, Taiwan and New Zealand, which have pursued an elimination strategy, have proven this to be possible.

At a recent panel hosted by the WSWS with leading scientists, Dr. Malgorzata Gasperowicz stated that had the necessary measures been taken in early 2020, new cases would have been brought down to zero in 37 days! Now, it will take

more time given the high level of transmission, but the pandemic can still be contained in a relatively short amount of time, around two months. The longer we wait to pursue eradication, the longer it will take to contain the virus.

Whatever the short-term sacrifices are, they pale in comparison to the 18 months and counting that we have been told to go back to work and live with the virus, while we watch our loved ones, friends and students fall ill and die.

United with the rank-and-file committees across the US and internationally, we raise the following demands!

- For a policy of total eradication of COVID-19! Alabama and the entire US must switch to an agenda of eliminating the spread of COVID-19. It must mobilize all the necessary resources to do so and use every scientific tool known.

- For fully remote learning until the pandemic is contained! From preschool to university, in both public and private schools, schools must be fully remote until the pandemic is contained so that no more lives are lost. This includes teachers being allowed to work from home.

- Full funding for state-of-the-art online learning technology! Teachers and students must be guaranteed the best equipment, including high-quality computer hardware, software and accessories, and free high-speed Internet access! An estimated 22 percent of Alabama households had no Internet access in 2018. As many as 17 percent did not have a computer at all. This must be fixed immediately.

- For the immediate closure of all nonessential production! Full income protection and social assistance must be given to all workers and small business owners affected by this necessary measure to stop the spread of COVID-19.

- For a massive expansion and international coordination to provide the entire world with rapid and safe vaccine access! This must be combined with other indispensable public health measures, including universal testing and contact tracing and safe isolation of infected patients to contain the spread.

- For a widespread public education campaign! The public must be guided by a scientific understanding of this disease and what is necessary to contain it. Just as importantly, we must systematically counteract the right-wing and antiscientific campaign against vaccinations by educating the public on how the vaccines work and why they are safe.

- For the formation of rank-and-file committees in workplaces across Alabama, the US and internationally!



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**