

Vaccines are not enough! Action must be taken to halt winter surge!

Washington Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
29 November 2021

Educators and parents adopted the following statement at a recent meeting of the Washington Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee. We encourage readers to contact us to get involved with this critical struggle.

Urgent action is required to halt a massive surge of COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations and deaths, which are predicted for the winter months ahead. The Washington Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee calls for the immediate return to remote instruction, the closure of non-essential businesses, and the implementation of a serious public health strategy to drastically lower transmission and eliminate the coronavirus.

It is undeniable that fully in-person learning has contributed to the latest wave of cases and deaths. In the first two months of this school year, Washington state recorded its highest numbers of cases and deaths since the start of the pandemic. Despite nearly 70 percent of Washington residents at least 12 years old being fully vaccinated, a record peak of 4,484 cases was recorded on September 13, compared to 401 cases exactly one year prior.

While Governor Jay Inslee and the rest of the Democratic Party insist that vaccinations and mitigation measures like mask mandates will serve as an effective strategy to deal with the pandemic, alone they have proved to be incapable of stopping mass infection. As King County health officer Dr. Jeff Duchin recently stated, “Compared to where we were, before our summertime surge with Delta, cases today remain three times higher, hospitalizations two times higher and deaths three to six times higher. So, although we’re coming down from that serious surge, we’re still much higher with respect to cases, hospitalizations and deaths.”

This winter surge is expected to bring an enormous increase of infections and deaths. When asked in October 2021 what the pandemic situation will look like in three to six months, Dr. Eric Feigl-Ding warned that “we will still be counting bodies. The excess death numbers will pile up even more. We are going to have a really bad winter in the northern hemisphere.” This is precisely what we are witnessing across the Midwest. The most recent surge of the

highly transmissible Delta variant in Michigan is significantly larger than last year’s surge. Immunity is waning for those in the US who were vaccinated earlier in the year but have not yet received a booster shot, leading to a growth in the number of breakthrough infections. An already grim situation is set to become much worse by the spread of the latest Omicron variant first detected in southern Africa, which is more virulent than Delta and potentially resistant to vaccines.

The latest surge is the direct result of the Democratic and Republican parties’ decision to fully reopen schools and workplaces over the summer. Based on agreements negotiated between school districts and local affiliates of the Washington Education Association (WEA), educators and students were herded back into overcrowded, poorly ventilated classrooms with no systematic testing and contact tracing. Children’s parents were also forced back to their jobs, with political leaders desperate to fill the most low-paid positions in food service, retail and logistics.

Schools, like Amazon warehouses and restaurants, have become petri dishes for the virus to spread unchecked throughout the population. Because the SARS-CoV-2 virus is primarily spread through airborne particles, any setting where people congregate in large numbers, especially in poorly-ventilated indoor environments, increases transmission.

K-12 schools and childcare centers have remained the top two sources of the state’s workplace outbreaks for more than a year, with 647 and 522 total outbreaks respectively. Even after the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) adjusted its definition of an outbreak from two epidemiologically-linked cases to three linked cases or 10 percent of a given cohort, the state reported 189 outbreaks in K-12 schools in August and September alone.

At the same time, pediatric cases, hospitalizations and deaths have climbed. The American Association of Pediatrics (AAP) has recorded 6.7 million pediatric (0 to 18 years of age) COVID-19 cases in the United States. The most recent AAP report found that 141,905 children were

infected last week, the 15th straight week of over 100,000 official new cases. In Washington, children aged 13 and under have the highest seven-day case rates out of any age group.

These figures are serious undercounts of the true scope of the pandemic. Without mass testing and contact tracing, most asymptomatic cases are not accounted for. Some states stopped reporting pediatric COVID-19 cases and other data altogether to cover up the reality of the public health disaster they created. However, they paint a damning picture of how the policies of the financial elite, politicians and trade unions have resulted in widespread infection and loss of life.

The policy of the Democratic Party, and the unions such as the Seattle Education Association, is to claim that the population must learn to “live with the virus,” with vaccinations and masks, taken in and of themselves, serving a strategy of mitigation rather than the elimination of the virus entirely. This is nothing but a variation of the Republican Party’s strategy of “herd immunity,” which means the intentional mass infection of the population. However, studies conducted in numerous regions of the world have shown that infection does not protect communities from reinfection. Rejecting the recommendations of public health experts, the political establishment is pursuing “herd immunity” to allow economic activity to continue full speed ahead and prevent any disruptions to the bottom line of the corporations.

We reject their claim that we must learn to live with the virus, which means accepting a policy of social murder. Such a crime is unacceptable!

This book compiles the most critical programmatic statements, polemics, scientific analyses, interviews, and news articles published by the World Socialist Web Site on the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a social and political chronology of this world historic event based on a Marxist and Trotskyist perspective.

After months of feigning concern for the academic progress and mental health of children due to online learning, state leaders and union officials are enforcing conditions that will have lifelong negative impacts on our students. An estimated 7 to 20 percent of infected children develop Long COVID symptoms, with neurological damage, declines in cognitive ability and respiratory symptoms at least three months after initial infection. More than 140,000 children in the US have lost a caregiver to the virus. Depression, anxiety and substance abuse are on the rise. Such conditions are not conducive to a safe, high-quality and stable learning environment that children need to thrive.

The pandemic has also revealed the systematic destruction of public education that has been underway for decades. Antiquated school buildings rely on open windows for

ventilation, even with cold and rainy winter weather. Nurses, social workers and counselors cannot keep up with their caseloads of students requiring mental health and social support.

Teachers and paraeducators are being called upon to take on impossible workloads in order to enforce COVID-19 guidelines, respond to more social and behavioral issues among their students and provide remote instruction for students in quarantine. The stress, exhaustion and burnout among educators is driving many to leave teaching altogether, sparking widespread staffing shortages. Many educators have reported giving up their prep and lunch periods to cover other classrooms lacking a substitute teacher.

Neither capitalist party is willing to implement a serious public health strategy because that would go against their own pursuit of profit. The unions have aided them by agreeing to school reopening plans and suppressing any attempt to organize demonstrations and strikes.

Epidemiologists and scientists know what must be done to avoid the current trajectory to another Winter of Death. The fight against the pandemic requires the use of every public health tool at society’s disposal. This includes the closure of school buildings and all non-essential workplaces until transmission is reduced to zero, rapid testing and contact tracing, quarantining of all infected individuals, a global vaccination program, and the use of mitigation measures at essential workplaces. All the resources necessary to save hundreds of thousands of lives must be utilized to this end, including the provision of full income to families who must stay home.

Our committee joins the struggle demanding the elimination strategy, which would save hundreds of thousands of lives and provide the tools needed to stop COVID-19 transmission in a matter of months. We encourage all teachers, staff and parents across the region to expand rank-and-file committees to every school and every district, coordinating independent opposition and linking the collective struggle of educators across the United States and internationally.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact