

A high school student's petition demands remote option for Massachusetts schools

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10 January 2022

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) encourages high school youth to contact us today to share the conditions in your school

A growing wave of opposition is developing across the country among young people to the unsafe reopening of schools as COVID-19 cases skyrocket in nearly every state. The latest expression of opposition comes in the form of a change.org petition posted January 4 by William Hu, a senior at Boston Latin School.

The petition has gained over 3,000 signatures from students, educators and parents concerned over the rising number of COVID-19 cases across the state of Massachusetts.

Under the heading, "Staying safe should be a right, not something that the government dictates," Hu writes, "Over the past few weeks, I've been a first-hand witness to surging COVID cases in my school community as well as in my local community. Just before winter break began on December 23rd, 2021, my senior class consisting of 370 students alone had over 30 confirmed COVID cases. Even over the holiday break, it became a common occurrence to see fellow peers post on social media saying that they tested positive for COVID-19. To expand further on these alarming statistics, on January 4th, over 1000 Boston Public School teachers and staff members were absent due to COVID-19."

Hu adds, "As I am writing this petition on January 4th, 31,184 new COVID cases have appeared just today. 2,221 patients were hospitalized in Massachusetts just today. Each day, COVID-19 death cases increase as well."

An initial target of 1,000 signatures was reached within one day of posting. The target increased to 5,000 signatures for the petition addressed to the Massachusetts State House, Governor Charlie Baker and Boston Mayor Michelle Wu.

After citing Baker's comment, "We count in-person school as school," Hu asks, "What is Governor Baker

actively condoning here? Are school districts so engrossed in maintaining 'normalcy' that they are unwilling to make a change for the health and safety of our communities?"

Laura Lambert posted after signing the petition, "I am also a BLS student. The amount of people in the school every day is concerning. During lunch there is no 6-foot distance between students and in the dining hall during the mornings, you can literally feel people breathing down your neck. I didn't like remote last year, but at this point there really shouldn't be another option."

Many students signing the petition shared their fears and the difficulties faced in schools. One poster commented, "I do not feel safe going to school anymore. Positive cases are rising rapidly and some students who ARE positive are going home to family members who are at high risk to the virus. This potentially leads to a higher rise in death of loved ones. I think our health is more important than trying to maintain normalcy in the schools and the education system."

A parent of two nine-year-old children wrote that she was very concerned about them, "specially during snack, recess, indoor Physical education and lunch. Our school has also had many cases. Children seeing other children testing positive is not a positive or healthy thing. It's definitely traumatic for them to see and wonder when am I going to test positive. How is this a positive feeling, children are scared to socialize, they are scared their friends won't come back, they are scared of who's going to get it and bring it home to their grandma, mom or dad."

Another parent commented, "I have kids in the Boston public schools and it's awful just awful!! I don't wanna send them but if I don't I get in trouble! I am so stressed sending them I worry about them getting sick and [I've] been testing them at home but now can't really find any more tests in store and I have bought a lot so far and all gone ... We all got sick on Christmas vacation and don't

want that again!! So many sick kids in the schools and a lot still going sick!!!!”

Some posts pointed to the political aims of keeping schools open. “It is nuts and totally about the economy to not keep the kids safer,” said one. Another pointed out, “Soon we may not have enough healthy staff to cover in-person classes. Then what? DESE’s rigid ‘no remote’ stance may be politically appealing but is absolutely counter-productive and asinine.” Another asked, “Why are board meetings virtual but teachers have to teach in person?!”

A poster commented, “Remote learning needs to be a tool available in our fight against Covid. A temporary return to remote learning to break up a surge in schools or deal with dangerously low staffing levels would be so much better than what we are dealing with right now. I am a parent of 2 public school kids in Boston, and I have seen how remote learning can be done well. It would give so many options to a classroom, or grade level, or whole school to help stem the tide. There are no ICU beds in MA right now, and yet the rigid adherence to ‘in-person’ school is more important? Please give us flexible tools to fight back against the Covid surge.”

The posts reflect concern for students and teachers across the state. “So many teachers have gotten ill with covid in the last few weeks despite being fully vaccinated and boosted. They are then putting their students and their own children and families at risk,” one post states. A signatory from Pittsfield writes, “I believe that students and staff should be able to be safe and with the numbers climbing they need to go back to remote. Here in Pittsfield we have only closed 2 of our schools for a lousy 2 days. Needs to be longer and all schools need to be shut down.”

Comments from teachers include one who says, “I am a teacher and I worry about the safety of my students, fellow colleagues, and self as omicron covid surges.” While another says simply, “I am a 68 year old teacher who is afraid of my own classroom!”

The petition page on change.org links to another page titled “Support Remote Learning and Flexible Grading Policies,” which lists 95 petitions with over 30,000 supporters. This page contains petitions from across the country calling for virtual or hybrid learning and the temporary closure of schools.

The groundswell of opposition to in-person learning under conditions of a new surge of the pandemic stands in stark contrast to the declarations from across the political establishment that schools must remain open with kids in

the classrooms—a prerequisite for parents remaining on the job and producing profits.

As for the teachers union, the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) limited itself to calling for schools to close January 3 so teachers and staff could use the day for COVID testing. The MTA, together with the Boston Teachers Union, has conspired with the political establishment to keep schools open throughout the last year.

Similar situations are playing out in cities across the country. Over 250 students in the Oakland unified school district in Oakland, California have pledged to strike and stop going to school unless the school system shuts down classes and makes learning remote until schools can be safely reopened. The Oakland Educators Association, the local teachers union, has not even mentioned this fact, nor supported the walkout of teachers Friday.

High school students in New York City are organizing a “Student Walkout for COVID Safety” this Tuesday across all city public schools. The students organizing the walkout are “concerned and upset that there is no remote learning option, despite rapidly rising COVID cases”—the city’s COVID positivity rate remains above 30 percent—and are walking out “to keep students and teachers safe.”

In Chicago, teachers have taken matters into their own hands, independent of the union. Teachers voted overwhelmingly to stop in-person learning at Chicago Public Schools after forcing the Chicago Teachers Union to take the vote after the union allowed schools to reopen January 3.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality encourage youth and teachers to get in touch with us today to share the conditions in your school and learn more about joining the developing opposition of teachers and students around the country.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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