

COVID outbreak at Baltimore school kills father of student, leaves 12-year-old in ICU

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On Sunday, October 24, The World Socialist Web Site will host an online event featuring a panel of scientists, to explain how COVID-19 can be eradicated and the pandemic finally brought to an end. We urge all those concerned about the situation in Baltimore to register today.

James Summers IV, a father of 10 children from Baltimore, Maryland died from COVID-19 on October 3. Summers caught the virus after his son, a student in Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS), was exposed to COVID-19 at school and brought it home.

The outbreak at Cherry Hill Elementary Middle School, which included at least 14 positive cases at the school in a 10-day period, also led to the hospitalization of a 12-year-old student in an intensive care unit (ICU).

According to local news reports, the 12-year-old student, whose name is Janiya, has suffered acute kidney failure among other medical issues. “She ended up getting sick and the symptoms just got worse,” her mother, Jacorey Barney, told WBFF. “I honestly did not know that she was exposed until it was too late. We were already here at Johns Hopkins.” Family members have set up a GoFundMe page.

Another Cherry Hill parent, Tina Washington, reported to WBFF that three of her children, including a baby boy, have COVID-19 symptoms. “One of the teachers that my daughter said wasn’t coming to school was her homeroom teacher. And that probably was the teacher that had it... They’re waiting to the last minute to notify parents,” said Washington.

Summers wrote in a Facebook post two days before his death, “My son is a 7th grade student who caught covid in the class for the lack of testing. He came home sick and affected my other nine kids. Now I am in the ICU unable to breathe for 3 weeks on my own and I am

pissed. The school should be shut down.”

Concerned Cherry Hill parents have repeated the demand for the shutdown of the school in the wake of the outbreak. In response, city schools spokesman Austin Riley rejected closures, telling WBFF, “So, what we’re doing right now is we are keeping our buildings open, but we will shut down grade levels, we will shut down classrooms.”

Riley declared the city’s completely inadequate once weekly, voluntary testing and quarantine protocols as sufficient. “We have rolling groups of students that are going on and off quarantine. So, again, as we provide our weekly screenings to determine where the presence of COVID-19 may be in different classrooms, as we identify students that test positive or close contacts, they’re going on quarantine.”

Summers sister Jeané explained on a GoFundMe page that Summers “was a fun-loving kid at heart, who was comical and protective, and who would go to the ends of the earth to protect his wife and kids. Our brother was a devoted father and husband who took on many jobs to provide for his family.” Jeané added that Summers’ whole family came down with COVID-19 from the school outbreak.

Since August 23, a total of 927 BCPS students and staff have officially tested positive for COVID-19. In addition to the Cherry Hill outbreak, significant outbreaks have occurred at Calvin M. Rodwell Elementary Middle School (12 cases reported September 27), at KIPP Harmony Academy (10 cases reported October 4), and Pimlico Elementary Middle School (14 cases reported October 5 and 23 total in the 10 days ending October 13).

Responding to Summers’ death, a Baltimore teacher told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “This story is incredibly sad and is unfortunately what I was most

afraid of in sending kids back into unsafe school buildings. Schools continue to push forward with an agenda that clearly puts the health of students, families and teachers last. This will unfortunately continue to be the trend.”

The teacher stated that the school system’s COVID-19 dashboard is unreliable and likely vastly undercounting the true number of cases. “It’s up to principals to report cases to the district. It’s all self-reporting,” the teacher explained. “Teachers are concerned it’s not reflecting the true numbers of cases. Parents aren’t always telling schools if kids are out for COVID. Outside of weekly pool testing, we rely on families to tell us.”

Summers’ death is far from an isolated incident. Almost 140,000 children in the United States have lost a caregiver to the pandemic. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, 542 US children have died from COVID-19 since March 2020.

This tragedy is yet another demonstration of the murderous character of the back-to-school campaign led by the Biden administration and enforced by the teachers unions. The unions, school boards and universities across the country know that reopenings are fueling the pandemic. They have responded with an eerie silence, obfuscation and the manipulating of COVID-19 figures in a desperate effort at doubling-down on the policy of keeping schools open and to minimize opposition from educators, students and parents.

Exhibiting the utter indifference to the lives of the working class, Baltimore Schools CEO Sonja Santelises did not publicly respond to the death of Summers or to the hospitalization of 12-year-old Janiya. The superintendent has not made any public statement about any of the major outbreaks in the schools. Seeking to chloroform the public, on October 5 she posted on Twitter, “Out this morning welcoming back students and families to Cherry Hill EMS. Many thanks to the ‘on the ground’ community leaders. We are all working with @BMore_Healthy team to increase vaccination rates and accessibility for Cherry Hill families.”

Likewise, the Baltimore Teachers Union (BTU), affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), has not commented on the death of Summers. On October 5, the union released its “9 Demands for

Community Safety” which says nothing about closing schools in the event of an outbreak, let alone demanding that the whole school system shut down until the pandemic is stamped out.

The BTU fully accepts that schools will be open and that so-called mitigation measures are sufficient. It merely “demands” numerous measures that the city schools are already carrying out, such as weekly testing. “The union is nowhere to be found,” a BCPS teacher told the WSWS. When asked if the BTU had called for any efforts to stop in-person classes to save lives, the teacher said, “I don’t hear about any teachers strikes happening. There’s none. There’s nothing.”

The recent AFT forum at which President Randi Weingarten invited representatives from the far-right parent group Open Schools USA confirmed that the unions fully endorse the ruling class policy of reopening the schools and keeping them open no matter how destructive the pandemic is to the lives of the working class. Tellingly, Weingarten allowed these far-right scoundrels a platform for their foul policy of “herd immunity” and opposition to masks and vaccines, while completely excluding rank-and-file teachers and parents who strongly oppose the back-to-school initiative.

The working class, however, is beginning to formulate its own independent response to the pandemic, in complete opposition to the trade unions and all capitalist parties. The international parent strike held on October 1, organized by British parent Lisa Diaz of the parent group SafeEdForAll, showed there is widespread opposition to the reopening of schools across the world.

Another parent strike being held today is but one expression of the growing strike wave in the United States and around the world in opposition to the policies pursued by the ruling class throughout the pandemic. Parents, teachers and workers who want to take up the fight to stop the pandemic and save lives are urged to attend the October 24 webinar, “How to End the Pandemic: The Case for Eradication.”



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