

“Schools need to be shut down globally rather than piecemeal actions”

Michigan educators endorse October 24 webinar and the fight to eradicate COVID-19

Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
4 November 2021

The Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee meets next on Sunday, November 14, at 1 p.m. Eastern. Register today and invite your coworkers, family and friends!

At the latest meeting of the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, held last Sunday, parents and educators from across the state discussed the October 24 webinar hosted by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), “How to end the pandemic,” which advanced a global strategy to eliminate COVID-19. In the course of the discussion, committee members drew the connection between the fight to stop the pandemic and the need to unify their struggles with other sections of workers battling low wages and onerous working conditions.

Phyllis, a Detroit teacher and chair of the committee, shared clips from the October 24 webinar, and afterward a lively discussion ensued.

James spoke for many when he said the speaker who had the greatest impact on him was Dr. Jose-Luis Jimenez, professor of chemistry at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and an expert in aerosol physics. James noted, “Dr. Jimenez talked about ventilation meters, which there are none of in schools. That would go against the profit motive.”

Phyllis commented: “So many children are getting sick. I am taking every precaution yet students still fall ill because they eat lunch, go to recess, etc. It was important to hear Dr. Jimenez’s remarks on droplets versus aerosols. He made the comparison that governments promoted the droplet theory because it is compatible with blaming the individual, who they can say didn’t wipe down the surfaces, or wasn’t careful.

“With aerosolization, the infection is everywhere—in the classroom, the hallways, the vents, and there is no escaping it. So, it involves society and there are only social remedies. That’s why schools need to be closed down until the virus is eliminated from society.”

A teacher from northeastern Michigan said she came to the meeting because “[you are] the only ones really fighting for eradication.” She spoke about COVID-19 cases increasing in Michigan, the under-reporting by the state, and how “all levels of state government are passing the buck.”

Ed, a science teacher in a Detroit charter school, remarked on the significance of the webinar, pointing out that “a century ago liberals exposed the ills of society. There was never a conception that disease couldn’t be defeated, going back to George Washington immunizing his troops against smallpox.” Referring to the country’s deadliest mass killing at an elementary school, where 20 children were murdered in 2012, he asked, “Since when is it acceptable to have a Sandy Hook level of death among children every week?”

V., who has grandchildren in public schools, said the webinar was the clearest discussion of COVID-19 since the pandemic started. “It’s time the teachers start to rally for each other. There must be a time to push for elimination strategies before winter. Schools need to be shut down globally rather than piecemeal actions.” When she mentioned the stress on health care workers, discussion quickly moved to the frustrations and stresses in the classroom.

Deb, a paraprofessional, reported that “teachers are as exhausted now as they are by the end of the school year. They have no staff, and by the time a school closes due to staff shortages they have already gone for weeks with

those shortages. When the schools close one by one, it's weeks after the situation has been intolerable for teachers."

Another Detroit teacher described the long hours of stressful work: "I can definitely attest to the exhaustion and feeling burnt out already only two months in. Every week I am being made to cover teacher vacancies and absences during my prep periods. That is making it impossible for me to meet the report card deadline without lowering the quality of my own teaching. Chronic teacher and support staff vacancies are also leading to a breakdown of a culture for learning and respect for teachers, and the number of fights is increasing."

V. spoke in frustration about these education cuts and the lack of staff, asking emphatically: "What is the point of education under these conditions? All systems are failing. No one is educating, it's a lost generation and it's at a breaking point."

Ed responded that the pandemic has "exacerbated a declining education system going back to [President Bill] Clinton through No Child Left Behind and [President Barack] Obama's Race to the Top. What was public education? The last great social reform."

Another committee member said: "The capitalists would like nothing more than an uneducated working class. Frederick Douglass said, 'Knowledge makes a man unfit to be a slave.' They are rolling back the clock on knowledge, reason, the Enlightenment, to the times when the population knew nothing about human rights. It isn't a coincidence that the socialist movement has these demands at its core."

Rochelle, a parent and teacher who works in upstate Michigan, spoke of some of the presentations by the scientists, the role of President Joe Biden and the Democrats in reopening schools, and the dangers posed to her students and her own children.

She related the growing anger and frustration of her fellow teachers in the face of high numbers of COVID-19 cases coursing through Michigan schools, commenting: "In the webinar, Lisa Diaz was talking about one in 12 secondary students and one in 32 primary students having contracted COVID in Britain. What also scares me to hear is the estimate that 12 percent of those who caught COVID ended up with Long COVID.

"I recently read that they looked at brain scans prior to COVID. There is a massive effect being revealed of COVID on brain function. It is much more than loss of the sense of smell. Mood and IQ are involved. Who knows if they will recognize the kinds of illnesses that

have a brain component as valid in the future? My daughter caught COVID early in the school year. She is back now but what will the future be?

"The other point that got my attention was that they know it is aerosols. But they won't recognize it or won't take seriously the scientists who were saying it early on. If they did, it would take the onus off the individual and point to the failures of government and society to properly deal with the virus.

"Several of the presenters talked about the places where elimination had been followed. There have been successes. As much as I believe that it has to happen, where is the force to come from? How will it be organized? This is important because right now there are no mitigation measures at my school. None! There is no social distancing, virtually no masks, because masks are optional. In the high school where I work several kids had it. But it took so long for us to find out that by the time we teachers got notification they were already back in the classroom.

"As far as [Michigan Governor Gretchen] Whitmer is concerned, her stance on COVID has changed dramatically since Biden took office. Actually now it is the same or worse than when [President Donald] Trump was in. Last March they announced the goal was to get schools open. But there were high rates of cases in Michigan. Our county was one of the highest in the state for infections. They publicized the COVID news then, but now you don't hear anything about it. I just don't think they are reporting the numbers at all. That is because it is collusion between the Democrats and the Republicans. The policy is driven by financial and economic interests and not human considerations. There is no difference between the two parties when it comes to financial interests."



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