

One thousand Oakland, California students plan strike in opposition to deadly school reopening

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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.

With an unprecedented wave of cases of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 ripping through schools, students at the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) in Northern California have joined the growing national wave of students and educators opposing the unsafe and deadly policy of in-person learning.

A petition urging a district-wide school strike if demands are not met has gained over 960 signatures at the time of writing. The petition demands that OUSD shift from in-person learning to online learning, or that the district provide KN95/N95 masks for every student, twice a week PCR and Rapid Tests for everyone on campus and outdoor spaces to eat safely when it rains.

“If these demands are not met,” write the students, “we will be striking by not attending school. We will be striking until we get what we need to be safe.”

The students say that they will call on OUSD students to strike starting January 18th should their demands not be met.

The move of almost 1000 Oakland high school students joins thousands of other high school students in Massachusetts, Michigan, Portland, and now New York City (where students walked out Tuesday), who are fighting against the reckless policy of school reopening.

The petition also follows actions by thousands of teachers in Chicago last week opposing the deadly school reopening, as well as wildcat sickouts by Oakland and San Francisco teachers.

Nikayla Dean, a student at MetWest High School in Oakland, California who helped initiate the petition, told The Flashpoint, “We took matters in our hands, not just with the strike but some people are trying to raise money to go get the KN95 mask and for weekly testing.”

Ayleen Serrano—another student at MetWest High School and organizer of the petition—told KRON4 news that her classmates began the petition after seeing an alarming rise in COVID cases and a lack of available testing and resources at her school. She said, “We were really shocked when we saw how many signatures were flooding in so fast. We’re happy that it’s not just us that are concerned but there’s more students out there that are concerned.”

In response to the petition—which was shared tens of thousands of times on Twitter and other forms of social media—John Sasaki, the OUSD communications director, issued a disingenuous statement saying, “We share the students’ concern about the spike in omicron cases of covid-19.”

On Thursday evening, the district and the Oakland Education Association, the union which falsely claims to represent Oakland teachers, announced an agreement on “safety bargaining.” The emergency bargaining had been conducted out of fear of broader wildcat action by teachers and students as they, in the words of the students, “took matters in our hands.”

The three measures agreed to—weekly pool testing for elementary students, a single day off of school and a slight extension of the number of days teachers can take off if they get COVID-19—do nothing to fundamentally address the rapid spread of the virus throughout the area.

Shula, an Oakland teacher, responded to the claim on Facebook by OUSD school board member Mike Hutchinson that the agreement is a “win, for everyone” by writing, “This agreement doesn’t come close to what students and staff need to be safe at school, and I know of 0 people who actually work or attend in person at a school who are satisfied with this.”

Despite the widely promoted lie by the Biden administration that schools are not an important vector for the spread of COVID-19, the American Academy of Pediatrics reported that about 8.5 million children have tested positive for COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic, with almost 11 percent of these cases having been added in the past two weeks. For the 22nd week in a row, child COVID-19 cases are above 100,000.

Since the first week of September, there have been over 3.4 million additional child cases.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) call on Oakland students to carry forward in their plan to strike. The “deal” reached by the union and the school board will do nothing to substantively improve safety on campus. We will do everything in our power to assist students, teachers and faculty and to link up striking students and teachers across the country.

Only a united movement of teachers, students and parents has the power to implement the public safety measures needed to stop the spread of the pandemic.

Dorothy, a caretaker and grandmother of a seventh grader in OUSD, spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* about how widespread illness makes teaching all but impossible in schools right now. She pointed to a tweet she wrote earlier: “This is what school was like for my 7th grade grandson this week: sitting in a room with a sub who just looked at his phone entire time while kids sat freezing & terrified of catching Covid. #CloseTheSchools.”

In nearby El Cerrito, teachers at Korematsu Middle School sent out an open letter on Monday detailing the horrid situation faced by students and staff at the school. They explained: “The district has failed to respond to this situation with any sort of urgency or available resources for our immediate needs. They have failed to increase testing, secure substitutes and are unable to provide KN95 masks to our students. We do not feel they are providing a safe learning environment

for students.”

They added, “Due to the rising COVID cases, lack of safety protocols and staff shortages, teachers at Korematsu Middle School will not be coming to school tomorrow, or the rest of this week.” They go on to say, “We feel it is better for everyone to rest ... than for more staff and students to get sick this week.” The letter reported that about one third of both teachers and students are out sick with COVID with nearly every teacher subbing at least one period.

The developments in El Cerrito and Oakland are part of a nationwide struggle of teachers, students, parents and health care workers to oppose the deadly reopening of schools.

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.



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