

New York City reopens schools for in-person learning: The American ruling class “experiments” with children’s lives

Jesse Thomas
13 September 2021

On Monday, approximately one million New York City K-12 public school students returned to classrooms for in-person learning. New York City Public Schools is the country’s largest school district, and it is the last major city in the US to resume classroom instruction amidst the rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The school district includes 1.1 million students, but about 100,000 did not report to class on Monday, presumably due to concerns from parents about the unsafe conditions. In addition to one million children, 75,000 teachers were herded back into unsafe, poorly ventilated school buildings that are prime locations for the spread of the virus.

The completion of school reopenings in the US comes as infections, hospitalizations and deaths among children are rising sharply. According to the latest data from the American Academy of Pediatrics, there were 243,373 COVID-19 cases among children in the week before September 9. The total number of cases for the past five weeks (August 5 to September 9) is just under one million, but this does not include cases in Texas, Alabama and Nebraska, which do not report cases by age distribution.

Last week 16 children died from COVID-19, bringing the total for the past five weeks to 89. In the population as a whole, daily new cases are at about 150,000, with daily deaths over 1,300, according to official figures.

With the reopening of schools, the American ruling class—led by the Biden administration and backed by both the Democrats and Republicans—is carrying out a criminal policy that guarantees the further spread of the deadly pandemic, fueled by the highly infectious Delta variant. In New York, this policy is overseen by Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio.

The *Washington Post*, in an article published Monday, called the reopening of schools a “real-life experiment” that will answer the question: “Can schools stay open safely amid the aggressive spread of the delta variant?” The AP referred to the reopening of schools in New York as “the

nation’s largest experiment of in-person learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The use of the term “experiment” sums up the barbaric logic of the reopening of schools. It is a scientific fact that resuming in-person learning is not safe, and it has already led to a sharp spike of the pandemic throughout the country. And the “experiment” is being carried out on the lives and health of an entire generation of young people, who face the still little understood consequences of Long COVID.

The first day of school in New York could only be described as a disaster. Reports abounded of malfunctions of health screening computer software mandated by the NYC Department of Health (DOH). The *Post* report stated that the school system’s testing and contact tracing regime is the weakest of the three largest school districts in the country, with only 10 percent of unvaccinated individuals being tested weekly.

For several weeks in advance of yesterday’s reopening date, educators and parents took to social media, warning of the horrendous conditions in their schools. Teachers noted the outdated and malfunctioning state of the ventilation systems in their buildings, pointing to the fact that the already inadequate health measures outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the DOH were impossible to enforce.

One Brooklyn teacher told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “This reopening is not based on any science. The three-foot social distancing rule is impossible to enforce, and it wasn’t any good anyway. I couldn’t possibly change the air in my classroom every 5-6 hours as per its recommendation. They’re totally fudging things.”

He added, “I personally hate remote learning and teaching, but it’s just not safe to have kids crammed back into school buildings. This drive to reopen is entirely political.

“I’m also a DOE [Department of Education] parent, but I cannot justify sending my kids in. Thankfully, my wife is a stay-at-home mom, so I’m able to keep my own children out

of schools. But it makes it all the more ridiculous that I'm being forced to teach other people's kids in person," he said.

Many New York parents and educators immediately reported unsafe conditions at their schools yesterday morning. One parent wrote on Twitter, "[W]ish I had seen this earlier. No social distancing in the school yard at drop off and starting tomorrow about 500 students entering through the cafeteria upon arrival."

A special education teacher described her first day, "Pretty much my whole morning so far: 'Put your mask on, put your mask on. Put it over your nose. It has to cover your nose and mouth.'"

A health policy expert on Twitter commented on a video of a school safety worker spraying down the walls of a school room with disinfectant, pointing out the futility of the stunt in light of the fact that the transmission of COVID is airborne. "This feels like something out of a George Orwell book. Spending millions on theater to lie and pretend like it is safe. Instead of taking needed action to actually make schools and communities safe. ... They aren't even opening the windows!!"

"This is all so crazy," read another comment on Twitter. "I am a healthcare worker, and I am infuriated that public health officials approve of this."

Biden and de Blasio claim that schools can be reopened safely because of vaccination, but no vaccination has been approved for children under the age of 12 and likely will not be until 2022. Thousands of teachers and staff in the school district are also unvaccinated, and even vaccinated individuals can contract and spread the virus to children, their parents, and the community as a whole.

The determination of the entire political establishment to reopen schools is driven by the imperative to keep parents on the job to fully resume the flow of corporate profits, whatever the cost in human lives. The ruling class, particularly in New York, is terrified that any action to stop the pandemic will produce a massive fall on Wall Street and the collapse of the speculative bubble built up with trillions of dollars pumped into the markets by the Federal Reserve.

In an online forum hosted by the WSWS last month, New Zealand epidemiologist Dr. Michael Baker called the reopening of schools in the UK an "almost barbaric experiment on the British people." He continued:

The precautionary principle means that you do not allow a population to be exposed to a hazard when you do not know the consequences of that, and when you think that the effects may be severe. A responsible government would not allow that to occur.

This "barbaric experiment" is now fully underway in the United States.

In New York as throughout the country, the reopening of schools has been carried out with the assistance and support of the teachers unions, including the American Federation of Teachers and its local affiliates. The United Federation of Teachers (UFT) in New York has paid educators to canvass neighborhoods to encourage parents to send their children to classrooms.

Sections of the union apparatus, along with groups like the Democratic Socialists of America, have sought to suppress opposition among educators and parents and channel it behind a call for a "remote option." Several protests and demonstrations were organized this weekend to call on de Blasio to reinstitute remote learning resources for families that choose to keep their children out of school.

The "remote option," however, leaves the policy of school reopenings in place. It is, moreover, unviable for families who will be unable to afford to stay home and ensure that their children receive quality online education.

New York City parents, students, educators and school staff must instead call for the immediate shutdown of all city schools, along with the allocation of resources to support all families and employees affected, as part of a broader strategy to eradicate the pandemic.

The WSWS urges all parents, educators, educational staff and students who oppose the reckless reopening of New York City schools to become involved in the New York Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact