

Michigan educators call for immediate end to in-person schooling as COVID-19 infections surge

Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
17 December 2021

At an urgent meeting called by the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee on Friday night, teachers and other school employees called for an immediate halt to in-person teaching to protect educators, students and their communities. The meeting was attended by teachers at schools in Detroit and surrounding areas, including those active in protests to demand virtual-only classes.

Educators discussed the spread of the new infectious Omicron variant, the methods China employed to suppress the transmission of the virus and eliminate it, and the refusal of US authorities to close schools and non-essential workplaces, which are the centers of community spread.

The following resolution was adopted at the meeting:
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The number of infections, hospitalizations and deaths in Detroit and Michigan is reaching the highest levels since the pandemic started, even before the full impact of the more infectious Omicron variant. Hospitals are filling up and every day more than 120 Michigan residents are dying.

According to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, there were 140 new outbreaks last week—up 31 percent from the week before—including 47 outbreaks connected to K-12 schools, 47 in nursing homes and 30 at colleges and universities.

Across the country, there were 164,000 new childhood cases, bringing the number to 2.1 million child infections since schools opened in September. The number of school employees and children who are dying across the country is continuing to grow.

On Tuesday came the tragic news that 17-year-old Alayna Thach, an honors student in Philadelphia, had

died. In Michigan, two educators at the Catherine Blackwell Institute, special education teacher Tracy Merritt and attendance officer Calvin Ayler, died last month. On November 26, 44-year-old special education classroom assistant JonL. Bush, who was fully vaccinated, died in Chicago.

In mid-November of 2020, Detroit school officials ordered the temporary closure of all schools when average daily cases reached 5,834. This was followed by Governor Whitmer's three-week suspension of in-person classes at high schools and universities. This year, however, average daily cases reached 8,556 on December 8 but schools and universities remain open.

There is only one reason for this seemingly insane policy. Politicians from both parties, from the Biden administration to the state and local level, want to keep children in infected schools so their parents will keep producing profits in equally infected factories and warehouses. How is this any different from Amazon boss Jeff Bezos and the owners of the candle factory in Mayfield, Kentucky, ordering their employees to keep working even as a killer tornado was bearing down on them?

Educators, parents and students are starting to take matters into their own hands. Students and teachers at Martin Luther King High School walked out last month to protest a COVID-19 outbreak at their school and the coverup by district officials. Earlier this month, educators at The School of Marygrove (TSM) organized a sickout to demand better school safety after the Oxford shootings and virtual-only classes to protect themselves and their students from COVID-19. TSM took the action in defiance of the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT), which long ignored their grievances

and has collaborated with district officials to keep the schools open.

As the historic struggles of autoworkers in Detroit, Flint and other cities show, the working class never achieved anything without a collective fight. Today, conducting such a struggle is a matter of life and death.

We, the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (MERFSC), are the true voice and leadership of teachers and other school employees who want to protect their children and save lives.

We demand:

- The closing of schools and nonessential businesses,
- The necessary resources for high-quality virtual learning,
- The full implementation of public health measures, including universal testing, contact tracing and quarantining, to finally eliminate COVID-19.
- The distribution of necessary resources to families affected by temporary lockdowns to guarantee their safety and well-being.

The MERFSC calls on educators to widely distribute this resolution, join and build our committee and unite with autoworkers and other workers to fight for it. We also call on educators to participate in the Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic that has been initiated by the World Socialist Web Site to expose the political and economic forces which have allowed the uncontrolled transmission of the virus and its development into a catastrophic pandemic that has killed millions worldwide.



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