

“This is what insanity looks like”

A Chicago Public Schools parent condemns the deadly return to school

Frank Anderson
20 January 2022

A week after the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) forced teachers back into unsafe Chicago Public Schools (CPS), opposition from teachers, students and parents remains determined.

Earlier this month, more than 75 percent of teachers voted to end in-person education until the Omicron surge abated, but the CTU conceded to an agreement that will do nothing to stop the spread of the Omicron variant in schools and across the Chicago metropolitan area. In response to this deadly betrayal, thousands of CPS students walked out last Friday, joining a wave of student and teacher protests against in-person learning around the country.

The policies agreed to by the CTU with the Democratic Mayor, Lori Lightfoot, are in line with the broader policy of the Biden administration to reopen schools in order to force parents to return to work to ensure corporations continue to make profits. The official death toll from COVID-19 in the United States stands at over 875,000, with excess deaths measured by the *Economist*, estimated to be over a million.

In Chicago, the official positivity rate remains high at 11.9 percent. The dip in the positivity rate from 17.9 percent the past week was largely due to the remote job action of over 25,000 teachers that temporarily halted the spread of the virus. Hospitalizations also continue to remain high at over 203 people daily and 14 deaths a day. There are currently over 2,819 cases a day.

Interview with a CPS parent

The WSWs is speaking to teachers, parents and workers about their concerns. One parent, whose name has been changed here to Sarah to protect her identity, spoke at length with the WSWs about her opposition to the forced reopening of in-person schooling.

WSWS: What’s it been like since you returned to school?

Sarah: “I haven’t sent my daughter back since school returned [from winter break]...How can I send my child back? What do I do in terms of protecting myself so that I’m not being hauled into court and being put on probation, and messing up my background because they are charging me with these compulsory re-attendance issues. It’s problematic...Plus many teachers and staff are missing because of COVID.”

WSWS: What do you think of the so-called COVID “safety” in schools?

Sarah: “It’s a great concern because we know that [children] are more susceptible, even though they’ve been vaxxed and boosted and everything, being inside in that environment with students that are unvaccinated – it’s a problem. And then when they’re eating inside, they

have to take their mask off, and honestly under no circumstances should students be inside eating with their masks off.”

“I’m immunocompromised. I’m concerned if my children go to school they might bring it back to me. The virus is mild for some, but if you’re immunocompromised, it’s not mild anymore. I just had an aunt who went to the hospital just for a regular checkup, and she got infected there. And she was in the hospital for 30 days, from a couple days before Thanksgiving up to Christmas. 30 days. So I’m concerned about that.

“They leave here, they go to school, they’re with these kids and then they bring it back to me, and what happens to them? They become orphans? Because that’s the reality.”

“A friend of mine just sent me an article from the *Business Insider* – they’re talking about patients that are going in for different things in hospitals and are testing positive for COVID because they’re getting it from the infected workers.

“Once the CDC said, ‘hey, everybody can go back to work and school or wherever else after five days,’ that caused major problems. Now they are saying: ‘oh this is going to help, and everybody is going to eventually get it,’ – but at what cost? Because now this is getting worse. We see the numbers are higher than they were with Delta – much higher.”

WSWS: What do you make of CPS saying it will test a small percentage of students?

Sarah: “Yeah, right. I’ll believe that when I see it. It’s probably some of the schools but the bulk of them probably are not doing that, because they don’t have access.

“CPS wasn’t testing regularly when they first resumed, even though they said they would. And then, ‘Oh, you know the parents can sign up and this, that and the other,’ but then the individuals that were supposed to perform the tests weren’t showing up, so the kids weren’t getting tested. In some schools there has been no testing.

“I’ve been dealing with CPS for thirty-something years, between all of my children combined, and I can say that when they say that they are doing something, unless there is an outside agency coming in to monitor what’s going on, it is not happening. They do the bare minimum.”

WSWS: They claim they will deep-clean the schools too.

Sarah: “It’s a lie. Their cleaning service contractor is Aramark. And if you Google Aramark, the contract that they have with CPS, several hundred schools in the CPS network failed the Department of Public Health [standards] several times over the years.

“And at one point, there’s a school called Mollison Elementary, and you can look it up on CBS 2 News, back in 2017 they had a rat infestation that was so bad that the rats were giving birth in the children’s seats in the elementary school. And the principal kept calling CPS, calling headquarters, to get somebody to come out. They finally came out, they laid down mousetraps. But this was worse than what could be done with a

mousetrap.

“They had to actually have a deep cleaning, with furniture moved out, that kind of stuff. CPS wouldn’t do it, so it got to the point that the parents got involved, and they had to get the news media involved in order for CPS to move to do something. And when they did, they came in, they closed down – because they were trying to continue school while this was happening – they came in, they closed down the school, they had to move the furniture out of the building and go inside of everything, clean out and then exterminate.

