

“This needs to spread further statewide and elsewhere”

# Hundreds of Oakland students and teachers show support for student strike during online rally

**Our reporters**  
**21 January 2022**

*The West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees invite all educators, parents and students across the West Coast to attend and share their experiences at our meeting this Sunday, January 23, 12:00 noon PT. To register, click here.*

On Friday morning, an estimated 500 students and teachers from Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) participated in an online Zoom meeting organized by students to discuss their strike and COVID-19 safety concerns in the district.

Representing the widespread opposition to unsafe schools, students and teachers in all grade levels were in attendance from kindergarten to 12th grade. Some students and teachers attended individually, as well as entire classrooms, with teachers projecting the meeting during regular instruction.

The meeting opened with remarks by students on the strike and their demands. Over 9,000 students and staff engaged in sickout action on January 7, which led to a petition initiated by students demanding KN95 masks for all students, weekly PCR testing, and safe outdoor seating for lunches. Since Tuesday, hundreds of students have been on strike and are presently emphasizing the need for schools to go remote as their initial demands have not been fully met.

Student organizers spoke on the implications of catching COVID-19, including infecting loved ones, Long COVID and the evolution of further variants of concern.

The meeting showed an immense level of support for the students on strike and opposition to the present policies in the schools under which the district and local officials, as well as the unions, have made sure to keep open amid the ongoing Omicron surge. Dozens of students and speakers expressed support for the students and described the reality of unsafe conditions on their campuses.

One sixth grader said, “My friend and his entire family all got COVID, which actually was quite worrying. I was concerned him or one of his other family members, like his grandma, could actually have died from COVID. But thankfully they did not. There are mass amounts of students that have been out in

multiple classes.

“I’ve seen so many of my friends just not come to school for weeks because the plan by the district as a whole for how you are going to make sure COVID doesn’t spread has been poor, to say the least, including the lack of masks until now. And I am hoping that the district and school can make a better plan to combat COVID and enforce it.”

One high school student said, “Our principal is telling us that only one student or staff member has contracted COVID-19 even though we personally know over three people who have gotten it. So he is basically just lying to us, and it’s uncomfortable.”

Mario, a junior at Fremont High School, said, “Schools haven’t been providing safety. They only provided us with one mask, and that’s not good enough. And they have holes in the bottom and that’s not good enough. You guys want us to be safe, I feel like we should have better equipment. The teachers can only do so much, and they are really helpful, but I feel like the district and school board has to come and help us also.

“The district needs to be more strict about this COVID stuff,” he stressed. “That’s our health at the end of the day. People are dying because of this, and that is not OK. You all don’t want kids dying. That sucks. Losing your loved ones. I lost a loved one from it, I had it badly and almost died so I know what it feels like to have it. ... Our voices need to be heard. This is ridiculous. It’s getting out of hand. ... We need to be safer and come together and beat this.”

An entire class at United For Success Academy Middle School was also on the call, taught by teacher Jazmine, whom the WSWs recently interviewed. One of her students said, “I’m glad we did have the strike, and we should show the people in OUSD that we are not joking around and that we do need serious precautions for COVID. Even if we are not vulnerable ourselves, at home we have people that are at high risk. Like my sister, it’s very stressful to be at home with her because I don’t want to get her sick because she has a lung

problem, cystic fibrosis. And it's a mess, and I don't want anyone else to go through that, and I really think we need to have higher precautions."

During the discussion, Gabriel Black, an educator and reporter for the WSWS, expressed support for the strike and made an appeal for students to break out of the isolation within the district and fight to unite their struggle with other students, teachers and workers across the US and internationally against the homicidal herd immunity policies being implemented in the schools and workplaces.

He stated, "We do not accept that we should die to keep jobs going and the stock market working," he said. "This is going to require a serious fight which is not just in Oakland, but also in Chicago, LA and elsewhere. We are fighting for a general strike of teachers and students to make schools safe and shut schools down until they can be made safe."

### Interviews with Oakland students

The WSWS also spoke with Oakland students this week on their safety concerns and the growing support for their strike.

Daisha, a junior at Oakland School for the Arts, an OUSD charter school, described the lack of safety at her site. Recent teacher shortages at her school forced it to close all last week, with students and staff returning to classes Tuesday.

She noted, "Just before the school closures and due to the number of teachers out sick, all the sixth graders had to be in the same room, which is entirely unsafe, especially since many of them aren't even eligible to be vaccinated. Our school building is quite small and does not allow for much social distancing. We eat indoors. High school students are allowed to eat off campus, but middle schoolers have to eat on campus."

In response to the present policies to keep schools and workplaces open despite the mass amount of infection, death and long-term illness, Daisha said, "We are in the middle of a pandemic, but the government is trying to convince us that we are not. It's ridiculous, quite honestly. It really highlights how capitalistic this country is."

Daisha gave her support for the striking Oakland students, saying, "I think that what they are doing is incredibly important, and the students who are a part of the strike are doing a great job. We know that money is tied directly to our daily attendance. I think students making a disturbance like this is what is needed to make actual change."

Cassidy, also a student at Oakland School for the Arts, also described the unsafe conditions at the school. Despite being fully vaccinated and boosted, she contracted COVID-19 during the first week that schools reopened from winter break.

She said, "The hallways are packed and not COVID-safe. We have been issued KN95s, but there are not enough for

everyone. The administration has asked parents to buy and donate masks to the schools. Also, the KN95s we got don't fit very well, which makes them not very helpful if they don't fit, right? We have irregular testing, and it is not mandatory.

"There are classrooms at our school with no windows, and we have our arts classes there. Many of us are in these classrooms for hours at a time during the day. Also, I'm a musician, and we practice in these small, soundproof practice rooms with around four people at a time. We practice for hours. The wind instruments have also been brought back out which is even more dangerous.

"Since winter break, we have had so many absences. It feels like we are back in March 2020, when schools were about to close and go online because so many people were out, except we aren't, they are keeping schools open."

In response to the fact that local, state and federal politicians are intent on downplaying the dangers of COVID-19 and keeping schools open, Cassidy replied, "It's not as much of a surprise to me anymore. Most politicians have money in mind rather than people. They have been totally exposed; there is no facade anymore.

"The pandemic doesn't need to be normalized. And in fact, it's really ableist to say that the reason people are ending up in the hospital now with COVID is because they already had comorbidities. They deserve to live just as much as anyone. It's terrible. It's because they [the government] only value people who are able to go to work and only when they can be 'productive' citizens of society. It shows the capitalistic tendencies of the system, and we need a complete change."

Cassidy stated emphatically, "I'm fully in support of the students striking and really hope something gets done. This needs to spread further statewide and elsewhere."

In response to the WSWS call for an independent fight by workers and youth to carry out a globally coordinated strategy to eliminate COVID-19 and stop the pandemic, Cassidy said, "What's taking place now is unacceptable. We are not going to get anywhere without trying to get the best outcome. The fact that other countries have done it shows it can be done."

We urge students and teachers in Oakland and beyond to join the emergency meeting of the West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees this Sunday to organize an immediate pause in in-person learning and expand the fight to end the pandemic. Register here.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**