

“It’s like they’re using our kids as guinea pigs”

## Omaha, Nebraska, parent speaks out against dangerous conditions in schools

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A nine-year-old child in Omaha, Nebraska, was hospitalized last week when COVID-19 spread rapidly through Black Elk Elementary in the Millard Public School (MPS) district. There have been at least 50 cases reported at Black Elk alone. On November 5, MPS released a limited comment from the family of the hospitalized child, which included a brief update on his status: “Our son continues to be a strong fighter through COVID pneumonia and through secondary bacterial infections. We are with him every step of the way.”

This is not the first outbreak in the district, which was forced to shut down several elementary classrooms in August as cases were reported throughout the district. A custodian with Millard died early on in the pandemic, but the district has refused to implement mask mandates this year, with Superintendent Jim Sutfin stating that requiring masks turns teachers into “mask police.” Now, as one student’s parents are facing the terror of seeing their child critically ill from COVID-19, Sutfin responded by stating, “Black Elk has not been an ideal situation.”

Meanwhile, Omaha Public Schools (OPS), Omaha’s largest school district, is already talking about reviewing its mask policy as soon as January, citing the fact that vaccines are now available for children aged 5-11. OPS reports 84 active cases for students and 20 for staff on their dashboard, but given the amount of under-reporting noted in the study that came out of the University of Nebraska Medical Center, it is safe to assume the numbers are higher.

All of this is happening within the context of the uncontrolled community spread in the wider Omaha/Douglas County area. The Douglas County

Health Department reports: “On Friday, November 5, the Douglas County Health Department confirmed 276 new positive COVID-19 tests have been received since midnight the previous day. The Health Department received four new death certificates during the past day. We have lost four men, one in his 40s and three over 70 years of age. All of them were vaccinated and two had underlying conditions.”

This is all unsurprising given Nebraska’s governor, billionaire Republican Pete Ricketts, has supported the “herd immunity” policy embraced by the rest of the ruling class. Most recently, Ricketts reinstated county-level reports, demographics and daily updates on COVID-19 cases to Nebraska’s COVID-19 dashboard after removing them. The removal of the data had been criticized by public health officials and others who noted the value of knowing the details of community spread. Ricketts also joined with Iowa’s Republican Governor Kim Reynolds in supporting a lawsuit against vaccine mandates.

Kristi, a parent in Omaha who asked to have her name changed for privacy, spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* and shared some of her thoughts on the situation in the schools. She said, “What’s happening in Millard at Black Elk elementary is heartbreaking.”

Kristi has worked to keep her children at home during this entire pandemic, but noted that this year there are no remote options and the state has tried to use the County Attorney and OPS to force parents to send their children to schools. She referred to those running the schools and those in power in Nebraska as bullies, saying: “People want their kids to have an education but not at the cost of their life. I understand that remote

[learning] was hard and a lot of kids struggled with it, but at the end of the day I'd rather my kid be behind in education than bury them. It's wrong for them to not give a parent that choice."

Kristi also noted that children do not wear their masks at lunch time and commented on the lack of real distancing within the schools and the fact that masks alone cannot keep children safe. She stated: "It's like they're using our kids as guinea pigs, but I refused to let them bully me to send my kids. They want to see if they can threaten us with courts and OPS. Like I have said, you can't spank your child anymore or OPS comes sometimes and will take your child, or you definitely end up in the courts; it is child abuse if you're driving and your kid isn't in a car seat, but it's okay for our kids to go into a place that's a breeding ground for this virus? There's kids dying all over the place."

Kristi's comments reflect the thoughts and feelings of parents and teachers everywhere who want to see this pandemic handled in a scientific, sane manner. UK parent Lisa Diaz made similar comments during the WSWs webinar "How to end the pandemic," during which scientists outlined a clear path out of the pandemic. It is not for lack of scientific knowledge or technology that this pandemic cannot end, but rather a lack of political leadership from the ruling class, who put profit over lives. Parents, students, teachers and all of the working class must work to create rank-and-file safety committees and fight back against these ruthless policies that are putting children all over the world at risk of severe illness and death.



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