

“It feels like I’m being harassed by the police”

New York City government cracks down on parents withholding children from unsafe schools

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The Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) of New York City has ramped up legal actions against parents who have withheld their children from school due to concerns over COVID-19. This move is consistent with threats by Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio’s administration from early September that it would be prepared to utilize the agency to strong-arm resistant parents into sending their children back into unsafe New York City classrooms.

So far in the 2021-22 school year, there have been at least 69 reports of educational neglect, as well as 61 reports of educational neglect combined with other maltreatment concerns to the ACS, according to a report by the Intercept. This number is significant considering that a large portion of New York’s K-12 Department of Education’s (DOE) students have been absent this year, presumably due to worries by their families on the safety of their school buildings. While the DOE has not released its official enrollment figures, it has been unofficially estimated that 130,000 of the district’s 1.1 million public school students have been absent this year.

Brooklyn public attorney Gabriel Freiman told the Intercept that the agency has been interpreting state educational laws particularly aggressively. He noted: “It’s being handled here in an extreme way... Parents who are actively engaged with the school asking for a remote option, asking for home curriculum, wanting to be involved, I think there’s sufficient room for [the DOE] to decide that fails to meet the legal standard for educational neglect.”

Parents have taken to social media to denounce the ACS and the DOE. One parent tweeted this week that they were pressured to send their child back into unsafe

schools and now fear for their safety. Another parent posted a screenshot Wednesday of an email from the DOE’s Office of Home Schooling, which wrote, “As you know if a parent chooses to keep their child home they have to officially enroll their child in DOE Homeschool.”

Mary, a Brooklyn parent who has been targeted by the ACS for refusing to send her children into schools, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “Early on in the pandemic, my youngest became extremely ill at and developed a very high fever. We rushed her to the emergency room and we later found that she had all of the symptoms—dry cough, loss of smell and taste, etc. So I have seen firsthand the harm that this disease can do to children.”

She continued, “now ACS is coming to my house telling me that I am neglecting my own, and for what? Because I am trying to keep them safe from a deadly virus? It’s horrible. It feels like I’m being harassed by the police or something. I just want the best for my kids and to keep them out of harm’s way.”

A second New York City parent contacted the WSWs and reported that she had similarly been targeted by the ACS with a neglect case regarding her two children.

On Sunday, October 24, the WSWs held an international online webinar in which a panel of some of the world’s leading scientists on COVID-19 categorically opposed the unsafe reopening of schools and nonessential workplaces. Denouncing the policy of the Biden administration to use vaccination as a pretext for “herd immunity” practices, several of the scientists called for the mobilization of every measure to stop the spread of COVID-19 internationally.

Mary commented on these statements, telling the WSWs: “Shutdowns have saved a lot of people. Stay at

home, limit time outside, go to school remotely. The government could have kept all of this. But they're opening everything open for money. Both the Democrats and the Republicans are really only interested in giving back to the rich. They don't want to pay to do it right and actually get rid of the pandemic. So instead, we're all suffering and they're just letting the bodies pile up."

The de Blasio administration has been at the forefront of what was hailed by the Associated Press as "the nation's largest experiment of in-person learning during the COVID-19 pandemic." Beginning in early September, the New York ruling establishment used the development of vaccines as a pretext to fully open the largest school district in the country to in-person learning, with no remote learning available to parents for day-to-day curriculum.

A month and a half into the school year, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has reported a surge in childhood cases which has accompanied this criminal "national experiment." Between August 12 and October 21, the AAP reported roughly 1.88 million infections, 6,208 hospitalizations and 206 fatalities among children across the US, all of which are undercounts due to the cover-up of COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations and deaths among children. Last week, 26 new mortalities were added to the cumulative national child death tolls record weekly figure since the start of the pandemic.

In New York City, children ages 5-11 are now leading the city's numbers of new infections. There have been 145.81 positive cases out of every 100,000 children between the ages of five and 11, according to Department of Health and Mental Hygiene data. The DOE infection tracker reports that there have been 5,715 school infections since September 13. Of these, 4,243 were infections among students and 1,472 were among staff. Last week saw the first death of a child due to COVID in the city since the beginning of the school year.

Currently, all DOE students under 12 are unvaccinated, as federal approval of a vaccine for this age group is still awaiting final approval. While the department has also withheld information from the public on the exact number of unvaccinated children in its system, it can be assumed that tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of children who have not been inoculated are transmitting infection in New York City school buildings daily.

The de Blasio administration has responded to the growth of infections by digging in its heels. Earlier this month, it was revealed that the DOE's gutted testing, contact tracing and quarantining regimen had been

completely compromised by the testing consent form requirements for all unvaccinated students. This revelation amounted to an admission by the administration of an effective cover-up of the actual number of infections within the city school system.

In a September 8 press conference, de Blasio absurdly stated, "[The] best place for your kids to be [is] in school." He then made a warning to parents who were hesitant about sending their children in for face-to-face schooling. "If in the beginning of the school year, a parent's not ready, we're going to keep talking to them, we're going to keep trying to convince them. If that goes on for a while, then that's a different scenario..." DOE Chancellor Meisha Porter then added, "ACS is our partner, and ACS is very clear that their goal is the same as ours, and that is to help get our babies into school. The only time the ACS will intervene is if there is a clear intent to keep a child from being educated, period..."

The aggressive pursuit of parents seeking to keep their children safe by the New York City political establishment underscores that the Democrats fundamentally represent the capitalist class just as ruthlessly as the Republicans. Both parties are insistent that there shall be no measures which impinge upon the right of businesses to accumulate profit at whatever cost to human life. The de Blasio administration's phony mitigation regime has been shown to be a cover for "herd immunity" practices, with an untold number of children needlessly exposed to COVID-19 with unknown long-term consequences.

The WSWS urges parents who oppose the drive to force the population into unsafe schools and workplaces to connect their struggles with those of the growing international movement of the working class. Workplace and neighborhood committees must be formed and built and united in alliance with the New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee. This committee is waging a determined struggle against both capitalist parties and their backers in the trade unions, and for the unity of all workers across the globe for better living and working conditions, jobs, social infrastructure and the global elimination of the COVID-19 pandemic.



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