

“Politicians care about the money more than they care about the people”

## Record surge in COVID-19 child deaths as opposition grows among US educators and students

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The first two weeks of the spring semester for K-12 schools have been a colossal disaster across the United States. At the federal, state and local levels, both the Democratic and Republican parties insist that all schools must continue fully in-person instruction during the worst surge in the pandemic. This homicidal policy is fueling the spread of COVID-19 and has produced a record surge of cases, hospitalizations and now deaths among children.

According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, since December 31, only two and a half weeks ago, 87 children under age 18 have died from COVID-19. Of those, 28 deaths occurred between January 14-17, a staggering rate of nine children per day. This rate is roughly three times the peak of the Delta surge, over the course of which more than 500 children died. The latest American Academy of Pediatrics report will be published later today and will almost certainly show another record increase in cases above last week's record 580,247.

No other news outlet outside the *World Socialist Web Site* has reported on the devastating surge in pediatric deaths taking place in tandem with record cases and hospitalizations. This is in line with the broader efforts to conceal and downplay the pandemic, which is being orchestrated by the corporate media and the teachers' unions. A Google search yields brief local reports on only two children's deaths over the past seven days: an infant in Riverside County, California and an infant in Pennington County, South Dakota.

However, this reporter's Tweet announcing the 28 deaths over the past three days has garnered immediate outrage.

One person commented, “The media said the child cases are ‘mild’, and hasn't looked back.”

Another wrote, “And for each dead child or adult, there will be dozens with some level of disability. Even a possible epidemic of neurological problems 20-30 years down the line. But on the bright side the economy is doing great!!\* \*for the elites only.”

The working class and youth have responded to the unfolding catastrophe with a resounding demand to stop in-person instruction as a necessary measure to end viral transmission and save lives. Inspired by teachers in Chicago, thousands of students across the US, from New York City to Chicago to Boston, staged walkouts last week to demand remote learning. Over 1,200 students in Oakland will walk out today, as the district has failed to meet their list of safety demands.

The WSWWS spoke to educators, parents and students across the US who have been involved in these struggles, some of whom are members of the

Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees in their areas. They were asked about conditions in their schools and their thoughts on the most recent developments.

### Oakland, California

A high school student who attends Oakland School for the Arts (OSA) highlighted the crisis operations of the publicly funded charter school founded by former California governor Jerry Brown.

“At OSA, we went online this week because so many teachers went into quarantine. We didn't have enough adults on campus to legally keep the school open. They had all the substitutes in and had administrators in classrooms. They still didn't have enough.

“We still have not closed for COVID. They're opening in-person this week. It is not a COVID-safe building. It's an old building with small hallways, and some entirely closed classrooms.

“I know OUSD agreed to give out N95 masks. I don't think OSA will get those. They are offering testing, but it's not enough for all the students and it's not very often. It's not safe. I think most of the students and teachers agree that we shouldn't be in-person right now.”

Making the connection between these unsafe policies and the Democratic Party-controlled California and Oakland governments, she continued, “Of course California is not letting us [go remote] either. The individual schools themselves, like OSA, don't get enough funding to be able to take the safety of students into its own hands. The school doesn't get funded enough to be able to close because they'll lose funding. Oakland could do something, but they aren't.”

She added, “Politicians care about the money more than they care about the people. The Democrats are not even holding up the facade very well about caring about people.”

Referring to today's walkout, she said, “We are going to try to get as many of our friends to not go as we can.”

### Arkansas

Exposing the lie that forcing children into infected schools benefits their “mental health,” a high school student in Arkansas shared his story on Facebook, writing, “I’m a student that did not feel safe going back to school. Everyone started testing positive. I have been exposed over 10 times. That is ridiculous! After 2 weeks of back in school I am home sick. I’m home sick with COVID.”

“It’s so stupid that these schools have nothing in place. ABSOLUTELY NOTHING. I have had my booster and everything but still I have it. So lemme just tell you omicron gets you even if you have your booster. Wear a freaking mask and stay home if sick. That’s all.”

### **Brooklyn, New York**

Disproving another lie, that the demand for schools to be open in-person is about providing a quality “education” and preventing “learning loss,” a middle-school teacher in Brooklyn spoke on the fact that it is nearly impossible to teach when so many faculty and students are out sick.

