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The Chicago Public Schools cancelled classes for the second day on Thursday, following the vote by teachers to reject in-person education and demand remote learning.

The entire political establishment and media have launched a full court press attacking the teachers' courageous decision to stop the spread of COVID-19, which directly challenges the ruling class's policy of mass infection and death.

During a Wednesday evening press conference, Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot announced that the city has filed an unfair labor action complaint and is threatening further legal measures to try to force teachers and students back into unsafe schools. She claimed that the action by teachers was an "unlawful, unilateral strike."

Speaking on behalf of the banks and big business, Lightfoot declared: "We will not pay you for an unlawful strike. We will not pay you to abandon your post and your children at a time when they and their families need us most." She added, "We are standing firm and we are going to fight to get our kids back to in-person learning. Period. Full stop."

The Chicago city government has the full backing of the Biden administration and the Republican Party.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Wednesday that the country is "more than equipped to ensure schools are open ... including in Chicago." Biden has campaigned aggressively for the full reopening of schools despite the massive surge in new COVID-19 cases and record hospitalizations of children.

For his part, Donald Trump issued a statement declaring that "what is happening in Chicago with all the school closures is devastating." He added, "Educate our children in person or give every dollar spent on education directly to the students so they can get out of these failing government schools!"

Lightfoot has claimed that teachers are doing "real harm" to students. In fact it is the ruling class policy of mass infection that has done irreparable harm to children, many who have seen their loved ones, teachers, and friends get sick and die as the federal government and state and city leaders encouraged a deadly disease to rip through the country.

Chicago Teachers Union President Jesse Sharkey said Wednesday that the CTU "had not seen enough movement" on CPS' proposals to reach an agreement. The CTU is trying to find some agreement with the schools that will justify forcing teachers back to work, as it did in the Spring of last year.

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) CEO Pedro Martinez indicated that the district was working on a remote learning plan, but that any remote days would have to be "made up," that is, tacked onto the end of the school year.

Parents received notification from the district that starting Friday, January 7, students may return on a school-by-school basis and would be contacted by their school principals. Martinez said on Wednesday, ?? "We still believe that the right approach is not a district-wide hammer that does a brush across the entire system calling the schools unsafe—there's no evidence to show that—and instead making sure we address individual issues at schools."

There is widespread support for keeping Chicago children and youth home and out of mass infection environments.

According to the Chicago Department of Public Health, children 17 and under have the highest per capita daily COVID-19 case rate, at 205.4 per 100,000 as of January 1. Chicago Department of Public Health Commissioner Dr. Alison Arwady announced yesterday that the city had no rapid tests available and will not for at least two weeks, referring to supply chain issues.

A CPS principals' survey indicated that, for the more than 100 schools responding, about 34 percent of students stayed home on Monday, January 3, the first day back after winter break, before the vote by teachers and the lockout by CPS.

"We should be out with the teachers too": Detroit teachers, autoworkers back Chicago educators

The stand taken by the Chicago teachers to demand virtual only schools to protect lives has inspired educators and workers across the US and internationally.

Casey Williams, a high school science teacher in Detroit, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "My heart goes out to the teachers and staff in Chicago. Shame on those who decided their lives were expendable! How could you force students and teachers back into unsafe conditions? The situation is even more unsafe than ever before.

"This foolhardy move is a clear attempt to maintain the status quo, keep kids in school, not for education, but to keep parents at work, making a profit for the big corporations. These are the same corporations who have purchased our politicians and unions. Kudos to Chicago teachers who have said, 'No more!' We want to teach. We love our kids, but we need to all be safe while doing it.

“The Chicago teachers intended to teach remotely, but the district locked them out! What does this tell us? The Chicago district does not want education and safety, they want control and warehousing of children. Way to make it obvious!

“Educational professionals everywhere must take a stand. You are more valuable than they credit you for. Protect yourself, because corporate greed is more than happy to gamble your life, and that of our elderly and medically fragile.

