

New York City educators call for unity with Chicago educators in fight to close schools

New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
4 February 2021

The New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee expresses its full support for the Chicago teachers' struggle against the dangerous and indeed criminal drive to resume in-person instruction in Chicago Public Schools (CPS). Their determined fight to save lives and resist the "herd immunity" policies pursued by the entire political establishment is the spearhead of a growing movement of educators and all workers throughout the US and globally.

The COVID-19 pandemic has already killed nearly half a million people in the US alone and is expanding daily, with new and more infectious variants spreading largely undetected throughout the country.

Contrary to the propaganda emanating from the corporate news media—led by the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*—the overwhelming body of scientific evidence proves that schools are major vectors for the spread of the disease.

The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) is making every effort, in collaboration with Chicago's Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot, to suppress educators' resistance to a policy that will inevitably result in a massive increase in deaths among teachers, students, their families and the wider community.

The back-to-school drive is the central domestic policy of the new Biden administration and the Democratic Party, which, just as much as the Republicans, is a party of the corporate and financial elite. Their sole interest is the continued flow of profits, no matter what the cost in human life.

Instead of upholding the demands and protecting the lives of rank-and-file members, the CTU bureaucrats agree with Lightfoot and the Biden administration that schools should reopen during the pandemic before community-wide inoculation against COVID-19. They are pursuing the same sort of miserable compromise

that the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) reached with New York City's Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio to reopen schools here last fall, which has proven disastrous for educators, students, parents and the entire working class.

On September 29, at which point 211,124 Americans had already succumbed to COVID-19, de Blasio and the UFT collaborated to reopen the largest school district in the country. This set the precedent for other Democrat-led cities to reopen schools, and the district's faulty data is now being used by the Democrats and unions to falsely claim that schools can be reopened 'safely' with minimal precautions and increased testing.

On the contrary, studies globally have shown that closing schools is among the most significant measures to reduce infections and deaths from the virus. Since New York City and thousands of other districts reopened in the fall, the death toll in the US has more than doubled to 460,398 today.

New research by a Princeton University professor reveals that positive cases among NYC Education Department staff have doubled during the first three weeks of January, compared to the totals from September through December. There have been 12,500 new cases among public school students in January alone. With the disastrously slow vaccination program and the emergence of new, more infectious variants, the situation will only worsen in the coming months. Despite this, Mayor de Blasio insists that schools are safe and continues to push for a full reopening.

The fight against the murderous back-to-school policy of the ruling class and the refusal to close non-essential businesses, with full compensation to those affected, until the pandemic is brought under control, pits teachers and all workers against the entire political

and economic system. The pandemic has brought to the surface and exacerbated the enormous social chasm between the rich and the working class, which has been growing for decades.

Chicago teachers can place no confidence in the treacherous leaders of the CTU and must build the Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee as the center of opposition to whatever miserable deal the CTU attempts to sell to reopen schools. You must orient toward other sections of workers throughout the city and metro region, and with educators and other workers across district and state lines.

We urge you to advance your struggle with the full confidence that educators in New York City and a network of rank-and-file committees across the US and internationally will support your fight, including in Los Angeles, San Diego, Northern California, Texas, Alabama, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, as well as Germany, the UK, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Australia, and a growing number of cities and states worldwide.

In New York City, our committee has fought to unite educators with Hunts Point produce market workers who went on strike last month, as well as transport and logistics workers, health care workers and more. We call for general strike action to close all schools and nonessential workplaces, which is the only way to contain the pandemic while the population is safely vaccinated.

With the utmost urgency, we call for all educators, autoworkers, health care workers, service industry workers, food production workers and all workers to form rank-and-file committees independent of their feckless unions. These committees must prepare for and organize for nationwide general strike action to close all schools and nonessential workplaces in order to put an end to the suffering and death of all workers, and to provide ample financial resources for all nonessential workers to stay home safely until the pandemic is contained.



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