

Alabama educator calls for support to Chicago teachers, “We got our degrees to teach, not to die.”

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Join the next meeting of Southern rank-and-file educator safety committees today, Saturday at 5p.m. EST, 4p.m. CST—Register here.

Alabama is being crushed with Omicron cases, with more than 12,600 cases on Thursday, the highest one-day figure yet. The Alabama Department of Public Health reports a staggering 43.6 percent state test positivity rate over the last seven days, suggesting the real number of infections is vastly higher than what is reported.

The Montgomery-Opelika region is “essentially out of ICU beds with 12 more people needing critical care than staffed beds,” said the CEO of the Alabama Hospital Association. Birmingham has 500 occupied total beds and only 28 remaining. Currently 48 children are hospitalized with COVID in Alabama, as well as 34 pregnant women.

With the exceptions of Homewood High School in Hoover City and the Pickens County district, schools in the state remain open. State School Superintendent Eric Mackay said he will not close schools until the positivity rate in a school reaches an astounding 50 percent.

The Alabama Education Association issued a statement this week reiterating its intent to keep schools open, merely suggesting a policy of universal masking. This insistence, despite the unprecedented number of cases and a hospital system on the verge of collapse, echoes the approach pursued by the National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers throughout the country. In-person classes have contributed to a death toll of more than 2,000 educators and have served as a primary vector for community transmission across the US.

A veteran educator from Alabama recently sent to the *World Socialist Web Site* a strong statement of support to the wave of teacher sickouts and resistance to the return to unsafe classrooms.

“The walkouts in Chicago and California are great,” said Clare, welcoming the independent initiatives taken by educators around the country. “I’d go walk out and I’d sue. This is murder and attempted murder. [Chicago Democratic Mayor Lori] Lightfoot and all the others in government responsible should be taken to court for endangering lives.

“When we stand together, it makes an impact. If you have a friend who’s immune-compromised or sick, stand up for them. We got our degrees to teach, not to die. Everywhere they are trying to make teachers chose their livelihoods over their lives. Biden made a whole big deal about giving out money. But nothing has been fixed. Nothing has been done.

“Alabama teachers are telling me that kids are being sent to school with positive cases in their house, the parents think it’s okay if they are vaccinated. They are getting this from the CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention]. It’s a lie, they are still able to spread the disease

“Parents in north Alabama are afraid to send sick kids to the nurse for fear of retaliation. Basically, they’re told, don’t send the kids in, we’re not reporting [more cases]. We are being retaliated against for all kinds of reporting. I was told I was on TV too much, but that was my constitutional right. Then they put it in the district regulation and policy guidance that we were not allowed to talk to the news media without going through HR. If it’s after hours, I can talk to who I want. That’s my right.

“The fact that [Alabama State Schools Superintendent Eric] Mackay is saying schools should remain—how many people could that kill? The Alabama Education Association justifies going along with it, claiming that they have to represent teachers that want to be in the classroom, but that’s not life.

“It’s sad that the teaching profession is so highly regarded until we stand up for ourselves, then we’re told sit down and color. But they need us in schools so that parents can go to work. They don’t care if we die. They haul kids into other classrooms and double up. The children are not being taught, they’re in assembly rooms. There are no [substitute teachers] and the teachers are all sick.

“They don’t care about education, they just want parents at work. Learning loss is everywhere. Making sure kids are in school is not the same as making sure they are getting an education. Parents are needed just to make the bottom line, so that corporations and government can continue to make money off our backs.

“How do I know? The least they could have done was use the money last year to fix the schools and provide us the best health care. They made the promises just to get people back to work. They claimed they would fix something. They didn’t. Even the renovations they made were a cover-up.

“How do you trust them when the CDC lies to your face? [CDC Director Rochelle] Walensky is a political frontman of death. They have fallen back on so many things they said before: masks, etc. Show me the science.

“How can it be the science if we are preventing people from reporting? They essentially stopped reporting death. If you take these factors away, it’s no longer science. An entire nation’s life is at stake, but they allow football and concerts. They say just bring your vaccine card.

“No. Shut it down. Let COVID dissipate. We came back last summer, but it was premature and it was wrong. Now we have the variants because they didn’t shut down. They did not stop contact and exposure. Other countries and other pandemics have proven that’s what works. Instead the government is threatening people will lose their jobs if they don’t come to work. But they won’t even cover them if they get sick or die?

“The Democratic Party paraded themselves as the

better party, the one that cares and has more sense than Donald Trump and his cronies. The Republicans are off the wall, but the Democrats are doing the exact same thing. On top of being reckless, they are threatening our jobs.

“I despise Trump, but at the end of the day, the Democrats too are run by money. It’s all capitalism. We are all doing this to keep the upper one percent even richer than before. Those blast-offs to space [by Jeff Bezos and Richard Branson] were just to prove whose phallus was bigger. They should have put that money into schools. These people are rich enough. We are dying, not just sick and in the hospital. We’re talking about dead people.

“I think about my student in Alabama who lost his mom and dad to COVID. They died within two weeks of each other. The family had asked he be taught at home due to medical issues, but now he has neither mom nor dad to help with his medical issues. This is a middle school kid, a child with no parents. He had to move out of state. We are talking about dead people. Kids are dying, young kids. Their lives aren’t [considered to be] worth anything. Other parents are at home sick and their kids are still forced to go to school. They’ve created a whole generation of trauma-exposed children over greed. They don’t know life without trauma now.

“We need independent rank-and-file committees for local states, while connecting with others and building off of that momentum. Unions that were supposed to do what was best for teachers, but are playing both sides of the fence, are also run by money. They might extend the holiday pay or stop additional hours, but we need to protect peoples’ lives. The unions get millions from the salaries of teachers. They are using the money from my pay to put my life in danger. Their purses are controlled by capitalist corporations.”



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