

“We are all exhausted, upset and stressed out”

Michigan educators and parents speak out about rising COVID-19 cases in schools

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In Michigan, as across the US and globally, children have been increasingly exposed to COVID-19 infections due to the unsafe reopening of schools over a month ago. They face the ever-looming prospect of hospitalization, unknown long-term health debilitation and even death. Last week in Michigan, over 375 children under 12 years old were infected each day with COVID-19, while hospitalizations doubled from a month ago to 35.

While the pandemic rages on, the cutoff of pandemic-specific federal and state financial supports in the US has brought about unbearable conditions for large sections of the population. Families with young children at home already constituted a large part of struggling and poverty-stricken households even before the pandemic. Now, with the eviction moratorium terminated in September and no guarantee of even the measly \$300 child credit continuing, families are quickly being thrust into destitution.

A teacher in Detroit’s public school system and a parent of school-age children in suburban Detroit spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site*, highlighting the acute dangers facing children, their teachers and caregivers, and the broader social crisis amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Veronica, a Detroit educator, spoke about the October 1 global school strike initiated by British parent Lisa Diaz, organized independently of the unions and capitalist political parties. She stated, “I am with it! Let’s shut it down! They put kids in these unsafe environments. I hate going into the building. Some parents are scared and want their kids to do virtual. I had a couple of kids and they went virtual, and they tell me that they don’t have enough teachers. Students don’t have teachers in virtual. What is that? It was set up to fail.

“They say they are concerned about student engagement. I had a couple of students whose parents

passed this past year. The effect on them is enormous. Also, the kids who are failing or aren’t learning are students that were failing and struggling pre-COVID.

“These same problems existed before COVID. Now everyone just really sees it. It’s in everyone’s face, and we can’t not see it. There are still the same problems with poverty. I am tired of hearing that the students are losing learning. Why didn’t it matter before the pandemic? They are using the schools, as Lisa Diaz said, as ‘Bums in the seat’ so the parents can go to work.

“I don’t think it’s fair to say that it’s okay for these kids to get sick and die. The mitigations are not working. I told my mom we should have a million teacher march to DC. We are all exhausted, upset and stressed out.”

Ronda, a member of the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee and grandmother of school-age kids, has been angered by the constant confusion and lies spread by the press about COVID-19 in schools. After learning about the upcoming October 24 webinar organized by the WSWs, titled, “How to end the pandemic: The case for eradication,” she is encouraging friends to attend. She called on all workers to do the same, stating, “Everybody should participate to find out how to get rid of COVID.”

Ronda noted, “When [Michigan Governor] Whitmer first locked down it started to die down and then everything was opened up again and it started to pick up again. Think of how many were in the hospital then when it first started and how many now—it is much, much higher. But you barely hear anything about that now.

“I don’t know why they keep saying kids don’t get COVID or they don’t get sick. Children are human and humans get COVID. We need everybody to hear the truth and not the lies of the rich.”

Kaisha, Ronda’s neighbor and a suburban Detroit

parent, explained the burgeoning social problems that parents are facing even as they worry about sending their children to COVID-infested schools. She stated, “My kids just returned to school this fall. I kept them out of school since the beginning of the pandemic but my situation has become just impossible. I have been living mostly off the pandemic stimulus checks because everywhere I turned for help I got turned down.

“I know there are cases at my kids school, but I don’t know if my children were around them. Of course they are not going to disclose who that individual kid is, but they’re not even going to tell me if my kid was around someone who is infected.

“I understand the risk and the concerns about children going to school. But as a single mother I don’t have an option to home school my children. Even so, I tried to apply for the virtual academy this fall but missed the window because the number of spots was very limited.

“I’ve had nothing but the stimulus checks to keep us going all this time. I had to decide whether to give them to rent or to make that stretch and take care of my kids. You can guess which one I did. Of course I took care of my kids.

“I got denied unemployment when I could not work because of child care issues. I just turned in a bunch of paperwork again because I had self-employment like working for InstaCart and for Door Dash. But I was denied.

“I ran into the same thing with cash assistance [the pittance state welfare for mothers] and was also denied that. It seemed like it was always one more thing they wanted as far as the paperwork was concerned and that went on for the longest time and then they just denied me.

“My rent is \$825 a month and I have three children and now no stable vehicle because it keeps breaking down. This means what work I did pick up where I needed a car, I can’t rely on now. Right now eviction protection has already ended. We are stuck in the house without money even to move.

“Then there is the child subsidy which is only going to last maybe another month unless they do something different. Since the kids don’t stop growing I had to use that money for clothing. Things got so bad that sometimes I could not even have my cell phone turned on. How are we supposed to survive now? We got food stamps but they took a long time to get that straight.”

Commenting on the growing number of children orphaned by the pandemic, she said, “I’ve heard heartbreaking stories about the children who lost their

parents and feel blessed to be with mine. I have close friends who work at the plants around here. One friend has five kids and the whole household came down with COVID. They did not offer them hazard pay or anything and she had to go into work.

“She told me that her whole line was exposed to COVID and she really didn’t want to go to work for fear of spreading it. In the end the whole family got it. She called me and said she only found out that she had COVID because her coworkers were at the hospital and just found out they tested positive and they called her.

“How can you go into work when they’re not even telling people who is infected and they’re not requiring quarantines and they didn’t even require people around that line to quarantine when they knew there was COVID there? I worked in several plants and I know how nothing gets sanitized and nothing gets cleaned and I don’t want to be in a situation where I bring it home to my kids. I don’t want my whole family infected like what happened to her.

“In a month or so the advanced child tax credit is going to run out. If they don’t extend it when that happens and when it ends where will we be? There were and are so many problems with getting back to work. With three kids it’s difficult enough to find a babysitter and I tried to get day care but in order to qualify for a subsidy but you have to have some type of job lined up to even apply. Even now with family members who might watch them they are scared of getting COVID themselves.

“It doesn’t take a fool to figure out that there is something going on with this behind the scenes and that this whole situation is wrong. I am going to attend your meeting on October 24 and I know a whole lot of other people I will tell about it who are going to be very interested.”



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