

Teachers denounce intolerable conditions in São Paulo schools

Our reporters
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The death of a teacher in São Paulo after suffering a heart attack during a pedagogical meeting last week has brought to light the intense pressure and harassment inflicted by pro-corporate education programs.

According to the *ABC em Foco* website, Analu Cristina Cerozzi da Silva Vieira, from the Maria Carolina State School in Diadema, in the ABC industrial region, “fell ill” when she questioned “the volume of demands made on education professionals.” She was taken to hospital but didn’t survive.

Facing the same intolerable working conditions, thousands of outraged teachers from all over Brazil mourned the death of teacher Analu. A Facebook post by state deputy Carlos Giannazi, from the pseudo-left Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL), received more than 7,000 interactions and more than 2,000 comments and was shared 1,000 times.

Teacher Jéssica wrote in the comments on the post that “Analu Cerozzi was an excellent teacher. She did her job with mastery, leaving no student behind. Always concerned about her students’ learning, she gave her best in the classroom. She was loved by many, affectionate, welcoming, and with a huge heart. A devoted mother and wife, companion and friend.”

Many teachers have also reported situations similar to those that Analu denounced when she had a heart attack. Lúcia wrote, “Unfortunately, psychological pressure happens all the time. It needs to stop. The search for results that aren’t always real means that teachers are overworked and mentally exhausted, losing their health and often facing depression or other invisible illnesses.”

Over the last two years, the extreme right-wing governor of São Paulo, Tarcísio de Freitas, and his education secretary, Renato Feder, have been carrying out a broad pro-corporate program in education that has transformed teachers’ pedagogical work. The enormous pressure to exceed established targets, many of them unattainable, as reported by teacher Lúcia, and at the expense of concerns about student learning, has led to discouragement, professional frustration, and the sickening of many teachers.

Tereza Gomes Biffi commented that this process is even greater in São Paulo’s full-time schools (PEI), similar to the “charter schools” implemented in the USA. She wrote: “I fell ill at a PEI school and went straight to hospital. I couldn’t stand the demands any longer and left this year. We are treated like slaves, and if we complain, we hear: ‘No one has to stay.’ Absurd.”

Eduardo, also a teacher at a full-time school in São Paulo, told the WSWs that Analu’s death “is not simply the product of conditions particular to her school or her life.” What happened to her, he said, “expresses most brutally the conditions faced by teachers throughout the school system.”

Eduardo continued: “I’ve recently started working in a PEI school, and it’s clear that the top priority is the achievement of so-called ‘performance targets.’ These range from producing various teaching planning documents to recording lessons—which need to be done within hours—to ensuring a minimum number of hours of use of online learning platforms by students. The demands of meeting targets are made in addition to the common demands of the school, such as correcting activities and tests, dealing with students’ particular problems, among others.”

The school has become an environment of intense pressure, which has led to episodes of moral harassment and intimidation by school management and teaching supervisors.

This pressure was evident in a video shown to teachers at the start of the school year, in which Secretary Feder stated that this year, he expects “results” from students in SAEB and SARESP—external assessments at the national and state levels, respectively. He added: “A principal who doesn’t deliver [the results] is liable to be fired.” Since then, managers and supervisors have reinforced this demand with teachers, stating with increasing vehemence: “If we’re being charged, we’re going to charge you.”

About this, Eduardo said, “The supervisors are present three or four days a week at the school, showing up without any warning and are responsible for ensuring that teaching in the form determined by the education secretary is being

carried out.” This includes what they cynically call “face-to-face support,” the overt presence of school management and supervisors in teachers’ classes, which can get a poorly evaluated teacher fired from a full-time school.

Teachers in full-time schools can also be dismissed based on the student’s evaluation results. According to Eduardo, this creates “not only an intimidating environment in the school but also pits all members of the school community against each other.”

He explained to the WWSWS that full-time schools and pro-corporate programs in education have been pushed since the beginning of the last decade by all parties of the political establishment, including the Workers Party (PT) of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. For Eduardo, the “impact of the policies implemented under different governments, which have created precarious working conditions, has prepared the privatization of public schools. In practice, mass evaluation methods have been created to turn public education into a lucrative enterprise.”

This whole process is also developing rapidly in the municipal public schools of the state capital, São Paulo. In last year’s municipal election, re-elected mayor Ricardo Nunes was supported by Governor Freitas and fascist ex-president Jair Bolsonaro.

Pedagogical coordinator Angela told the WWSWS that “the professionals of the municipal education system ... have resisted the direction they are trying to impose on our system, a path that is worryingly similar—if not identical—to the one that led to the precariousness of the state public school system.”

According to her, “Last year, we could already see a closer look by the education secretary at the results of external evaluations and the monitoring of teachers’ work, which could be of great value and support if it weren’t for the fact that this look is geared towards controlling the actions of the management team and the school, in a conception of the institution from an economic-administrative point of view.”

“This year,” Angela continued, “we have been witnessing, since the beginning of the school year, a strengthening of this corporate and technical view of public schools, with training, demands, and controls on ‘targets,’ as well as unreasonable demands for any educational situation. This includes the requirement that we achieve 100 percent literacy of students in the second year of elementary school—disregarding the countless variables that influence literacy processes, such as issues of social vulnerability, violence, misery, and poverty, students with disabilities, learning difficulties, and disorders, etc.”

For her, everything is happening “as if the school were a company and the students were mere numbers. ... School administrations that don’t achieve the expected results, i.e.,

the targets set by the education department, are being threatened with privatization.”

According to Angela, pro-corporate programs in education have a particular impact on teachers’ work. Under them, “there is no longer any concern with the pedagogical training of coordinators or teachers, or with the conditions to which our professionals are subjected.” The teacher becomes “an agent who reproduces a stagnant and undemocratic curriculum, being the only person and the only professional responsible for the ‘failures’ or ‘successes’ of the students.” These programs have contributed enormously to teacher illness.

She also drew attention to “the high number of teachers who work in school areas other than the classroom,” the so-called “readapted” teachers. In her school alone, seven out of 60 are readapted.

According to her, these teachers are a “direct result of the increasing precariousness of teaching work, which can be characterized, among other things, by inadequate working conditions, an overload of tasks, the lack of institutional support for physical and mental health issues, professional devaluation, an excessive number of students per class, high rates of violence in schools, as well as the lack of effective policies for valuing and monitoring these professionals.”

Removed from the classroom mainly due to mental health problems, Angela said, “Readapted teachers represent a fragile part of this system, and instead of being subjected to public policies that pay attention to the reasons for re-adaptation processes, with the intention of logically minimizing them and strengthening teaching action and identity with decent working conditions, what we have been faced with is government actions ... that further weaken not only these professionals but the entire workforce.”

In conclusion, she said: “We are faced with a government that ignores and devalues our work, as well as running roughshod over it with projects that, deep down, only exacerbate social inequality, only keep the most vulnerable students away from school, and only promote the privatization of education.”



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