

Mask mandates being eliminated throughout Texas school districts

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As Texas hospitals continue to report shortages of staff and ICU beds, a decline in hospitalizations to levels last seen in late December has been used by state officials to reinforce the drive to scrap any remaining public health measures against COVID-19. The current downturn in the pandemic, however, is more apparent than real.

On February 23, WFAA Dallas 8 reported that there were 4,832 COVID-19 cases, down from 4,970 the day before and “the fourth straight day officials have reported fewer than 5,000 new cases.” The report continues, “The state’s current 14-day average is 6,387 cases. This is the first time the average has been this low since it was 6,114 from Dec. 11-24, 2021.”

A look at the Texas Department of State Health Services dashboard, however, shows that there were 4,693 “New Confirmed Cases” and 1,911 “New Probable Cases” on February 25, adding up to 6,604. And the 150 deaths, contrasted to the daily average of 173, hardly signifies “turning the corner” on the pandemic, or justifies its reclassification as “endemic.”

Whatever the spin the corporate media put on these numbers, the fact remains that hospitals remain in a dire state. As a *Victoria Advocate* report admitted on February 22: “Here is the latest situation Friday, Feb. 11 to Thursday, Feb. 17: Hospital staff has never been in shorter supply, which deepens the strain on all departments, including emergency rooms, respiratory therapy and even labor and delivery. Without the capacity to take on new patients—and with equally thin resources elsewhere to transfer them to—doctors fear they’ll have to start making heartbreaking decisions about care in order to save the most lives possible.”

Noting that the vast majority of COVID-19 hospital patients are unvaccinated, the article concludes, “Doctors say mask-wearing, hand-washing and social

distancing are the best ways to slow down the hospital numbers in the short term, and that monoclonal antibody therapies for people with COVID-19 symptoms can keep them out of the hospital in many cases. They also say the only way to permanently slow down the spike in hospitalizations is to vaccinate a majority of the state.”

This is in line with the mitigation approach, an abject failure previously promoted by the Democrats, who are now, as the policies of the Biden administration and Democratic governors nationwide show, increasingly adopting the homicidal herd immunity approach pushed by the Republicans. Since neither policy relies on science nor concern for the working class’s health and life but on prioritizing profits, any apparent or real dips in sickness and death will prove short-lived, as they have every other time following the relaxation of already inadequate mitigation measures.

One by one, Texas school districts have dropped their mask mandates and other measures like social distancing, contact tracing and testing. Round Rock Independent School District, where over 600 students signed a petition in January to demand the enforcement of masking, provision of high-quality masks, reestablishment of testing and contact tracing and outdoor eating spaces, dropped its mask mandate on February 21.

At the Dallas Independent School District’s school board meeting on February 17, Superintendent Michael Hinojosa announced plans to lift its mask mandate beginning February 28. Hinojosa said that, since the district had “single digits of students and staff members infected” with the virus on February 16, “we will make masks recommended.”

In Waco, where the school district had incurred a lawsuit by Governor Greg Abbott and Texas Attorney

General Ken Paxton for refusing to rescind its mask mandate last fall, the school district will drop the mandate on March 4. Of the four original defendants in the lawsuit, Waco, La Vega, Midway and McGregor, only La Vega will retain its mask mandate, though its days are likely numbered after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released new guidelines Friday which discourage mask wearing in much of the country.

The crowding of children back into unmasked in-person instruction in often poorly ventilated classrooms and of their parents into unsafe workplaces is couched as nothing more than a personal decision and “freedom” of choice, not a matter of social policy designed to protect the right to health and life. Thus, masks and vaccinations are to be “strongly encouraged” but not required under the latest protocols.

It is highly likely that the Omicron variant will be supplanted by, or merged with, other strains of the virus, like the BA.2 subvariant, bringing more sickness and death in its wake and undermining the efficacy of vaccinations in the third year of the pandemic. The ruling class and its adjuncts, as they are already doing, will do everything they can to keep the public in the dark about the true toll.

As Dr. Benjamin Mateus recently commented, “The deliberate intent” of the CDC, which has repeatedly withheld critical data from scientists and the public, is to make sure “science conforms to policy rather than shaping it.” Government officials, politicians and corporate media will continue to conceal, minimize and misrepresent data that does not further this reckless agenda.

The return-to-school, return-to-work agenda can count on the assistance of the trade unions in their role as the enforcers of the ruling class dictates, as epitomized by American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, who has worked might and main to push the return to in-person classes, to the point of joining forces with extreme right-wing figures like pseudoscience peddler Dr. Lucy McBride and herd immunity advocate Jay Bhattacharya.

The working class—teachers, parents, students and all workers—can put no faith in capitalist politicians and their enablers to end the pandemic. They must form rank-and-file committees, independent of the Democrats and aided by principled scientists and

medical professionals, to fight the lies of the ruling class and struggle for socialism to eliminate the virus and its toxic political counterpart, capitalism, worldwide.



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