“The science shows this virus persists as an aerosol in rooms where the infected have been breathing and talking. Therefore, whole classrooms, grocery stores and factories can be infected rapidly when people simply breathe in that room too. The overcrowded ICU’s decreased ventilator availability can lead to that patient’s death. But more concerning, for the entire human family, is the mutation of this virus.

“Most of those mutants will not be viable, but the ones that are viable could become the next variant. Those new forms of the virus may one day be so different from the current form that our vaccines will no longer be effective, taking us back to start of 2020 in the fight against a ‘new’ virus. It is best to do a two-month lockdown now, save lives, and prevent the creation of a more dastardly virus.”

A young autoworker at the Stellantis (Chrysler) Warren Truck Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit said, “What the Chicago teachers are doing is good. They are protecting the kids. I’m with them. I have kids, and I don’t want to bring Covid home to them.

“At our plant people are being forced to work when they are positive. The plants should absolutely be closed. We should be out with the teachers too. The more people that get together the better.”

Thousands of students and faculty take a stand against the University of Michigan’s return to in-person learning

Thousands of students and staff are once again taking a stand at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor against the school’s reckless decision to reopen for in-person classes on Wednesday. The decision to reopen the campus comes in the face of skyrocketing local infections and hospitalizations from the Omicron variant of COVID-19.

On January 3, two days before classes were set to begin in-person, over 500 faculty and graduate student instructors attended an all-instructors meeting held online to discuss an initiative called the “e-pivot,” a transition to online instruction in opposition to the university’s forced return to in-person classes. Close to 600 participants and other supporters pledged to make the pivot to online instruction in their classes.

The meeting follows the publication of an open letter to President Schlissel and Provost Susan Collins on December 17, which argues for a two-week delay of in-person instruction. As of Wednesday morning, the letter had been signed by 1,520 faculty, students and staff.

The letter begins: “We write to urge the University of Michigan administration to reconsider our plans for the winter semester. It seems clear that bringing students, faculty, and staff back to campus directly after a week of holiday activities that typically include numerous gatherings of friends and relatives and often take place in crowded venues is a recipe for a major COVID outbreak in the first week or two of classes.

“What is critical,” the letter continues, “is to act now and not wait until a last-minute decision is forced upon us by circumstances.”

Full article

Detroit teacher: “It’s like they want to normalize [death] and make

this the new way of life”

Jeff, a Detroit Public Schools teacher, spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* about the surge of the COVID-19 pandemic and the response of the ruling class. The city is planning on reopening schools to in-person learning, but it has delayed the start date until January 14.

In response to comparisons of the death toll from COVID-19 in the US to deaths in World War I and the Civil War, Jeff said, “We’re surpassing all these numbers, and they are ignoring it. It’s like they want to normalize it and make this the new way of life. It’s crazy.”

“What does ‘live with Covid’ even mean? It sounds like the same exact thing we’re dealing with, but we’re supposed to ignore it. But how do we live with something with this many deaths and cases! It’s way more serious than the flu.

“If a disease like this is going to affect even the brain, learning, IQ, why are we putting children at risk? So many new cases are being caused in schools. They first said kids can’t get it, but as soon as you open the schools, we have all these children with cases. Isn’t the definition of insanity when you keep doing the same thing but expect a different outcome? It doesn’t make any sense.

“I agree 100 percent with a lockdown. I think that’s the only way you can get rid of something like this. I’ve read about New Zealand, where they had a lockdown and have had a small number of cases by comparison. To me it’s shocking to hear that the US leads the world in cases.

“They just say: ‘This is the new normal! Just get used to it!’ For big business, corporations, it’s all about the economy.

“I agree with the three demands in the open letter [from the Socialist Equality Party]. Small business owners need to be protected too. The billionaires are still getting money.”

