

West Coast educators and students hold meeting on the fight to pause in-person learning at unsafe schools

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On Sunday, the West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees held an online meeting, “Stop the Spread: Pause In-Person Learning Now!” Teachers, students, nurses and other workers discussed what is needed to stop the surge of the COVID-19 pandemic and oppose the ruling class drive to keep schools open amid the spread of the Omicron variant.

David Moore, a California teacher and member of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), led the discussion. In his opening remarks, he stated that the situation in the US is “increasingly dire,” noting, “Teachers and staff are so sick that they are bringing in anyone to watch students. Schools are in a state of collapse due to COVID.”

Moore commented that in response, “there’s a massive upsurge of students and teachers around the world who are against the deliberate policy of mass infections at schools.”

Moore highlighted the recent walkout of high school students in Oakland and other school districts around the country. He then stressed the importance of connecting them to other struggles of workers nationally and internationally in order to completely eradicate COVID-19.

Moore addressed major myths of the propaganda campaign waged by the Biden administration used to justify their refusal to contain the spread of Omicron.

“The myth that COVID-19 is becoming endemic like a seasonal flu so we can’t do much about it is false,” Moore said. He explained that a virus is endemic if it is seasonal and does not, as in a pandemic, grow exponentially, potentially infecting everyone around the globe.

The second myth Moore exposed is that Omicron is

mild and does not put kids at serious risk. He stated, “Pediatric [children] hospitalizations are increasing due to in-person learning at schools, and mitigation methods are inadequate with 30-plus class sizes, no ventilation, poor masks, no contact tracing and a positivity percent at 20 percent. Schools are super-spreader events.”

Moore then addressed the myth that COVID-19 should be allowed to spread unhindered since it only kills those who are in bad health. “The claim that the only people who are dying are those in bad health, and that normal, healthy people need to move on is a eugenicist’s claim,” Moore stated. He emphasized that up to 30 million Americans, 10 percent of the population, have four or more comorbidities, and that COVID-19 itself can actually cause comorbidities such as diabetes or asthma.

The last myth that Moore took on is that it is impossible to stop Omicron’s transmission since it spreads so easily that almost everyone will get it. Moore pointed out that China has successfully contained and eliminated transmission of COVID-19 within its borders by applying common medical practices that have been developed over centuries. Those practices are not applied in the US and other countries because they would interfere with corporate profits.

Katy, a San Francisco Bay–area nurse, described the state of collapse of the health care system, which is increasingly unable to handle the influx of new patients. She stated, “Stretchers are lining the halls in emergency rooms, overwhelmed hospitals that can’t accept any more patients have to issue a state of emergency, and patients experience 20 hour wait times

just to be seen.” Non-elective surgeries were routinely being canceled given the overload.

Katy also described the effect of these conditions on health care workers and their ability to care for patients, saying, “There’s a slow emotional drain from being unable to take care of patients in dangerous conditions. This bears down on you on an emotional basis. To be put in a position where you cannot efficiently perform your role has a demoralizing effect on workers.”

Katy ended her remarks by emphasizing that workers need to understand that they can no longer “live with the virus,” and that the government’s indifference to human life is bringing mounting opposition from the working class. “The fight for better working conditions is the fight for the elimination of COVID,” she concluded.

Michael, a senior from Redondo High School in the Los Angeles area, who helped organize a student walkout to protest the implementation of herd immunity policies, described the conditions at his school, where 40 to 50 students are being infected daily, and the school’s indifference to them.

“Students are not being notified by their school district if they are attending a class with a positive student even if they sit right next to them in class,” Michael said. “Schools give students a green light to attend school if they are positive just as long as they are asymptomatic.” Despite these conditions, the pressures of schoolwork and finals are causing students to come back to school, even if they are ill.

Michael reported that even though he faces harassment from a vocal right-wing minority of students on campus that oppose vaccines, mask mandates and other mitigation methods, and from parents online, given the importance of closing schools down, he would continue his struggle.

Cassidy, an Oakland charter school student, shared the dismal conditions at her school and its inability to safely and effectively teach students.

“There’s no way to make school safe, we have people out every day,” Cassidy said. “Everyone is anxious. Without large-scale changes, we need schools and everything else to shut down. Just one or two schools closing is not going to be enough, every school needs to be shut down.”

Alfonso, a San Diego-area public school teacher, stated that workers must look to themselves for

leadership and initiative because the institutions of the ruling class are hostile to the needs of workers.

“You need to understand the science of COVID in order to keep others safe, but the government is preventing this info from being disseminated. Teachers’ unions have already made their peace with COVID. We can’t turn to the teachers’ unions, we can only turn to ourselves.”

“You can’t look to the CDC for help,” Alfonso continued. “Turn to teachers, scientists, and others. Build within your own workplace.”

Alfonso further stressed the importance of rank-and-file committees, and how workers can use them to change the dire conditions found at schools and worksites. “There’s a lot of anger out there, but the workers don’t know how to organize,” Alfonso said. “A lot of teachers feel like they have their hands tied, but there’s a way out of this.”

Jasmin, a middle school teacher in Oakland, expressed solidarity with striking students. She explained the urgency of the current situation, saying, “People are at a breaking point. Teachers are overworked and tired and are feeling demoralized.”

Jasmin described the “urgency to move and organize for the needs of the students and teachers.” They cannot “wait for the unions to advocate,” because “the unions have always put weak policies in place to supposedly protect teachers.”

In closing the meeting, David Moore stressed the “need to develop these workers’ struggles into a conscious fight for socialism.” To that end, he explained the specific call by the West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees to educate broad layers of parents, teachers, students and other workers.

He concluded, “These meetings are only a foot in the door. We need to organize local meetings to teach parents and teachers about the science of the pandemic. Let’s not accept the unions’ demands that only masks and testing will stop the pandemic. The longer this goes on, the more people will be sick, hospitalized and dead. It is up to us to fight against this.”



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