

Build the Tennessee Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee! Shut down now to stop the spread of the Delta variant!

Tennessee Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
31 August 2021

The Tennessee Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee demands the closure of all schools and nonessential workplaces until COVID-19 is eradicated worldwide.

Between August 20 and 27, 42,623 people in the state of Tennessee tested positive for coronavirus. A total of 24,793 of these, or 53 percent of all cases, were children between the ages of 5 and 18. There have been at least 177 cases of multisystem inflammatory syndrome (MIS-C) among the state's children. Hospitals, including children's hospitals, are at or close to capacity. Over a quarter of the children currently hospitalized with a COVID-19 infection are in an ICU, and the number of children needing ICU care has quadrupled over the past month. As more and more schools open, the situation will continue to worsen.

How many more child deaths are acceptable? None. How many more debilitating cases of long COVID are acceptable? None.

We reject the premise on which all the piecemeal mitigation measures of the past 18 months have been based: that there can be a compromise between safeguarding human lives, the criterion supported by the working class, and safeguarding private profit, the criterion supported by the capitalist class.

In reality, significant sections of the capitalist class and its political representatives reject even the semblance of such a compromise. Governor Bill Lee and the Republican-led legislature have systematically undermined every effort by the state's Department of Health and individual school districts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. On August 16, Lee signed an executive order allowing parents to opt out of district mask mandates. While the governor is now

encouraging vaccines to stem the overwhelming rise of new COVID cases, two months ago he fired Dr. Michelle Fiscus, the medical director of Tennessee's Vaccine Preventable Diseases and Immunization program. In addition, Lee suspended all vaccine outreach programs in Tennessee.

Governor Lee and Tennessee's Republican majority in the legislature have blocked districts from closing schools and offering virtual instruction in order to protect the lives of students and educators. Now, schools across the state are closing because staff and students are sick. However, districts must ask for a waiver if school closures exceed their allotted inclement weather days.

Online learning has been declared a failure on the basis of low test scores on 2020-2021 standardized tests. But when upwards of twenty percent of students are home sick with COVID or quarantined, how is the return to life-threatening classrooms a solution to "learning loss?" Low test scores are simply a despicable justification to warehouse students in poorly ventilated classrooms so that their parents can continue to produce profits for the corporations.

The Democrats and the unions also support this effort. Biden has made the return of teachers and students to schools a primary aim of his administration. At the same time, even as daily new cases in the country approach 200,000, the Democrats have allowed both federal unemployment benefits and the federal eviction moratorium to lapse. In Tennessee alone, 167,000 households are at risk of eviction.

The so-called "mitigation" strategies the Biden administration has used to provide its criminal back-to-school drive with a veneer of scientific legitimacy now

have a proven record of failure. The “5 Core Actions” promoted by the CDC and the Biden administration—masking, physical distancing, washing hands, cleaning surfaces, and staying home when sick—were totally unable to prevent mass death during the winter 2020-2021 surge, when an average of 126 Tennesseans died from COVID every day in spite of mask mandates and social distancing restrictions.

School buildings in the state and around the country desperately need upgrades to their ventilation and filtration systems. However, such upgrades cannot be a substitute for a comprehensive strategy to eradicate the virus. We now know that even relatively mild infections can have potentially devastating lifelong consequences, including cognitive deficits comparable to those produced by lead poisoning. With mitigation alone, every school child will be faced sooner or later with infection, and with it, the risk of permanent neurological damage.

Moreover, the virus continues to evolve with potentially catastrophic consequences to the entire world population. As Dr. Yaneer Bar-Yam, a leading public health expert, recently said, the Delta variant is only four common mutations away from total vaccine resistance.

A recent online meeting with prominent scientists hosted by the *World Socialist Web Site* made the case that the eradication of COVID-19 and all of its variants is not only desirable but is possible within a matter of weeks through an aggressive combination of school closures, lockdowns, and shuttering of nonessential businesses and production.

Moreover, the struggle to implement a scientifically guided policy to eradicate the virus must have an international character. The pandemic itself can only be eradicated if it is eradicated everywhere. However, in nearly every country, educators, students and workers are faced with policies aimed at preserving profits at the expense of human lives. However, such an eradication strategy requires the building of the independent organizations of the working class in opposition to the corporatist trade unions and both the Democrats and the Republicans, all of which have a continuous record of sabotaging even the most meager efforts to control the virus.

For this reason, we ask all Tennessee educators, parents and students who agree with our demands to

help us build the Tennessee Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee and to attend our next online meeting on Sunday at 3 p.m. Central Time.



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