

Cases continue to rise in Los Angeles school district one month after start of school year

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One month into the fall semester at Los Angeles Unified School District, the country's second largest school district has witnessed a series of coronavirus outbreaks as children as young as six are packed into overcrowded classrooms.

The district's dashboard currently indicates 2,209 active coronavirus cases among staff and students. Implausibly, the school district claims that only 8 cases out of the 2,209 were linked to transmission within schools, with the remaining 99.7 percent of cases supposedly having come from off school campuses.

Last Friday, September 3, the district experienced its third official school-wide outbreak. Halldale Elementary near Long Beach reported 17 positive coronavirus cases, of which 5 were officially deemed school-based transmissions. That same day, Plainview Academic Charter Academy in the San Fernando Valley area reported three positive cases, all of which were also categorized as the result of school-based transmissions.

The two schools now bring the total number of campuses in LAUSD with official coronavirus outbreaks to three, however, this outbreak classification used by the district massively undercounts school-based spread.

An alternative COVID dashboard for LAUSD has been set up by the group Parents Supporting Teachers, drawing upon the work of Dr. Jorge A. Caballero, a physician and data analytics researcher tracking pediatric COVID-19 cases. The dashboard was created after the group felt they were being completely left in the dark by the district as to the real spread of the virus in schools.

Caballero noted the immense increase in pediatric COVID cases in Los Angeles in the immediate days prior to the LAUSD school reopening last month,

making the decision to go forward with in-person learning all the more criminal. According to Caballero's research, 119 children were hospitalized at Children's Hospital of Los Angeles alone, a tripling of hospitalizations from four weeks earlier.

Part of the reason that school-based transmission numbers offered by the district are so low is because the district defines school-based transmission as cases involving less than six feet of contact with an infected student or staff member for more than 15 minutes at a time. This has no basis whatsoever in the science of the pandemic. People have been confirmed to have contracted the new Delta variant of COVID-19 from close contact lasting only a few seconds. "You can't adequately determine what a close contact is," said Jenna Schwartz, co-founder of Parents Supporting Teachers, "so the entire class needs to be notified so parents can make a decision that feels good and safe for them."

The district has a vested interest in keeping classrooms open. The reopening of LAUSD is considered pivotal in the Biden administration's school reopening drive. The initiative has the full backing of the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) teachers union, which has done everything in its power to herd children and teachers back into unsafe classrooms.

At the national level, this has been spearheaded by American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten (who makes \$500,000 a year), who released a Labor Day statement promoting the AFT's "Back to School for All campaign" which entailed "a get-out-the-vote-style campaign in support of in-person learning. That's caring, fighting and showing up in action."

The position of the unions throughout the pandemic is that schools can safely reopen provided that students

remain masked indoors with teachers and students vaccinated. Most recently, the UTLA called for mandatory vaccinations within 12 weeks of all eligible students and staff. Even leaving aside the fact this would still leave more than 200,000 LAUSD children under the age of 12 completely defenseless against infection, the “mitigation” strategy pursued by the Democrats, who claim it is possible to “live” with the virus with piecemeal measures such as vaccines and masks, is being discredited by the rapid growth in cases nationwide over the past two months.

The only correct course of action is the combination of masks, vaccines and contact tracing with the closure of schools and nonessential workplaces, as part of a comprehensive strategy to end the pandemic. At a recent online meeting held by the *World Socialist Web Site* entitled “For a global strategy to stop the pandemic and save lives!” Dr. Małgorzata Gasperowica of the University of Calgary explained that such an approach, including lockdowns lasting roughly two months, would be sufficient to completely eradicate the virus.

To detract attention from the criminal consequences of their policies, the unions have launched various public relations campaigns feigning concern over the impact of the coronavirus in schools while studiously ignoring the need to shut down campuses.

The UTLA is now arguing that the district had bargained in “bad faith” for attempting to put in place a plan for online learning for quarantined students without consultation with the union. The union’s accusations could possibly lead to the filing of an unfair labor practice charge with California’s Public Employment Relations Board.

The UTLA’s alternative plan for quarantined student instruction actually involved an option for those infected students to come meet with teachers during office hours, on the bogus grounds that teachers, having been vaccinated, would not be able to contract coronavirus. This is a continuation of the Biden administration’s lie that the current surge in cases is merely a “pandemic of the unvaccinated.” In fact, driven by the hyper-infectious Delta variant, tens of thousands of vaccinated people across the United States are becoming infected every week.

“Our bargaining team is bringing proposals to the table with educators and LAUSD families in mind,” said UTLA President Cecily Myart-Cruz. “Families

who have had their lives upended by their child having to quarantine do not need a cookie-cutter mandate—they need understanding, flexibility and options.”

The latest maneuver by the UTLA follows a sham return-to-school vote among the membership earlier in the summer, in which half of all teachers decided not to participate. The deal reached between the UTLA and the district provided no options for remote learning and presented in-person learning as a *fait accompli*. The only option available for online learning now is independent study, which is rarely granted and which the majority of impoverished LAUSD students and their families cannot successfully participate in due to the stringent academic demands of the program.

The situation in the school district is poised to get far worse as the Delta variant continues to spread throughout the Los Angeles area. Los Angeles County has already recorded 167 cases of the Mu variant of the coronavirus. While it remains to be seen if the Mu variant poses dangers to the population on the scale of Delta, it nonetheless underscores the urgent need to shut down schools and enact stringent public health measures to contain the virus before it mutates into newer, deadlier variants.

This essential public responsibility will not be met any figures within the political establishment, nor by the trade unions who no longer represent the working class and are criminally responsible for the reopening of schools and workplaces, ensuring that the coronavirus continues to burn through the population. Instead, workers and students must form and join their own rank-and-file committees of struggle. We encourage all teachers especially who agree with this perspective to contact the *World Socialist Web Site* and take part in the work of this important initiative today.



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