

Fifty educators have died in Georgia since mid-August

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At least fifty-two educators in Georgia have died since schools reopened for in-person learning in late July. The full reopening of schools in the state is part of the broader push across the US and internationally to force all children back into the classrooms so that their parents can be forced back into unsafe factories, while the COVID-19 pandemic rages on.

Fifty of the educators have died after August 11, according to local news WSB-TV2, which is tracking reported deaths. This horrific figure is equivalent to a rate of more than one educator killed by COVID-19 per day in the state, which has a population of 10 million.

The growing death toll in Georgia is mirrored across the south, particularly in Florida, where at least 102 educators and 24 children have died since schools reopened this fall, according to the Florida Education Association. As well, data from the American Academy of Pediatrics has shown that children in the US are also dying at a rate of roughly three per day nationwide.

Statewide, the pandemic remains totally out of control. The seven-day average for new cases was 1,771 on Wednesday, as the decline in cases from a peak in late August has virtually stalled, portending a possible rise in the coming weeks. Deaths have risen over the past week, from a seven-day average of 74 last Thursday to 110 this Wednesday.

The school reopening victims include teachers, coaches, school administrators, lunch-room staff and other school workers. Bus drivers have been particularly hard hit, with at least twelve dying this semester. Just a few of the victims include the following:

- Natalia D'Angelo, age 43, became sick very soon after classes resumed. She was a bus driver for the special education department of the Griffin-Spalding County school system and, according to her family, she

was certain she caught the virus at work. The bus monitor on D'Angelo's bus, Marie Darley, also contracted the virus and died.

- Leigh Anne Garland Bracket, who was only 35 years old and a mother of two, died from COVID-19 on September 13. She taught at Murray County Pre-K Center and Dalton Public Schools.

- Larry Hinton, age 74, a bus driver for DeKalb County, died in mid-September. Relatives of Hinton say he became sick after only the first week back. His son Jasvis Hinton told local news, "He did that first week of school and by Sunday he said he wasn't feeling well. Then it just went downhill from there." Another DeKalb school transportation employee, bus monitor Martha Campbell, also died soon after school started this fall.

In protest of the dangerous working conditions and low pay amid the pandemic, 54 school bus drivers walked-out in the Savannah-Chatham district in early September. Many expressed concern over the lack of protections they have against the virus. In DeKalb County, a district in the metro Atlanta area, some 30 school bus drivers also went on strike, with dozens more calling in sick, citing the lack of protections and lack of adequate pay.

Among their demands were greater enforcement of masking among the kids and plexiglass barriers around the driver. School bus drivers have been forced to work extra hours for small pay increases amid a mass shortage of drivers during the pandemic, which has led districts across the state to temporarily suspend bus routes.

In line with the trend occurring across the country and internationally to remove all measures to even mitigate the spread of COVID-19, many regions of the state have entirely scrapped safety measures in schools,

leading to tens of thousands of infections. Metro Atlanta school districts have reported 44,737 cases since the start of the school year, with 22,000 of those among students. Statewide, there have been 8,490 cases recorded among ages 0-22 over the last two weeks.

In Cobb County, a particularly striking example of the “herd immunity” strategy being pursued across the South, the semester has been a total disaster for educators and children alike. The district has the weakest protections of all districts in the Atlanta area, and has eliminated even the most basic protection measures. After the first month of schools reopening, cases throughout the county rose by 458 percent.

The vice chairman of the Cobb County School Board, David Banks, has been using his official district email to disseminate conspiracy theories about the vaccines and COVID-19, including the bogus claim that 122,000 people have died because of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Outraged, one parent told the *Cobb County Courier*, “This really is reckless behavior. I’d support any effort to remove him.” Another said, “There is no accountability for him. The superintendent has said multiple times that they ‘strongly’ encourage vaccines and ‘strongly’ encourage masks, yet David Banks continues to do the opposite.”

Illustrating the growing moves by the ruling class and its state apparatus to force the population to “learn to live with the virus,” last week a U.S. District Court judge ruled against a lawsuit filed by parents of immuno-compromised children who petitioned for a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction which would have required the district to put in place a mask mandate.

In a damning article by ProPublica, parents and educators revealed the horrible conditions in the district. One teacher, who chose to remain anonymous, reported over-crowded classrooms and a lack of resources: “In two of my classes, there were more kids than seats... Some days, I’m scrambling to get chairs from a workroom to say, ‘Hey, come sit at this table together,’ which is also unsafe, because you can’t be 3 feet apart.” In the same report, a parent commented, “our kids made it from last February until [August] of this year without getting COVID. Three days in school, [two of them] got COVID.”

In addition to the scores of educators killed by COVID-19, the full reopening of schools in the state in

the midst of the Delta wave has claimed the lives of four children between September 30 and October 14, bringing the state’s total pediatric deaths, counted in the state as ages 0-17, to 20, according to data from the American Academy of Pediatrics. As of this writing, no further information has been made public on these deaths.

It is imperative that the working class, including educators and parents, intervene to stop the spread of COVID-19 and end the pandemic, which can only be carried out through an internationally-coordinated effort aimed at the global elimination of COVID-19.

Already, parents and educators internationally have taken up the call by British parent Lisa Diaz to participate in a weekly school strike to fight the wave of childhood infections and deaths, and to demand remote learning until the pandemic is contained.

To advance the cause of global elimination requires a highly-informed public. To this end, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) urge all educators and parents to register for the October 24 webinar “How to end the pandemic” to learn about the strategy of elimination and the vital role of the working class in pursuing such a program.



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