

Seattle students and teachers stage walkouts over lack of COVID-19 safety protocols in schools

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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. Get involved in the fight against unsafe school reopenings!

As infections rise throughout Seattle and Washington state, students and teachers have initiated sickouts at two high schools in defiance of the local, state and federal governments' policy of mass infection and death.

Students at Franklin High School in Seattle, Washington, initiated a walkout on Friday, calling for increased safety measures and for remote learning as Omicron rips through the schools and the community. Many schools throughout the Seattle area and the Pacific Northwest have closed this week as the rampant spread of COVID-19 caused major staffing shortages.

Franklin High School has the highest infection rate in the entire school district, with Roosevelt High School trailing behind, according to the Seattle Public Schools (SPS) COVID-19 Dashboard. It recorded 52 cases in the first week of school alone, an undercount of the real rate of infection as testing sites are overwhelmed throughout the city.

The students at Franklin High School are demanding that schools implement safety measures or they will not return, with many students calling for remote learning and the closure of schools until it is actually safe to return. The list of demands on the Change.org petition calls on the district to:

- Provide N95 masks for all
- Perform weekly required COVID-19 testing at school
- Continue contact tracing

- Provide COVID-19 vaccines, including booster shots, available at school
- Update the district's COVID-19 dashboard daily
- Provide one mental health therapist for every 30 students

There is broad support for the action of the high school students throughout the state, with more than 800 people signing the petition as of Friday afternoon.

One student at Kamiak High School in Mukilteo, north of Seattle, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "At school, we've had children test positive in the library. It's unfair quite honestly. When we look at the chart for COVID cases in our county, we've had up to 3 times more COVID cases compared to the initial outbreak when we went into lockdown. The numbers are growing, and our measly precautions are not preventing sickness. Human life should be above all."

The Franklin High School students said they decided to join the movement initiated by students nationally for the closure of unsafe schools and other COVID-19 safety protocols, such as those actions taken by high school students in Chicago, Boston and other cities across the US.

Alongside the walkout of high school students, teachers at Chief Sealth International High School in Seattle also staged a sickout Friday in response to the rise in infections at the school and the lack of safety protocols. They are calling for the district to provide KN95 and N95 masks, weekly on-site testing, the hiring of more staff and increased funding for mental health resources.

If these conditions are not met, they call for the closure of schools and for remote learning options. Rebecca Neil, a Chief Sealth International High School

science teacher, said in an online post, “the system is broken and Seattle Public Schools has failed to provide necessary protections on so many levels. So much of what we are facing was preventable with strategic planning and preparation, and [the] Seattle Public Schools district leadership failed to act.”

In response to the action by the teachers, the school administration decided to fully close the high school for the day Friday, with no remote instruction.

The growing militancy of educators and youth comes in response to the unprecedented surge of the Omicron variant and the intransigence of the state’s Democratic politicians, who are following the Biden administration’s lead in implementing a “herd immunity” strategy of mass infection and death.

Washington state’s Democratic Governor Jay Inslee said at a press conference on Thursday that “hospitalization rates will continue to go up,” acknowledging that the hospital system in the state is already “in crisis” and that “the emergency rooms are full.”

Inslee has called out 100 National Guard troops in order to help the hospitals deal with the unprecedented crisis, while insisting that SPS schools remain in-person. The school district is scheduled to return to in-person classes on Tuesday, sending over 50,000 students and staff into overcrowded, poorly ventilated buildings where COVID-19 will spread like wildfire.

The walkouts in Seattle are part of a broader struggle by high school students, parents and educators against the deadly policy of mass infection and for the closure of unsafe school. Protests have broken out in New York City; Chicago, Illinois; Oakland, San Francisco and Los Angeles, California; Boston, Massachusetts; Portland, Oregon; Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and a growing number of cities across the US.

The IYSSE and the WSWS call on students and educators to join the growing resistance against the unsafe reopening of schools across the country and internationally.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact