

After teacher's COVID death, parent denounces murderous school reopenings in Brazil's Federal District

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As the Delta variant spreads amid the largest reopening of schools and businesses in Brazil since the pandemic began, there has been a clear decelerating trend in the decrease of COVID-19 deaths. Two weeks ago, Brazil registered the first increase in deaths in three months. Since then, the country has supposedly “stabilized” in terms of COVID deaths, with an average of 498 per day over the past seven days.

On Monday, October 4, the country registered 199 deaths and 11,149 cases, figures that are a gross underestimate of the real toll. Brazil ranks 126th in the world in testing, with experts pointing out that the number of cases and deaths can be up to 10 and two times higher, respectively. In total, there have been 598,000 recorded deaths, second only to the US, and 21.5 million cases.

Seven of the 26 Brazilian states have had an increase in COVID-19 deaths in the last two weeks. One of the highest increases was registered in the Federal District (FD), which includes the Brazilian capital, Brasilia. It has seen a 17 percent rise in COVID-19 deaths. ICU bed occupancy has also been rising rapidly. From August 31 to September 28, the ICU occupancy rate increased from 52.5 percent to 75 percent. The occupancy rate of pediatric ICU beds is at 90 percent.

After schools reopened at the beginning of August, 14 percent of the cases registered in the FD last month were among children, the highest rate since the beginning of the pandemic. From mid-August to the beginning of September, the number of schools with confirmed cases increased from 14 to 61. By September 16, according to the teachers' union SINPRO, there were 101 schools with registered cases.

Karla, a mother whose son is enrolled in elementary school in the FD public school system, told the WSW, “The FD Secretary of Education said that they would take

all measures so that the schools would follow all the required protocols. However, since the beginning of classes, there have been daily cases of infection in several schools. The classes with cases were dismissed, but the dismissed students were not tested, nor were the teachers who came in contact with those infected. They had to go get the test.”

In the public schools of the FD, the return to school took place on a rotation system, with half of the students going one week and half going the next. Karla denounced the lack of structure for remote learning, “Most students in the public system have few or no means to follow the classes on the online platform. ... Governments should have given tablets to each child and Wi-Fi so they could study at home.”

In addition to the lack of technological support, she said, “There are students who only have one mask, and the government didn't even help with that.”

Although the return to school is mandatory, Karla said, “We are not sending the little ones to in-person classes. We learned about the real situation from inside the schools in groups on social media, through reports from parents who are sending their children to schools. Many are scared to death.”

She continued, “Some schools made threats to families who were not sending their children to in-person classes, denying online classes on weeks that were supposed to be in-person. In others, the school forced families to fill out a term sheet as an excuse and disclaiming responsibility for the student not attending class. Only students with comorbidities are not required to go to school, but they are required to provide a medical report.”

Karla, who is an educator, also denounced SINPRO. “I never liked the teachers' union ... there are many promises and no action in favor of the teachers.” With the

reopening of schools, she said, “There was a promise that the union would be intensively involved in the inspection of the schools, but they do not even report transparent data.”

She highlighted the union’s role in isolating teachers in different schools, a role being played by the unions everywhere in the world and with all sections of the working class. “One thing I observe is that schools don’t talk to each other,” she said. “I pass on information from other schools to teacher friends who had no idea it was even happening.”

This led her to join “a group of parents against in-person classes in FD when I saw a report in the local daily that there was a movement of parents against the opening of the schools and that they were uniting in order to seek legal action.” Karla explained, however, that she is “against the reopening of the schools, as well as the mandatory in-person classes ... [B]ut not because we are denying the right to education, but according to the Constitution, we are fighting in favor of life, protecting our children and young people.”

On September 14, the first COVID-19 death of a teacher in FD was confirmed. Joseli Gomes de Farias, 53, was a teacher at the Stella dos Cherubins Educational Center in the administrative region of Planaltina in the Federal District.

In a powerful denunciation of the situation in the schools in the FD that went viral on social media, Luiza Oliveira, Joseli’s colleague, wrote, “We are going through an unimaginable reality in our school. When we returned to in-person classes, I warned our staff many times that we couldn’t guarantee a safe return. This would require proper ventilation of the classrooms, safe masks (N95) made available to everyone, and an efficient isolation and testing protocol. We have none of these conditions at our school.

“Since the in-person return began,” she continued, “suspected and confirmed cases began to appear among colleagues and students. ... However, the Health and Education Secretary’s monitoring of these cases is ineffective. Until the beginning of this week [September 13], even with the emergence of these suspected and confirmed cases, no class had been suspended.”

Without testing in schools and public hospitals, Oliveira wrote, “the vast majority are testing in the private health care system, taking the money out of their own pockets.”

“It is so sad and revolting to see that it took the death of a school teacher for something to happen,” Oliveira declared. “Measures that should have been taken a long

time ago, like suspending classes and sanitizing the school, have only been taken now. Yesterday, the Secretary of Education, Hélvia Paranaguá, phoned our school to express her feelings to the school community. What we expect from the Secretary of Education and from the FD government is that they stop being irresponsible and inhumane with students, employees and their families. What is happening is absurd. Our colleagues who have not yet completed the immunization cycle and are waiting for the second shot were forced to return to work amid this outbreak of COVID.”

Oliveira concluded saying, “We can no longer see this genocidal policy of the FD government [of Ibaneiz Rocha] happening. Our colleagues are getting sick and dying, and nothing is being done.”

About the governor, Karla also told the WSWs, “At first, I thought he was a conscientious human being. But in addition to being a politician, he is a businessman. He wants to move the money and the economy, he pretends he cares, but we know he doesn’t.”

Far from being isolated cases, the situations reported by Karla and Luiza Oliveira are to be found in every school in the world amid a global pandemic. Children, teachers and school staff are being pushed into unsafe schools to secure the profits of the world’s ruling elite.

However, the international working class is fighting back against this politics of death. Significantly, last week, Lisa Diaz called on parents in Britain to keep their children home on October 1 in a one-day strike, as a protest against the irresponsible reopening of schools. It was met with worldwide support.

In Brazil and many other countries, rank-and-file committees have been formed to advance a program to eradicate the novel coronavirus through the independent mobilization of the working class. We call on all those looking for a way to fight back against school reopenings to contact us and follow the Facebook page of the Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education in Brazil.



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