

Los Angeles school district restarts in-person learning as pediatric hospitalizations skyrocket

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Students and teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the second largest district in the nation, returned to classrooms Tuesday as cases of COVID-19 skyrocket in the metropolitan area and across the country. In mandating the return to school sites, school authorities, with the sanction of the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) union, are deliberately exposing 665,000 students and more than 50,000 teachers and school employees to mass infections, long-term disability and death.

The reopening of the schools will also vastly accelerate community spread under conditions in which Los Angeles County reached a record weekly high of 200,000 confirmed cases last week. During that same period, area hospitalizations doubled to 3,200 people. Statewide, more than 6 million cases have been reported since the start of the pandemic, an increase of 1 million cases over the past two months alone. Two million of the state's 6 million cases have occurred in Los Angeles County alone.

Approximately 65,000 students and staff members have tested positive for COVID-19, according to mandatory testing conducted by the district during the winter break. More than 760 schools in the district have reported more than 10 cases each, while 140 schools reported more than 100 cases. Six schools reported more than 300 cases.

"There's no way we should be open," John, a middle school teacher told the *World Socialist Web Site*. "Did you hear the statistics? 16.6 percent of students are positive, and 14.5 percent of adult employees were COVID positive. Today, most teachers were averaging only 60-70 percent of their students who were present.

"There are minimal additional safety protocols in place. At least one teacher at my school tested positive for the second time. We should have been on Zoom at least until Monday, January 31, or the following Monday, February

7. That would have been 3-4 weeks, a very manageable number. It's better than getting COVID. I got emails from kids today. 'I'm at home because I tested positive, so I'm not coming in.'

"If Chicago can stay out, why can't LA Unified? You don't want more people getting sick. We're suffering through the holiday surge because people got together with a very, very contagious variant of COVID. As for the UTLA, it is completely ineffectual. They sold out a long time ago. It's ridiculous.

"Teachers are getting tired of being treated like doormats. We're frontline workers. We have 30-40 plus kids in each class. Come on! What's the deal here? There's this huge budget surplus in the state and the district. I'd like to know how that money is being spent. That money doesn't go to the teachers and supplies; it goes to contracts where outside subcontractors are making a ton a money. And people within the district get kickbacks. A lot of people feel this way."

Another LAUSD teacher told the WSWs that classrooms were only about 50 percent full, as many parents kept their children home on the first day back. "There's NO way that LAUSD should be back in person!"

There were long delays at school sites Tuesday even with tens of thousands of students and staff not there. Early in the day the district's health screening system failed outright, leaving school staff scrambling for alternate means to record students' COVID-19 test status. At a news conference Tuesday, Interim District Superintendent Megan K. Reilly acknowledged the health care screening failure. "We thought we might have something like this occur," she said. "I think everyone's getting through. They [school staff] have a daily list that they can actually print out, and if things get slowed down,

they actually can just go to a manual list.”

Since the decision was made in late 2020 for LAUSD to return to in-person learning, district officials and the UTLA have claimed that the mitigations and testing regime were a national “gold standard.” In a statement released on the eve of the school reopening, UTLA President Cecily Myart-Cruz claimed that “LAUSD is in a better position than most others in the country because of the safety infrastructure that educators and families fought for and won during this pandemic.”

As this week’s reopening fiasco demonstrated, the idea that there is anything remotely “safe” about school sites is a bald-faced lie. In fact, the only safe option for students and teachers is remote learning, which was deliberately excluded as an option when the district and the UTLA reached agreements for the school return last year. LA educators and families were given no options at all for remote learning with the exception of independent learning programs, only available to a very small proportion of students. The union presented the return to COVID-infected classrooms last year as a *fait accompli* even going so far as to block teachers on its Facebook and Twitter pages when they protested.

This murderous position has been echoed by the California Teachers Association which, in a January 8 statement, stated that the union remained “committed to keeping our schools open for in-person teaching and learning.”

Both national teachers unions, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA), remain entirely committed to in-person learning. In a Monday Op-Ed in the *New York Times*, AFT head Randi Weingarten responded to the widespread sentiment among teachers for remote instruction while the pandemic rages. “There are plenty of places where teachers are concerned and where there’s groups within school districts that are calling for sickouts. But in terms of my union, *there’s no organized effort to do that. In fact, it’s quite the opposite.*” [Emphasis added]

Like the rest of the corporate and political establishment, the highly paid bureaucrats who run the unions have no limit on the number of mass infections and deaths they will accept in order to keep children in schools and their parents working to produce profit.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained, the Biden administration and the whole ruling class have abandoned any effort to end the pandemic. Quite the opposite, from the standpoint of the ruling elite, the continued spread of the disease is seen as a positive good;

a means to cull the elderly and infirm who are no longer able to sell their labor power and are seen as an unnecessary drain on profits .

The only social force that will oppose this is the working class.

As Los Angeles teachers and students are forced back into unsafe classrooms, school walkouts have been taking place across the country. On Tuesday, thousands of students walked out of classrooms in the New York City as part of a mass “Walkout for COVID Safety.”

Students in Oakland, California signed a petition threatening to walk out of schools if a safe learning environment was not provided, including N95 masks and weekly PCR testing. A petition was similarly organized by students in Boston, Massachusetts and Portland, Oregon demanding a remote option for students as COVID-19 numbers continue to rise there.

Chicago teachers are in a battle against both Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot and the Chicago Teachers Union, which shut down the four-day job action by more than 20,000 teachers to demand remote-only instruction. There is mass opposition to the sellout by the CTU, whose pseudoleft leaders have close ties to the UTLA.

Teachers, parents and students must take matters into their own hands by expanding the network of educators rank-and-file committees to mobilize the broadest sections of workers and young people to close schools and nonessential businesses and demand the allocation of the necessary resources for high-quality remote learning, compensation for all low income families and the necessary public health measures to eliminate the virus once and for all. For more information on joining a rank-and-file committee, contact us here .



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