“Some classes only have like two kids. Other classes have the full amount and so they started blending classes together,” she said. “How does this make any sense? Just keep the kids home and we could teach the whole class. There are so many coverages that the kids aren’t being taught anything. They are just being warehoused. Some kids are visibly sick. A lot of kids are out, and I don’t know if that’s because they are sick or because their parents were afraid to send them back. It’s just a nightmare.”

She described the abysmal testing levels, which undercounts the actual spread of the virus in schools. “Last week, they came to test and they called the kids down, but most of the kids that had signed up for testing were not there.”

The union chapter leader announced for interested staff to come to the testing area. “Almost every teacher that was available came down,” she said. “Then they told us, ‘oh they’re only testing five people because there are only 50 teachers present and they only test 10 percent’. One teacher said, ‘What is this, The Hunger Games? Whoever gets here first gets tested?’

“I thought ‘OK, last time their excuse was that we didn’t have our consent forms and now it’s that they’re only testing 10 percent of teachers that are in the building today?’ Why can’t we be tested? Everybody was really angry. Why are they limiting the amount? Well we know why. They’re trying to keep the numbers down.”

### **Detroit, Michigan**

Ronda, a grandparent in Detroit, wrote in support of the student walkouts.

“I say to the students in Chicago: good job. For so long they’ve been saying that children couldn’t get COVID. So them walking out shows that these kids are smart enough to figure things out. They have their own mind.

“I also think they figure to protect the teachers. They think, ‘If we walk out they can’t blame the teachers.’ They are not telling the children in the schools if someone is sick, or if they do find out someone is sick and immediately that kid comes back to school, the children realize ‘I’m not gonna deal with this. I’m not gonna come back and sit next to someone who is sick.’”

Speaking to the real motives behind the campaign to keep schools open

despite the dangers, she said, “The employers don’t care about their employees’ children. They just care about their companies and their parents coming into work. It’s all about the money!”

### **Seattle, Washington**

Last week, students at Franklin High School in Seattle walked out over the dangerous conditions in schools. The campaign to keep schools in-person has been supported by a blanket refusal to invest in high-quality remote learning and technological resources.

A high school student at Kamiak High School in the Seattle area told the WSWs, “Many students who have COVID still go to school because the remote option is so bad and unsupported. Teachers are tired because their classes are half empty. Students are packed in a crowded building.”

### **Montgomery, Alabama**

A teacher in Montgomery reported that faculty are required to buy their own PPE. Children are handed a surgical mask when they arrive each day, but if the school runs out, they ask their teachers for a mask, which the teachers pay for.

She said that at a recent board meeting, a board member responded to a parent’s concerns about the safety of the schools by saying, “Any parent who doesn’t like how things are going should home school their kids. And any teacher who doesn’t like it should resign.” This recalls the callous response of the school board when two educators in the district died from COVID-19 in a single day last year. In the last week, K-12 cases across Alabama jumped from 2,940 to 16,035.

### **Los Angeles, California**

Juanita, a retired teacher with grandchildren, spoke to the obfuscation and intimidation from the school district, telling the WSWs: “A number of parents have been trying to find out about the number of COVID cases at school, and we can’t get any answers. People are threatening me because I have the courage to speak up. It’s unbelievable. Parents are being denounced for asking. How can they hide that kind of information? It started before the Christmas break. They just don’t want us to know.

“Then the children who have symptoms are all put in one room. They don’t even call the parents to come pick up their children. The children are all put in one room and then released out the back of the school.

“The other thing I’m upset about is we got news that the district is delivering COVID test kits to our homes. The problem is they are charging us for them. They should be free for everyone. The district has a budget of \$20 billion! What are they doing with it to help us?”

The developing movement of students and educators is emerging as the spearhead of a global class struggle against the capitalist system and its refusal to implement the necessary measures to end the pandemic. The trade unions, including the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, have colluded to keep all schools and workplaces open, dutifully marching their members into death traps.

The WSWs urges our readers to oppose the social crime being committed against the population, including millions of children, and to

take a stand today by building the network of independent rank-and-file committees in your school or workplace.



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