

Massachusetts principal admonishes students for sharing photos of their COVID-19 rapid tests

Our reporter
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In a remarkable email sent out in the middle of the school day Wednesday, a principal of one K-8 public school in Brookline, Massachusetts, demanded that parents of middle grade students tell their children to stop worrying about their friends catching COVID-19—and stop complaining.

The email obtained by the *World Socialist Web Site* states the following:

This morning has been a challenge. We have students who have tested positive, quarantined for 5 or more days, and returned to school with no symptoms. This is the proper procedure to follow. However, some students are sharing pictures of their rapid tests on social media or via text. You can test positive after the quarantine period for some time. We DO NOT require a negative test to return from the 5 days if you are vaccinated and symptom free. We are asking you to trust that our nurses and staff [are] working hard to keep everyone safe. We want to stay in school. Today we spent a lot of time answering calls, because worried students were texting parents. Students should not be in bathrooms texting during the school. Please reiterate this with your children at home. We will do the same.

This email is the result of the reckless school reopening policy implemented in all schools across Massachusetts. According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

(DESE), schools must be open for in-person education to meet the required 180 days of instruction, despite the raging spread of the Omicron variant. On the day the Brookline email was sent, there were 22,184 new confirmed cases, a 21.61 percent 7-day positivity rate, 3,087 hospitalizations and 75 confirmed deaths.

The content of the email is suggestive of a significant fear spreading among students for their health and safety, as well as that of their friends and family. The principal of the school admonishes students for telling parents the truth of what is happening and demands that children and their parents accept the wisdom of school administrators who promote the lie of the Biden administration that schools are the “safest places” for children to be.

The school administration is attempting to defend the policies of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and DESE, which aims to suppress concerns within the population about skyrocketing COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations.

DESE has incorporated into its school guidance the unscientific CDC guidelines of reducing the quarantine of positive cases from 10 days to 5 days. DESE writes that individuals who test positive are to “return to school after 5 days and once they have been without fever for 24 hours (and without taking fever-reducing medications); and experienced improvement in other symptoms.” They note that these individuals “must mask for 5 additional days when around others,” adding, “*Even with a 5-day isolation period, repeat viral testing prior to return is not recommended.*” (Emphasis added)

It is hardly surprising if students and their parents lack faith in the ability of “nurses and staff ... working

hard to keep everyone safe,” when actively infected and contagious children and educators are being sent back into school just five days after testing positive for COVID-19.

Despite all the pressure placed upon children to accept that it is “normal” for their friends, families and teachers to fall sick in record numbers, these students—roughly 11 to 14 years old—are far from numb to what is going around them. Born in the age of the internet, they are concerned about not just their schools and neighborhoods but conditions in schools around the world.

Children worrying, questioning and discussing their concerns about health and safety are to be praised and supported, not admonished.

There is now a growing international movement of the working class and youth against the homicidal “herd immunity” being pushed by capitalist governments worldwide. In nearby Boston, high school students are planning a walkout today to protest the unsafe conditions in schools. Similar student-led walkouts have taken place in New York City and Oakland, California, with a demonstration planned in Chicago today. These students are joining educators who have entered into struggle against in-person learning across France, as well as Chicago, parts of Mexico and other parts of the world.

Student reports reveal that essentially no learning is taking place in reopened schools throughout the country. One student in Boston, adjacent to Brookline, spoke at an online meeting of Families for COVID Safety about conditions in the school: “Many students were in the auditorium because there were not enough substitutes. I don’t understand how that is not a lack of learning. That makes no sense. We’re not doing anything.”

Another stated, “My teachers don’t really know what to do with us. They don’t know whether to choose new material because they don’t want people out of school to be left behind. But they don’t want to completely stop teaching us. So, my classes have honestly been a waste of time this week.”

Despite the continual claims of government and school officials about the damage being done to students’ mental health by keeping schools closed, it is the unrestrained spread of SARS-CoV-2 throughout schools and communities that is taking its toll on

students.

Students ask themselves and their peers: Will I get sick? Aren’t some children dying? Will I get Long COVID? Will I bring home the virus to my parents? Will I infect my grandparents at a time when so many older people are dying from COVID-19?

Tasked with keeping schools open, administrators are demanding that children suppress such fears. They ask for blind belief in a system that is in shambles, while threatening to muzzle students who speak out and ask questions.

After a last-minute announcement on Sunday, January 2, the Public Schools of Brookline (PSB) closed schools for the first day of the new year, announcing: “At this time, we simply do not have the staffing capacity to operate all schools safely.” Schools were open the next day, however, without any explanation as to how the staffing problem was resolved.

In school districts across Massachusetts and the nation, staff members are being ordered to report to work despite not being fully recovered from a recent COVID-19 infection or being in close contact with someone infected, but who does not yet show symptoms. There is no reason to assume that these same methods are not being used in Brookline, and that the Brookline Educators Union, affiliated with the Massachusetts Teachers Association, has not participated in enforcing them.

In each country, the teachers unions are enforcing the ruling elite’s “herd immunity” policy which places profits over the lives of students, teachers and all workers. Educators, parents and students must form their own rank-and-file committees, independent of the unions and both big business parties, to carry out the necessary struggle to close schools as part of a broader strategy to stop the pandemic. We urge educators, parents and students in Brookline to sign up today to get involved.



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