

Democrats allow school budget cuts in New York City to move ahead

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With just over two weeks remaining before classes resume, schools across New York City are implementing deep cuts to staffing and critical programming imposed upon them by the austerity budget for Department of Education (DOE) public schools.

The massive cuts, spearheaded by Mayor Eric Adams and passed by his fellow Democrats on the City Council, are moving forward after a state appeals court on August 9 temporarily blocked a lower court decision that would have reinstated funding. A full hearing by the appellate court is set for August 29, a timeline that in practice solidifies many cuts, regardless of the final ruling.

New York City has become the center of a fierce offensive by the local ruling establishment to enforce a new wave of austerity measures in its education system. In early June, Mayor Adams announced a restructuring of budgets which left hundreds of K-12 schools lacking in funds for the upcoming year.

It is difficult for the true size and scope of these budget cuts to be fully understood, as all public information has been the subject of vicious debate between the various municipal agencies involved. While the city comptroller's office has put the total cuts at \$378 million, after factoring in fluctuations in spending within the school year as well as additional remaining federal pandemic funds, the figure of \$215 million in reductions has been the official total presented by the administration.

Other media outlets have estimated total education budget cuts as high as \$1 billion. There can be no doubt that the mayor and the factions of the local ruling establishment most aggressively pursuing the cuts are deliberately concealing the actual numbers in an effort to deflect and diffuse massive popular resistance to austerity.

Widespread opposition to the plans of the Adams administration was immediately triggered after the initial proposal passed in mid-June. Subsequently, dozens of teachers and school staff, including many art and music

teachers, school counselors and special education staff took to social media, reporting that they had been “excessed”—i.e., removed from their schools and forced to look for open jobs within the system in order to remain on payroll. Dozens more educators protested the loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars in their schools at a time when the resumption of in-person learning amid a global pandemic has already dealt a devastating blow to their profession.

The total number of teachers excessed this summer has been in the hundreds. Parents, students, and teachers have spoken out against the dramatic effect that these cuts will have on their communities. In various protests at City Hall and in comments online, overwhelming sentiment has been that job losses and fund reductions in schools still reeling from the past year have added tremendous insult to injury.

The Manhattan Supreme Court lawsuit was filed in early July on behalf of two New York City parents and two excessed DOE teachers, who sued the city in an attempt to nullify the financial plans for the upcoming year.

Its legal basis was entirely procedural from the outset. As laws enacted by the Democratic and Republican parties make it perfectly legal to gut public education, the suit shifted focus away from the central issue of the damage resulting from the cuts. Instead, it alleged that the city violated its own rules. The case claimed that the budget was required to have been passed with the approval of the Panel for Educational Policy (PEP) but that its consent was bypassed on the basis of “emergency” provisions that did not legitimately exist.

The PEP is a government-appointed educational “oversight” board comprised of a slew of petty official and unofficial political figures, administrators, business owners and executives. Even if a vote had been required by this entity, regardless of the intentions of its individual

members, it would in no way be representative of the interest of broad layers of working people and their families, whose education and livelihoods will only be further decimated by these cuts.

The City Council seized on the lawsuit in a pathetic attempt to save face, posturing as opponents of Adams's agenda. In actuality, all but six council members initially voted in favor of the proposal, with dozens of them later affecting a phony about-face on the issue once popular anger toward the budget had mounted but after it had already become an established fact.

The six City Council members who voted against Adams's budget proposal are no less incapable of presenting serious opposition to austerity. While several of these politicians are relatively new and have little or no track record, all of them are explicit proponents of identity and racial-based politics, which ultimately serve to divert mass anger against social inequality into channels deemed acceptable to the capitalist ruling class. Half of these council members belong to the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), while another two are endorsed by or closely associated with the organization.

In an apparent attempt to further confuse matters, the mayor announced his intention to negotiate with the City Council over the cuts and make other funds available to mitigate the effect of the reductions. However, this was quickly demonstrated to be a farce when the news of the city's appeal broke several days later.

From the outset, the Adams administration has attempted to push through its agenda with a combination of lies, manipulation, political duplicity, bravado and cowardice. No substantial opposition, however, has been mounted within any of the existing organizations of the political establishment.

This includes The United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the labor union supposedly representing nearly 200,000 educators and school staff across the city, which has served as an effective political bulwark against serious discussion of and action against the defunding of education. The head of the UFT, Michael Mulgrew, a multimillionaire bureaucrat whose interests are directly opposed to the mobilization of workers, has restricted union-sponsored protests to a handful of tightly controlled publicity stunts, with little or no follow-up. He has even undermined the recent lawsuit by parents and teachers, despite its complete political toothlessness.

In a politically bankrupt statement published by the *New York Times* last Wednesday, Mulgrew said, "School starts in a few weeks. Our students do not need a drawn-out

court fight. ... The answer is for the mayor to restore the cuts." In other words, Mulgrew seeks to limit the fight of the union to making empty appeals to the selfsame administration that is spearheading the savage austerity agenda.

Mulgrew and the UFT have been instrumental in perpetuating the lie that schools can be safely opened during a deadly pandemic. Their criminal initiative to push students into unsafe schools at the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year has led to the spread of illness, debilitation and death among masses of New York City students, teachers and school staff.

These efforts have flowed from the policy of the American ruling class more broadly to force the working class to bear the brunt of the pandemic, promoting the lie that it is possible to "live with" coronavirus. It aims to direct mass opposition to its criminal policies outward in the form of support for imperialist violence abroad, with funds for war in Ukraine flowing in the billions. There is no section of the American political establishment, let alone the DSA or the AFL-CIO labor bureaucracy, which is not criminally responsible.

Students, parents, rank-and-file teachers and education staff must take the struggle against budget cuts into their own hands. The Northeast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, as part of the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, must be built and expanded in order to formulate and fight for demands based on what workers need, not what is deemed acceptable within the existing political framework.

We urge workers interested in joining this fight to contact us today. We also encourage educators, parents and students to attend the online meeting "Organize a rank-and-file rebellion to defend public education" on September 1 at 7 p.m. EDT.



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