On a proposal from the city to close Detroit schools for three more days beyond January 14, Jeff replied: “What good is three days going to do? It’s not going to help anyone if we get kids together on Thursday instead of Monday. What good is it going to do?

“I’ve always agreed that we need a system that prioritizes life over profit. This is such a clear statement from the government that ‘we can’t shut down the economy.’ They just came out and said it. I don’t think either party prioritizes life over the economy. I would align myself with the Democratic Party, but I don’t see any difference in the way that the pandemic has been handled. Their approach in talking about it is just different. Both parties represent the rich. One comes straight out and says it, and the other beats around the bush.

“We have a variety of people at our school. We have a group of teachers who think we have to make this the new normal, because the kids can’t socialize or learn well on virtual. Which I agree with, but I think if we did a lockdown we really could stop this thing in a couple of months, and just have a short term inconvenience in exchange for a real long term solution.”

Biden administration backs reopening of schools after Chicago teachers vote to reject in-person learning

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki reiterated the Biden administration's demand for the reopening of schools to in-person learning Wednesday, following a vote by Chicago teachers to shift to online instruction. "We know they can be opened safely, and we're here to help make that happen," Psaki said when asked about developments in Chicago.

Chicago's Democratic mayor, Lori Lightfoot, denounced teachers for "fear-mongering and hysteria" on Tuesday evening, in advance of the vote by 20,000 educators in the country's third largest school district.

The courageous action to stop mass infection received the support of 73 percent of educators voting on Tuesday evening. It is part of a growing movement throughout the country to demand the shutdown of schools as the COVID-19 pandemic surges out of control.

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) CEO Pedro Martinez has put teachers on "no pay" status and locked them out of their Google accounts, preventing them from communicating with parents and students. The district announced it will provide an update by 5 pm Central Time today on further plans to force the reopening of schools.

The city's COVID-19 positivity rate was above 23 percent on Wednesday, as the Omicron variant spreads without restraint. Most children in Chicago are not vaccinated, as is the case in the US as a whole, and child hospitalizations have surged to record levels. According to the state's public health department, schools are the single largest means of COVID-19 spread in the state of Illinois.

Other school districts in the Chicago area have reopened with low staffing levels due to widespread illness and staff burnout, creating dangerous, crowded situations where no learning can take place. An Elgin teacher commented on Facebook: "We had 44 teachers out today at our high school, and we were begged to cover teachers' classes all day long. They still didn't close the school, instead corralling the kids together into the auditorium to be supervised by administrators."

The Democratic Party's efforts to reopen schools, led by Lightfoot since early 2021, have relied on open lying and intimidation. On Tuesday, Chicago Department of Public Health Commissioner Dr. Alison Arwady repeated the fiction that schools, which are centers of transmissible disease in every other instance, are somehow safe spaces from COVID-19. She claimed COVID-19 acts like the flu in children, including the unvaccinated, saying, "And we don't close schools for the flu."

CPS CEO Martinez announced Tuesday that he thinks a positivity metric for teachers and staff can be agreed on this week that will allow individual classrooms and schools to go remote. The numbers being floated are absurdly high, including 25 percent.

The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) is working to get teachers back into classrooms as soon as possible. The Tuesday vote was structured to allow the rapid reopening of schools, calling for no in-person work until January 18 or until the city's COVID-19 infection rate falls below the threshold set by the Chicago Public Schools last year, whichever comes first.

CTU President Jesse Sharkey said at a press conference Wednesday morning that negotiations would resume as early as this afternoon with the aim of reopening the schools as quickly as possible. "If you want to get us back in school quicker, provide testing," he said.

For assistance in forming a rank-and-file committee, visit wsws.org/edsafety

Chicago teachers vote to reject return to in-person learning as COVID-19 cases surge

On Tuesday night, Chicago teachers voted overwhelmingly not to return to in-person classes and to move all learning online in the third largest

school district in the US. The action is part of a growing movement of educators throughout the country to demand the shutdown of schools as the COVID-19 pandemic surges out of control.

