

The way forward for high school students in the fight against the pandemic and the reopening of schools

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (US)
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) encourages high school youth to contact us today to share the conditions in your school and to get involved in the fight against the pandemic.

High school students throughout the country are on the move! Thousands of students from Oakland, California to New York City are organizing opposition to the unsafe return to in-person learning amid a massive surge in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths from the Omicron COVID-19 variant.

On Tuesday, a thousand students in New York City walked out of their classrooms in over 30 schools to protest the unsafe conditions. The action, organized through social media, forced the closure of several schools throughout the city.

Nearly a thousand students have signed onto a district wide online student petition in Oakland, California, stating that students “are not comfortable going to school with the rising cases of COVID-19.” The students are fighting for an end to in-person learning and proper PPE and testing if and when they do return to the classroom.

In Boston, Massachusetts, in less than a week, over 5,000 students signed a petition posted by a senior at Boston Latin School. Similar situations are developing across the West Coast, including significant protests in Portland, Oregon that forced the closure of the schools.

The current center of the opposition to school reopenings is in Chicago, Illinois where thousands of educators voted overwhelmingly last Tuesday to teach remotely until January 18. However, late Monday night the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) pushed through a vote at a House of Delegates meeting to “suspend” the teachers’ remote work action and resume in-person learning on Wednesday, before a vote by the whole membership.

Outraged at the collaboration of their union with the local politicians to force them back into schools, teachers and students have begun to organize their fight independently.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth and student movement of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), welcomes and supports this courageous stand taken by students. In fighting against the unsafe reopening of schools, these youth are fighting not only for their own health and safety, but for the community as a whole.

We urge students who are participating in these struggles, or wish to join them, to share this statement widely and contact the IYSSE today.

The IYSSE is a socialist youth group, fighting to link up the struggle of students and youth with teachers, parents and other workers in a common fight against the reckless “herd immunity” policy of the entire political establishment, which encourages the virus to run rampant, regardless of the carnage.

As a result of these policies, over 850,000 people have died from the virus in the US.

As of January 10, there were 1,084 pediatric deaths, with a staggering 44 deaths recorded in just the past 10 days. More than 167,000 children have lost parents or caregivers to COVID during the pandemic — roughly 1 in every 450 young people in the US under the age 18.

Countless more have suffered through the loss of a teacher, bus driver or other school staff member. Every one of these deaths was preventable.

The disastrous impact of the pandemic is the result of decisions made by capitalist governments—first and foremost, in the United States —to deliberately prioritize profits over lives, to reject the implementation of public health measures required to eliminate the virus and,

instead, to adopt policies that allow the virus to spread widely throughout the global population.

The reopening of schools has always been at the center of the ruling class' pandemic "strategy." In order for workers to return to work and continue to pump out profits for the rich, their kids must be back in school.

Throughout the past two years, under both Donald Trump, a Republican, and current president Joe Biden, a Democrat, students, parents and teachers have been bombarded with a series of lies to promote the reopening plan: 1) children are largely immune to the virus; 2) children cannot spread the virus to others; 3) classrooms are "just as safe" as anywhere else; 4) students' mental health will suffer more from remote learning than in-person; and 5) workers must learn to "live with the virus."

In fact, children can catch and spread the virus. Child hospitalizations are also at their highest point ever, at 766 per day. Lurie Children's Hospital in Chicago reported Thursday that child hospitalizations have increased 10 times compared to the number of admissions at the end of November.

COVID-19 is transmitted primarily through aerosols, small particles which linger in the air for hours, a fact that has been widely suppressed. Indoor spaces lacking proper filtration and ventilation, including the vast majority of schools and workplaces, have thus been the primary centers of viral transmission.

While there is no doubt that the youth mental health crisis has been vastly accelerated by the pandemic, alongside all other social crises, it is not their root cause. Students do indeed need immediate access to mental health treatment and services. But deteriorating mental health is only the symptom of a much deeper problem.

Moreover, the politicians deceitfully employing this argument are the very same figures who have overseen the systematic destruction of social services, the starving of education, and the 30 plus years of continuing wars and militarism, funded to the tune of billions of dollars every year.

By taking the actions they are taking across the country, students are now refusing to be used as pawns in the drive to reopen the schools. They are taking a stand on the side of life against profit.

As is being demonstrated through the ongoing protests, there is no shortage of anger or willingness to fight among youth. However, in order for this anger and opposition to produce the desired change, the central political issues must be clearly understood.

The struggle against the unsafe reopening of schools

must be directed by what scientists insist will save lives and end the pandemic. The present policy of "herd immunity"—i.e., allowing COVID-19 to spread throughout the population—must be repudiated. A new strategy, directed toward the elimination and eradication of SARS-CoV-2, must be adopted.

The costs of fighting the pandemic—including guaranteeing quality online learning for all students, paying the wages and salaries of workers affected and providing compensation to small business owners and ensuring full medical coverage for the ill—must be borne by corporations and a 100 percent tax on the windfall pandemic profits obtained by large investors through the run-up in the stock market.

COVID-19 does not respect the boundaries of any campus, workplace, state or even country. The dangers confronted by students and teachers in the classrooms are mirrored in nearly every workplace around the country and the globe.

Therefore, in order for the pandemic to be brought under control, measures must be implemented on a global basis.

The fight against the pandemic is at the same time a fight against the capitalist system and a fight for socialism. The homicidal policy implemented over the past two years has been dictated by a financial oligarchy that has piled up unimaginable fortunes amidst mass death. Indeed, the more people die, the higher the stock market soars. The ruling elites celebrate every announcement that no measures will be taken to save lives and stop the pandemic.

Appeals must be made, not to this or that ruling class politician or trade union bureaucrat, who have betrayed workers a thousand times before, but to workers across all industries to build a united movement of the working class against the pandemic and against the capitalist system.

We call on all students to fight for this program and to join the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact