

“Any society should protect its children”

Opposition builds as Washington state school reopenings fuel surge of COVID-19

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12 October 2021

In line with the demands of the Biden administration, state officials and school boards in Washington state forced the full reopening of schools this fall. In doing so, they falsely claimed that mitigation measures and vaccines would ensure that schools were safe havens from COVID-19. Nearly two months into the semester, the reality of high case rates, pediatric infections, and hospital capacity has exposed the so-called “safe” return to in-person schools promoted by the Democratic Party and teachers unions as a lie.

In September, King County, the largest county in Washington with a high percentage of people fully vaccinated, reported 11 outbreaks in K-12 schools and seven outbreaks among child care and extracurricular locations. The Seattle and King County Public Health site reports that King County is at a high level of community transmission. Last week, 50 percent of outbreaks in Pierce County, the second largest county in WA, were in the K-12 and child care settings.

According to the Washington Department of Health, the latest seven-day case rate for children ages 4-10 years old is 183.8 per 100,000 people, while the rate stands at 198.6 for children ages 11-13, and 192 for children ages 14-19. These case rates are the highest of all age groups.

COVID-19 case rates have been on the rise statewide since August and have stayed at a high level of transmission, making the situation worse than the third wave last winter. The seven-day case average in Washington in September averaged around 3,000 cases. According to the Washington Department of Health, hospital admissions continued to increase over the month of September and recently peaked at a level 60 percent higher than in the winter of 2020. Although admission rates appear to be slightly declining, hospitals across the state are operating at full capacity and projections suggest

that high levels of occupancy are likely to persist through the fall.

While pediatric cases had previously been lower in Washington state before schools and businesses were fully open, the latest data shows that one in four new COVID-19 cases are now among children. Washington has had 893 children hospitalized with COVID-19 symptoms and 13 children die from the virus.

Regional data is consistent with the rise in pediatric cases nationally. Despite the insistence from local school officials, politicians, and union bureaucrats that transmission is not likely to occur in schools, the rise in infections coincides precisely with the return of children to classrooms.

Although many pediatric cases are asymptomatic or mild, that is not the case for all infected children. There is not enough information about how this virus effects children to fully grasp how many will develop severe COVID-19 or long-term symptoms. With children 0-11 still not eligible for vaccination and vaccination rates in Washington for children 12-17 only around 50 percent, outbreaks and hospitalizations will continue in this population.

Commenting on this, an educator in Washington told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “A logical society does not tell a 10-year-old, who can’t be vaccinated, that they have to be in a classroom during a pandemic. Any society should protect its children. If the social structure isn’t accomplishing that goal, it has failed.”

Teachers and students were forced back into classrooms by agreements negotiated between Washington Education Association (WEA) affiliates and local school boards, typically including vague language for safety measures like “quality ventilation,” “social distancing when possible,” and mask requirements, which are meant to

slow down the rate of infection but not eliminate transmission. However, the measures are not consistently implemented and enforced, and in some rural Republican-led districts, mitigation measures are being dropped altogether to accelerate the spread of the virus.

Many teachers report that even the measly requirement of three feet of social distancing is impossible to maintain and enforce throughout the school day. Kids naturally gravitate towards one another and when they are in the hallways and eating lunch, they often do not keep distance. Additionally, many teachers report on social media that it is difficult for kids to keep their masks on all day and that while they do their best to remind students, the numbers show that these mitigation measures are not enough to keep kids safe.

Parents in Washington are keeping track of the numbers and are deeply scared for their children. One parent who is fighting a battle to keep her child out of schools told the WSWS, “COVID, and Delta specifically, has increased to a higher point than it was last fall and winter, when in-person learning was closed. I feel strongly that we could see a spike.

“The first student death in our district happened the same week schools opened. I thought that would be a big alarm, forcing the district to say we need to shut down, but it didn’t. It shows why eradication is needed, reopening caused the current state of high transmission. As an educator and parent, I don’t need to look at more graphs. The environment is very high-risk. With restaurants, non-essential businesses, we saw the increase in cases. Just look at that timeline. When mandates are dropped, cases increase.”

While the pandemic is far from over, the Democrats refuse to take the essential steps to protect the public, instead promoting solely vaccines and mask-wearing. No one has peddled these insufficient mitigation measures and the unsafe reopening of schools harder than American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten. She has consistently backed the Biden administration’s insistence that schools must remain open and has applauded the most meager of measures, including Biden’s recent “Six-Part Covid-19 Action Plan,” which outlines the administration’s commitment to the reopening of schools and forcing workers back to their jobs, regardless of community spread and how much it leads to infection and death.

In opposition to this policy, which demands that workers “learn to live with the virus,” educators and parents in Washington, across the US and globally are

increasingly determined to eradicate COVID-19 and put an end to the needless suffering and deaths of millions.

Eradication measures include the universal deployment of every possible public health measure, including the short-term closure of schools and nonessential workplaces, a globally-coordinated vaccination program, mass testing, contact tracing, masking, the safe isolation of infected patients, and more.

An educator in Washington commented on the fight for eradication, stating, “Eradication is possible and it is necessary. Science has proven that this virus, like all viruses, will continue to mutate to provide better propagation, and will thus become more transmissible, finding ways to evade natural immunities and vaccinations. To eradicate the virus will be hard work and we must all make sacrifices, but it has proven itself as a viable strategy in New Zealand and China.

“Canceling public events and gatherings, closing non-essential workplaces, and using technology to remain connected with each other, in addition to vaccinations, treatments, masking and social distancing when staying at home isn’t possible, will reduce opportunities for COVID to spread and continue mutating. It is clear that these sacrifices can be borne by the working class; although communities want to gather, people recognize the need to protect one another. That is fundamental to human civilization. It is also clear that the ruling class will not bear those sacrifices. It challenges their power and profits and growth. They will not concede but must be compelled by the just demands of the united working class.”

In order to put an end to the pandemic, the working class must understand the science of the pandemic and the policy of eradication. For this reason, the WSWS and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) are hosting a webinar with leading scientists on Sunday, October 24, to discuss these issues and chart a path forward. All parents, educators, students and workers in Washington should register today and invite your coworkers, friends and family to attend.



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