

# Whitmer keeps Michigan K-8 schools and factories open despite record COVID-19 surge

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As the COVID-19 pandemic continues its catastrophic spread across the globe, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer has announced new restrictions on public gatherings. Last week there were 44,019 new COVID-19 cases across the state, shattering the previous record of 29,614 set one week earlier by almost 50 percent.

By order of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Whitmer has shut down in-person dining, casinos, and movie theaters from November 18 until December 8, as well as in-person instruction at high schools and colleges. However, pre-K and K-8 instruction can continue in-person at the discretion of the district, while daycares can also remain open.

[Click here for interactive map.](#)

Is K-8 remaining face-to-face because COVID-19 only spreads in high schools and colleges, but not among younger children? No. The state's own data shows that 108 of the total 208 ongoing outbreaks at K-12 schools are at preschools, elementary and middle schools.

Rather, the schools are being kept open in order to also keep open the other major vectors for the disease which were excluded from Whitmer's shutdown order: factories and workplaces. To get the workers to work, their young children must be sent to school.

Michigan's factories and workplaces are themselves hotbeds for infection. Recent in-depth exposures by committees of rank-and-file workers at southeast Michigan auto plants show that COVID-19 is rampant in that industry. In nearby Illinois, reports show that factories and workplaces are the single largest source of outbreaks, outranking prisons, schools, restaurants, or any other category.

School outbreaks as reported by the state include cases only among students, teachers and staff, and

exclude parents and other community members who become infected. But in reality, outbreaks at schools and auto plants are clearly connected.

Dr. Jeremy D. Goldhaber-Fiebert of the Stanford University School of Medicine wrote in a recent article for *JAMA Network*, "school reopening increases the risk of transmission within schools but also within households, workplaces, and the community at large," because "students and staff mix with others and because reopening increases parents' mixing as they return to work."

Michigan's factories, workplaces and K-8 schools remain open at a time while hospitals across the country are already overflowing. Doctors in the state have warned of a catastrophic staff shortage as COVID-19 now engulfs the entire country at once, rather than region by region as in earlier stages of the pandemic. A recent study from the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation predicts that in the next four months the COVID-19 death toll in the US will double, going from 250,000 now to over 500,000 by the end of February.

The homicidal policy of keeping schools and workplaces open is driven by the profit motives of the major corporations. As millions are dying around the world, the stock market is at record highs. In the third quarter, Fiat Chrysler Automotives made \$1.4 billion in profit, and the US auto industry made as many cars as it did the same time last year. On top of this, the CARES Act, passed on a near-unanimous vote by Democrats and Republicans in March as the first surge of the pandemic hit, has funneled trillions of dollars to Wall Street, the largest bailout in history.

This is the bipartisan capitalist policy of "herd immunity," which is imposed by Trump at the national level and by Whitmer and the Democrats at the state

level in Michigan. The ruling elite seeks to reap massive profits no matter how many workers' and children's lives are destroyed by the deadly virus.

While there exists massive opposition to this policy among teachers, students, and the entire working class, the trade unions have kept them divided, and have facilitated the opening of schools and workplaces which has led to the spread of the virus.

The day after Whitmer's announcement that high schools would be closed, the American Federation of Teachers of Michigan wrote in a statement that K-12 schools, in fact, "may stay open to meet basic student needs such as food, internet access, school based health-care, child care and face-to-face instruction for special education and ELL students. Given lower transmission rates and greater need among younger students, whether or not K-8 education is face-to-face, virtual or a hybrid remains the decision of local districts."

In other words, the AFT-Michigan advocates for numerous exceptions to the closure of K-12 schools, and fully endorses keeping K-8 schools open, advancing the fraudulent claim that there is lower risk.

In September, the AFT-Michigan played a central role in selling out the nine-day strike by 1,200 graduate student workers at the University of Michigan. After the student workers courageously went on strike against unsafe teaching conditions and rejected an offer from the university that addressed none of their concerns, AFT-Michigan President David Hecker was brought in to take over negotiations. He promptly orchestrated the passage of an essentially identical offer, sending the graduate students back to work under the threat of state injunction.

As for the United Auto Workers (UAW), leaked documents reveal that they are working with management to carefully track the spread in secret while concealing the information from workers on the line.

The Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee was formed by rank-and-file educators to unite them with students, parents, and all workers in the preparation of a general strike to stop the spread of COVID-19. We demand resources be made available for high-quality at-home virtual learning, with full compensation for parents who have to stay home from work. The lives of workers and youth are worth more than the profits of the rich! Get involved today.



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