

New York City Democrats and teachers union push deadly school reopening plan

Sandy English
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New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio is pressing ahead with a full reopening of public schools for hundreds of thousands of unvaccinated children in the largest school district in the United States on September 13. The “progressive” Democratic mayor is opening schools as COVID-19 cases rise in the city, state and around the US and the world.

Behind de Blasio is the entire political establishment. No Democratic or Republican official in the city or state, no corporate media outlet and no union opposes the reopening of school buildings for over a million students. On the contrary, all of these forces are actively promoting this criminal policy. The United Federation of Teachers (UFT), which claims to represent over 70,000 teachers in the city, has been paying educators to go door-to-door and encourage parents to send their children to physical school buildings.

Some Democratic politicians and organizations are seeking to quell the explosive anger of millions of parents and teachers with the bait of a “remote option,” which will permit parents to keep children home and resume remote learning if they choose. The Democratic Party and the unions are determined to block collective action, including an educator-parent strike, which would encourage similar actions across the country. They are using the remote option as a steam valve to encourage those opposed to the school openings to make an individual decision to keep their children home.

Parents who cannot afford to stay home with children or who do not understand the science behind the spread of the coronavirus, will still be sending their children to school. Given the considerable economic pressures that parents are under to return to work, under a remote option, disease and death will again disproportionately impact the poorest layers of the working class.

On Friday, three Democratic members of Congress, Adriano Espaillat, Grace Meng and Jamaal Bowman (who is associated with the Democratic Socialists of America [DSA]) wrote in an opinion piece for the Daily News that “it is our hope that in the next few weeks, constructive discussion and consideration continue on behalf of families who—given the legitimate and known concerns about COVID-19, the delta variant, and students who are not yet able to be vaccinated—deserve flexibility, and to have a remote option available to them as our children head back to the classroom.”

The Movement of Rank-and-File Educators (MORE), a caucus in the UFT that is associated with the DSA, has also called for a

“remote option” along with others in the union.

Given the advocacy of Bowman and MORE for a parent choice in returning children to school, one would expect the DSA flagbearer in Congress, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, to promote a minimal mitigation measure such as the remote option.

Nothing doing. On Thursday, in what has without doubt been one of the filthiest displays by the DSA of its subservience to the Wall Street program of reopening schools, an unmasked Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez surrounded by her unmasked staff, handed out 1,500 backpacks to children at a return to face-to-face learning event in the Bronx. The Bronx is the poorest urban county in the United States and one of the most under-vaccinated in the northeast.

“Everyone’s ready to rock this upcoming school year,” the Congresswoman told the media.

Will these children “rock” when they are in an ICU ward, or when they are unable to focus for a few minutes or even draw simple figures because they have contracted Long COVID?

Even more disgusting was Ocasio-Cortez’s posting on her Facebook page where she framed the event as a part of a series of “progressive” causes designed to help the working class, including alleviating the economic disaster to many families in her district from the pandemic. It said, “Along with the backpacks, Team AOC and our partners are providing parents and community members with vital information about our Homework Helpers program, vaccinations, and pandemic relief resources.”

The reality is that the Democratic Party’s school reopening program in New York—including the constrained debate over a so-called remote option—will cause a massive spread of infection and death. Last week, de Blasio’s Department of Education (DOE) released a school opening plan that outlines what mitigation efforts it will implement to supposedly reduce the spread of the disease among students and staff.

This back-to-school program, bizarrely named “Homecoming,” calls for a series of wholly inadequate mitigation measures, which will not stop the schools from becoming super-spreader locations as they have been in districts that have already opened around the country.

Under “Vaccination,” the plan mandates that educators must, “provide proof that they have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccination by September 27, 2021.” In other words, educators and school staff can be unvaccinated for the first two

weeks of school, ample time to contract and spread the disease.

“We also strongly encourage vaccination for all students 12 and over,” the plan continues. That is, vaccination is not required for students who are eligible, the only exception being for students who engage in high-risk sports.