The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) announced late Tuesday night that the vote to stop the reopening of schools after winter break passed by 73 percent.

Illinois is experiencing record-breaking numbers of COVID-19 infections, fueled by the spread of the Omicron variant, including a growing number of child infections. On December 30, Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker advised hospitals to cancel non-emergency operations in order to free up space for a further increase in infections.

The Democratic Party, which controls Chicago politics, has pushed aggressively for the reopening of schools. Prior to the vote on Tuesday, Mayor Lori Lightfoot and Commissioner of Public Health Dr. Allison Arwady spoke to the media to threaten and berate teachers for considering action to save lives. Lightfoot declared that teachers should not be in a position to "shut down a whole school system, for what?"

On Tuesday night, following the vote, the CPS issued a statement announcing that classes would be cancelled and that there will be no remote learning. The CPS CEO Pedro Martinez has declared that teachers who do not report to school will not be paid, essentially declaring a lockout.

[Full article](#)

Michigan teachers discuss collective action to close schools

Michigan teachers took part in an emergency meeting Tuesday afternoon to organize collective action to close schools and stop the spread of COVID-19. The meeting, sponsored by the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, included a large number of educators, parents and young people from Detroit and other Michigan school districts, as well as teachers from Illinois, Pennsylvania and New York. Also participating was a leader of the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee in the United Kingdom, where 218,000 new COVID-19 infections were recorded Tuesday.

The emergency meeting was held as the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) reported that the state saw 61,235 new cases and 298 deaths between last Thursday and Monday. The seven-day average of 12,929 daily cases was a record and up 87 percent from the previous week. In its first report of 2022, the DHHS reported that 3,999 Michigan residents were hospitalized with COVID-19. This includes 96 children, the highest number since the pandemic began.

K-12 schools continue to be the largest source of COVID-19 outbreaks in the state, with 22 new outbreaks and 333 continued outbreaks traced to classrooms, according to a new report posted Monday. As bad as this is, the full impact of the travel and family gatherings over the holidays has not yet been felt.

[Full article](#)

K-12 schools reopen as Omicron surges throughout the US South

Amid the record-breaking surge of COVID-19 cases in the United States and throughout the world due to the spread of the highly transmissible Omicron variant, infections are on the rise again in states across the Southern US just as K-12 schools reopen for the spring semester.

While the Biden administration falsely claims to follow the science, it

has totally abdicated responsibility for the health and well-being of students and staff as they resume in-person instruction amid what many scientists are predicting will be a tsunami of infection for both the unvaccinated and vaccinated. In a meeting with the nation's governors on December 27, President Biden told them, "There is no federal solution" to the ongoing crisis of the pandemic. He continued, "This gets solved at the state level."

Governors and state legislatures across much of the South have banned or impeded policies and procedures that allow schools to enforce even the most limited mitigation measures such as wearing masks, social distancing, testing, and limiting attendance to indoor events.

[Full article](#)

Eric Adams takes office as Mayor of New York City, pledging to keep schools open amidst record COVID-19 infections

Eric Adams took the oath of office as the 110th mayor of the largest city of the United States at a ceremony on January 1, just after the annual Times Square countdown ushering in the New Year. The new mayor lost no time in emphasizing his loyalty to Wall Street, pledging that the city's public schools would remain open despite the unprecedented wave of COVID-19 infection spawned by the Omicron variant.

Interviewed on ABC television a day after assuming office, Adams told parents of small children to "fear not sending them back. The stats are clear. The safest place for children is inside a school." This as child hospitalizations have surged to record levels, the city reported nearly 40,000 new cases in a single day.

While professing concern for the obstacles facing young people confined to remote learning, Adams laid heaviest stress on the child care problems facing parents. He thus revealed the primary reason for the drive to keep the schools open: to keep the parents at their jobs and the city's business establishment satisfied.

[Full article](#)



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