

Principal at high school in Seattle, Washington fired by district for informing families of abandonment of contact tracing

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Teachers, parents and students: Contact the World Socialist Web Site send us statements of support for Catherine Brown, and tell us what the covid situation is in your classrooms.

A Seattle high school principal has been fired for informing families of upcoming changes to the district's COVID-19 guidelines and the consequences they would have on the school. The firing was an act of retaliation aimed at enforcing the district's coverup of transmission rates and the abandonment of basic mitigation measures, which have led to skyrocketing pediatric cases over the last six months.

Catherine Brown revealed her termination to parents at Cleveland STEM High School in a letter sent May 10. Brown wrote: "I have been under investigation for an allegation that I disobeyed a directive. The specific allegation at issue is that I failed to follow a directive to withhold information about changes in COVID-19 contact tracing from the Cleveland community. While the process for determining if I will be subject to discipline for that is not yet complete, as you now know, SPS [Seattle Public Schools] has determined that I will not be the principal at Cleveland High School next year."

Teachers, parents and students must rally to the defense of Brown. She is being sacrificed by the district for her limited exposure of the dangerous health policies being pursued in Seattle, which are not fundamentally different than at school districts across the country.

During January, more than 50,000 students were sent back into public school buildings in the city amid a sharp rise in infections, fueled by the Omicron variant. Between 2,200 to 5,600 cases were confirmed each day

that month in the city of Seattle. Hundreds of students were being tested and sent home each day, with over 1,000 cases reported on the SPS dashboard each of the first three weeks of January.

The volume of cases was so high that the district made an internal change to its contact tracing practices. Unable to carry out detailed contact tracing to follow the spread and inform individuals of close contact to a positive case, staff were focused on handling kids who tested positive and sending general updates to classrooms without specific information.

"What I understand this [the change in the guidelines] to mean for families," Brown wrote in her January email to families, is "if your student was exposed to a positive COVID case in one of their classes at Cleveland this past week and going forward for an unspecified length of time, it is most likely that the only notification you will receive is the general notice that your child was in a classroom with someone who later tested positive for COVID. The interviewing of individuals, including staff, to determine if a close contact occurred will only occur in a limited number of cases with this change."

Catherine Brown's email exposes the narrative of a so-called "safe" return to schools. Even the most basic mitigation measures were relaxed or abandoned, and closing schools to stop the spread was off the table. The response of the district to terminate Brown's position reveals the extent to which the administrative and government officials are covering up the consequences of their unscientific policies.

The announcement has sparked mass opposition among educators, parents and students in the region, who are coming to her defense and criticizing the

district for hiding critical information. About 100 students engaged in a walkout and protest on Friday, chanting “bring back Brown!”

Hours before the protest was set to take place, the incoming principal Marni Campbell withdrew her acceptance of the position, responding to the popular hostility of the school community to the decision.

“Today, May 20, there are six educators out with no substitute. 24 periods need to be covered, and so far 7 educators have given up planning to cover 18 of those periods. 6 remain unfilled,” one Seattle educator told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “Many students are absent, some to work to support their families, some because they are sick, some to care for a sick family member. This daily uncertainty and stress makes for an uncertain and impossible learning environment.”

From May 9 to 16, new covid cases surged in Washington state by 124.8 percent. This week alone, 22,365 new cases were reported. Johns Hopkins University data reveals that Washington covid case numbers are rising the 12th fastest out of all states in the US. As in all US states, mask mandates and other mitigations in schools were entirely dropped by March.

This reflects what is taking place across the US. The sixth wave of the pandemic, fueled by the highly infectious and immune-resistant Omicron BA.2 and BA.2.12.1 subvariants, has now fueled a surge in daily cases past 100,000 per day. Total deaths have surpassed one million since the start of the pandemic.

The data from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) shows that cases among children have been steadily rising since students returned from spring break in April. An alarming number of children have died from infection with COVID-19. At SPS, there were 105 more infections this week than the week before. 1,577 positive cases were recorded over the last two weeks.



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