Scientists have pointed out that vaccinated adults can also carry and spread the highly infectious Delta variant, which now makes up 98.8 percent of the cases in the US, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Under “Testing,” the plan says, every school will have “ten percent of unvaccinated individuals who have submitted consent forms” tested biweekly. This is an even lower percentage than the highly inadequate 20 percent that were tested monthly during the last school year.

Under “Social Distancing,” the DOE’s guideline does not mandate social distancing between students, but merely quotes the CDC’s recommendations that a three-foot distance between students is “desirable.” The DOE knows it will be impossible to keep children this distance between themselves in the crowded conditions of New York City classrooms. It that regard the plan points to the most dangerous suggestions of the CDC, written by the Trump and Biden administrations, which declares, “It is important to note that the CDC emphasizes that schools should not exclude students from in-person learning to keep a minimum distance requirement.”

Under “Personal Protective Equipment,” the plan says all children and staff will wear masks on campus. The DOE does not specify the quality of mask to be used, and notes that masks can be removed in lunchrooms during meals. The guideline does not address the fact that the likelihood of younger children keeping their masks on throughout the rest of the day is slim.

As for “Quarantining,” the plan says children under 12 who test positive for COVID-19 will quarantine for 10 days. Children over 12 who are unvaccinated will do the same, the DOE continues. Vaccinated children are excluded from quarantining despite the fact that vaccinated individuals may carry high viral loads.

The DOE’s plan says nothing about tracing the community contacts that a child has had when he or she tests positive or if parents, siblings and grandparents will be tested.

Under “School Shutdowns,” classrooms can be shut down for 10 days when a child in the room tests positive for COVID-19. Other students will quarantine for 10 days. The DOE’s plan does not make it clear if these students will be tested.

The DOE does admit that whole schools may be shut down because of widespread infection as they have been throughout the pandemic. There is no provision for a systemwide shutdown if the city’s positivity rate for those tested for the coronavirus reaches a certain threshold.

Regarding “Remote Learning,” only immunocompromised children (but not immunocompromised educators) or children who are quarantined may learn remotely. The DOE has issued no plan on how this will take place. It is not clear, for example, if students will have their regular teachers or substitute teachers instructing them.

On “Ventilation,” the DOE plan calls for two HEPA purifiers in each room and larger units in cafeterias. Recent examination in the

media and independent testing has revealed that the Intellipure model of air purifiers sold to the DOE by Delos may be toward the bottom of the rung in efficacy for air circulation in classrooms. One expert called them, “better than nothing.”

Publicly available data analyzed by WNYC/Gothamist found that 1,500 city public classrooms still need repairs to be adequately ventilated by the time school starts. The news outlet noted that “an education department spokesperson didn’t confirm but pledged all rooms would be ready in time.”

De Blasio’s school reopening plan and the support it has gotten from the UFT and its parent organization, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), has sparked widespread anger among educators and parents. Not a day goes by when Facebook and twitter are not filled with sharp comments by New York City teachers at the lying statements of AFT President Randi Weingarten.

When news came out that de Blasio would allow the limited remote instruction for children who are quarantined when they test positive, Weingarten tweeted “Good ... It made no sense for DeBlasio to keep blocking a remote option ... Glad parents and @uft fought for it.”

One city educator responded, “Uh is this some other @rweingarten commenting because you’ve been calling for every single kid to return to school in person all damn summer?! You are the biggest hypocrite right now!! Are you kidding me?!”

Ever greater numbers of educators, parents and young people are coming into conflict with the whole political establishment, including the unions, which is determined to get children into school in order to send their parents back to work to produce corporate profits. We encourage teachers and other school employees, as well as concerned parents, to join the New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee. The committee is fighting for a policy not for the mitigation but the eradication of the deadly virus. This requires the closure of schools and non-essential business and the provision of full income protection, combined with universal testing and contact tracing, social distancing and masking, and a vast expansion of vaccinations globally.



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