

West coast educators: Organize action to close schools!

**West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees
12 January 2022**

An emergency meeting of the West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees (WC-ERFSC) was held on January 8. During the meeting, educators, parents, students and workers discussed the dire situation along the West Coast at their schools and workplaces and voted to support the following statement from the committees:

The West Coast Educators Rank-and-file Safety Committees call on our fellow educators, school employees, parents, and students to organize to shut down in-person schools along the West Coast to stop the infection of millions of children and further community spread of COVID-19.

We support the wave of growing opposition and struggle among educators to the deadly reopening of schools across the US, including including teachers in Chicago, who had refused for the past week to return to in-person learning but are being forced back under pressure by the Chicago Teachers Union, and the hundreds of teachers in San Francisco and Oakland Unified School District teachers who engaged in sickouts last week, leading to the closures of multiple school sites in the district.

We also support the opposition growing among students, including thousands across the country who have engaged in walkouts and signed petitions against reopening. A major development came on Thursday, when students in New York City shut down dozens of public schools in a city-wide walkout.

As important as these first steps are, the critical question is coalescing these different struggles in an organized, nationwide movement against the herd immunity policies pursued by both parties, who are prioritizing profits over the lives and health of the population. The overriding aim in reopening schools is not concern for the learning environment of children,

but warehousing children in the buildings so that their parents can go to work for the major corporations.

To build this movement, we call on educators to join with us and teachers across the country in building a network of rank-and-file safety committees at every school district, independent of the pro-corporate unions and both big business parties. These committees will provide the means for teachers to communicate with each other across the country, share information, plan joint action, counter the lying media narrative that schools are “safe” and that teachers are being unreasonable, and appeal for the broadest possible for support from the working class.

The situation is dire along the entire West Coast. In California, daily cases have surged past 100,000, and the test positivity rate is 22 percent, meaning even this enormous figure is likely a substantial undercount. The seven-day average of pediatric hospitalizations is 76 throughout the state, well over 60 percent higher than during the peak of the Delta surge. There have been 44 pediatric COVID deaths in California since the pandemic began and this number will rise significantly. On Friday, a child under five died in Orange County, and became the county’s third pediatric death. Elsewhere on the West Coast, Seattle Children’s Hospital reports that 21 percent of its pediatric admissions are COVID-positive.

No sooner have school districts reopened throughout the region than they have faced massive staffing issues and student absenteeism due to the scale of infections. Los Angeles Unified School district recorded 65,000 positive cases out of 424,000 students and staff during baseline testing carried out *before* the beginning of classes. Thirty percent of students and staff had yet to be tested prior to schools reopening Tuesday. In Oregon, a 259 percent increase in overall cases

prompted the closure of multiple schools throughout the state. In Hawaii schools, more than 1,800 educators were on sick leave Friday with 550 substitute positions unfilled.

The teachers' unions around the country are working hand-in-glove with city, state and federal governments in forcing through reopenings in spite of massive opposition from teachers, students and parents. They are reprising the role they played in forcing reopenings last January, with the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), once again, playing a central role.

While it was forced last week to call a vote to return to virtual learning, the CTU rammed through an agreement to send teachers back to work Monday night, without any prior notice. Making a mockery of democratic procedure, the CTU is forcing teachers to vote on the deal after being sent back to school on Tuesday to prepare for reopening. Before the voting was even concluded, the union and the school district announced that students would return to in-person classes the following Wednesday.

To save lives, educators must take matters into our own hands! At the latest meeting of our committee, which included attendance from school districts across the West Coast, we agreed on the following principles to serve as the foundation for our fight:

First, that the present policy of herd immunity must be repudiated and a new strategy toward the elimination and eradication of Sars-CoV-2 adopted.

Second, that the policies implemented to stop viral transmission must be determined by the needs of public health. The protection of human life and safety must take absolute and unconditional priority over all corporate-financial interests.

Third, that the fight against the pandemic must be conducted on a global scale. The pandemic cannot be stopped unless SARS-CoV-2 is eliminated in all countries. American workers must demand that vaccines be provided in necessary quantities, free of charge, to their class brothers and sisters in the less-developed countries.

In addition, we resolved to fight for the following concrete demands:

? The immediate closing of school buildings until teachers themselves, on the advice of scientists, determine that it is safe to return.

? The implementation of high-quality remote

education.

? Financial support for parents who must stay home with their children.

? Financial support for small businesses that are forced to close because of the pandemic.

? A program of mass vaccination and contact tracing, including of children, with thousands of testing and vaccination centers set up throughout every major city.

? A reversal of the CDC's shortening of its quarantine guidelines. Those infected or exposed must quarantine for at least 14 days, with full compensation made for missed work.

? Mandatory masking with KN95-grade masks, to be provided free of charge, in all public places.

? A science education program directed at the working class conducted with the assistance of scientists and physicians.

? The installation of the highest quality HVAC and air filtration systems in every school.

? A tax on the West Coast's 189 billionaires to pay for the needs of parents, educators and other workers impacted by the pandemic.

A direct appeal to transit, health care, logistics, service and other workers to form their own committees and implement safety standards at their workplaces. Joint action should be taken to shut schools and non-essential businesses until COVID-19 transmission is close to zero. An appeal must also be made to university staff and students for developing action committees to close their institutions until they are safe.

Those who agree with this program should sign up here to build or join a Rank-and-File Safety Committee at your school site. Become a voice of opposition at your school site, share this statement among your co-workers and attend our next meeting this Sunday January 16 at 12 p.m.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact