

Students and faculty at Syracuse University threaten strike against unsafe reopening

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Students and faculty at Syracuse University announced their intention to strike for the implementation of remote courses amid a recent surge in COVID-19 in Onondaga County. The opposition, promoted under the hashtag #NotAgainSU, is encouraging students and faculty to demand a remote learning option, the organization posted on Instagram Sunday.

#NotAgainSU's Instagram page links to a petition listing their demands. The petition calls on students to refuse to attend any in-person course and encourages educators to not hold in-person classes until their demands are met. The group of students and educators have called for an indefinite struggle until the university allows students and faculty to have the option of online learning for their courses.

"Classes have not yet begun, and the public health alert level has already been raised to red. We've also heard reports that several faculties fell ill to COVID after attending a faculty orientation this past week alone," the petition states.

"Syracuse University has announced its plan for the school year. It includes returning to fully in-person classes, lax testing requirements, dining and event spaces resuming full capacity, and all this at the cost of endangering everyone's health, especially harming the disabled and immunocompromised people in our community."

"I support the demand to approve the option for every student and teacher to participate in online learning if they wish," the statement says. "This is a necessary decision to protect our communities from COVID-19."

University officials have confirmed 22 active COVID-19 cases on campus and its campus masking requirement is at "red level," meaning visitors and students must wear masks indoors at all times.

However, students are not required to wear their masks in their own dorms and vaccinated employees can go maskless while alone in private offices, personal workstations, or when working independently outdoors on campus.

Four faculty members at the university's School of Public Communications tested positive for COVID-19 just last week, the school announced. All currently impacted faculty members have been in quarantine since last week, and temporary instructors are teaching their classes. Officials said more cases are currently being identified through contact tracing and warn more cases among students and staff are likely this academic year if the university does not change its policies.

Syracuse has announced it requires proof of COVID-19 vaccination from all students, faculty and staff members, but allows medical and religious exemptions. A university spokesperson did not say whether all four professors were vaccinated, citing concerns about their privacy. The university claims that 90 percent of the student and employee population is fully vaccinated.

The steady rise in hospitalizations mirrors the increasing spread of Covid-19 in the community. During the past week, the county has reported 809 new cases, nearly four times the 207 new cases during the last week of July, county records show.

Syracuse hospitals reported caring for an average of 67 Covid-19 patients a day during the past week, more than four times the average number from the final week of July. As of the time of this writing, nine patients are in intensive care. Approximately 735 county residents have died of COVID-19.

County officials said approximately 61 percent of newly hospitalized patients were not vaccinated, while 39 percent occurred among vaccinated patients,

demonstrating that vaccination does not fully protect an individual from the virus.

Although hospital cases have not yet risen to the troubling levels of last December and January, when Syracuse hospitals treated up to 300 coronavirus patients a day, central New York still only had about a quarter of its hospital beds available, according to the state health department.

The growing opposition to the unsafe reopening of class at Syracuse takes place amid a growing wave of opposition among students and educators at universities across the country.

At Duke University, where 98 percent of students and 92 percent of faculty are vaccinated, 349 students and 15 faculty and staff tested positive for COVID-19 last week. The university was forced to halt indoor dining and implement mask mandates in outdoor areas. Similarly, the University of California, Berkeley saw its test positivity rate jump from 0.5 percent last week to 5.8 percent this Tuesday. Again, cases are rapidly increasing despite high vaccination rates for students and faculty (97 percent and 96.9 percent respectively).

These cases offer further proof that under conditions of rapid spread of the delta variant of the coronavirus, there is no safe way to reopen schools. Any significant opposition to this disastrous policy will inevitably come into conflict with the capitalist system and the interests of the corporate and financial elite.

Students must turn to teachers, healthcare workers, and other workers who are faced with similar dangerous conditions. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party, is fighting to link students up with workers for a common struggle against the dangerous reopening of schools and workplaces. We encourage youth and students to take up the fight against the pandemic and join the IYSSE.



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