“But that wouldn’t have happened if the parents hadn’t done that, and that’s typical of CPS. So if you’re looking at the lower-income neighborhoods, that’s where the issues always happen with the cleaning. And so for CPS to say ‘deep cleaning,’ yeah, this ‘deep cleaning’ is happening in the neighborhoods where there are the most affluent people in the city of Chicago, but it is not happening in the lower-income neighborhoods. It’s not.”

WSWS: Have you seen the reports that the New York public school system has been quietly offering remote options to parents, students and teachers due to the rise of COVID cases? What do you think of this?

Sarah: “I saw that and I was just like, ‘wow,’ I would love to live in New York right about now. You know, the mayor of Chicago, Lori Lightfoot, had her kids on remote learning and they probably are still doing remote learning since school resumed. Why is it that her kids can be remote and we don’t see her pushing for her kids to be in schools since she claims that’s the safest place? Why can’t our kids be at home?”

“We are sitting ducks. Unfortunately the CDC and our federal government, have decidedly given up on battling COVID. And it’s just like, ‘well, everybody’s gonna get it, so we might as well just let it happen.’

“They are telling us that most of us, or many of us who may even be the smallest percentage, our lives don’t matter. The government’s thought is, ‘you’re just gonna get it,’ and for some of us that’s a death sentence. That’s the reality.”

WSWS: There’s also a stench of eugenics in the claim by CDC Director Rochelle Walensky that it is encouraging news that over 75 percent of COVID deaths occur in people who had at least four comorbidities.

Sarah: “Totally eugenics... when I heard that I just thought ‘wow!’ You know, for most of us in that community, or who are parents or guardians of people with disabilities, that stung deep. What you’re saying is that a wonderfully normative person matters more than the rest of us. So that means senior citizens don’t matter, people with disabilities don’t matter, people with any kind of health issues—if you have cancer, any kind of disease—you don’t matter. So we just need to let you all be wiped off the face of the earth, and the rest of us will continue on.

“That’s insane. For the sake of ‘the economy,’ [but] not mine!”

WSWS: Did you see the courageous walkout of CPS students?

Sarah: “Yes, I thought it was fabulous. The unfortunate side of this is that our mayor is a narcissist, so knowing that, it was a great show of force for the students but it’s not going to change anything unless she and the general counsel for CPS are removed. She’s not going to do anything. They put out a statement saying ‘this is great and we’re going to continue to work with students, blah blah blah.’

“Nothing is going to happen unless someone catches her with her hand in the cookie jar because she’s done something that’s tantamount to fraud or something like that. The reality is that CPS is a business. It is not an institution of education. People get that confused. You have too many individuals in the city of Chicago who have ties to different companies and that have contracts with CPS. Millions and millions of dollars are involved. And so if CPS is closed, that means they’re losing money.”

WSWS: What has it been like with children back in the classrooms?

Sarah: “It’s been a complete nightmare. Hundreds of kids are being pushed into auditoriums because they don’t have enough staff. The Special Education Classroom Assistants are being used to monitor those rooms or monitor classrooms.

“Some schools got masks and some schools didn’t, so kids are still walking around with cloth masks or some other kind of mask that isn’t KN95 or KN94, or N95 compatible. More than half of the teachers were out because of COVID. A lot of the classrooms were sources of spread and people were getting sick.

“Many people are just now getting back PCR results from before the [winter] break, so they’re having to move students out of the classrooms or send them home. Some of the kids were coming to school and they had to send them back home because they hadn’t given them notices that they had tested positive.”

“I don’t understand this whole thought process of not requiring the vaccine. All the rest of the vaccines kids are required to have in order to attend school. So this policy makes no sense to me. If you’re eligible to get the vaccine, it should be required. If you’re going to attend school, you [should] have to be vaccinated, you cannot come here, because you’re going to cause an outbreak.”

“It is complete chaos, and I knew it was going to be chaos.”

“This is insanity. This is what insanity looks like because what the school is telling me is that they don’t have enough staff because everybody is coming up positive. Probably not only are they coming up positive, they’re probably having a secondary breakthrough as soon as they come back again and get sick again because the kids are coming in sick.”

“I think what needs to happen is the parents by-and-large should keep their children out. If nobody sends their children, what can CPS do? They’re going to have to offer a remote option. Or offer to keep schools closed for a temporary amount of time until the numbers go down, because the numbers are too high in the city.

“If we’re going averaging between 18 and 20 percent, let’s just say overall for the city of Chicago, but then in certain neighborhoods it’s upwards of 30 percent, and you’re sending these kids to schools and they’re traveling to different schools around the city, then you’re helping and aiding and abetting in the outbreak.”

“We cannot properly mitigate the spread if we don’t have opt-out testing, vaccination requirements, and remote learning options.”

The Chicago Educators Rank-and-file Safety Committee encourages teachers, parents and students to get involved in the fight to end the unsafe reopening of schools and fight to end the pandemic. Fill out the form below to get involved.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact