

Turkish educators and students support October 15 global school strike to stop spread of COVID-19

The Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education in Turkey
13 October 2021

The Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education in Turkey fully supports the October 15 global school strike call by British parent Lisa Diaz. We call on educators, parents and students to join this strike and send messages of support against the continuation of in-person education in unsafe schools during the pandemic.

Lisa, a mother of two and a member of the SafeEdForAll group, called for her first parents strike on October 1. These courageous initiatives by Lisa reflect the concerns and opposition of hundreds of millions of parents, teachers and students around the world and deserve widespread support.

As in the rest of the world, the pandemic rages in Turkey. After schools reopened completely to in-person education on September 6, the number of daily cases increased from 20,000 to over 30,000. Turkey ranks among the top five countries in the world with the most new cases per day. About 200 people die every day from this preventable disease. While 66,000 people have officially lost their lives due to the pandemic in Turkey to date, it is estimated that excess deaths—reflecting numbers of people dying due to the pandemic—are approaching 200,000.

Unsurprisingly, the reopening of schools in unsafe conditions so that parents can return to work to generate profits for companies has caused an explosion of cases among young people.

Health Minister Fahrettin Koca admitted this last month, stating, “With schools staying open for the last three weeks, the number of cases between the ages of 0-17 has doubled. Our average [number of] active cases is currently 400,000. A quarter of them are in the 0-17 age group. Previously it was 10-11 percent.” One of the

tragedies caused by this policy was the death of a 17-year-old high school student in Kütahya last week.

According to a statement of the Student-Parents Association last week, at least 153,000 students have been quarantined since schools reopened in September. According to data collected by the education union E?itim Sen, hundreds of classrooms are quarantined each week, while thousands of students and teachers have tested positive for COVID-19.

Many infected children go undetected, as there is no free and widespread testing in schools. The Health Ministry has taken the government’s de facto herd immunity policy one step further, slashing the mandatory quarantine period of students from 10 days to 5 days. Children who are asymptomatic will be able to return to school if they have a COVID-19 test after the fifth day of isolation and the test is negative.

The teacher and classroom shortage is rampant. The lack of even the most basic sanitary supplies, proper air conditioning and staff in schools where class sizes are often over 30 accelerates the spread of the virus. It is untrue to claim that other measures such as masking can stop the spread of COVID-19 in these conditions. In fact, as scientists made clear, schools cannot be reopened safely unless zero cases are reached!

Despite this proven fact, all the capitalist political parties and the trade unions advocate keeping schools open no matter how many teachers, parents and children get sick or die.

However, social opposition among workers, parents and students is growing against this deadly policy; the ground is being prepared for a united global struggle of the international working class, the only force capable of fighting and halting the pandemic.

The Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education, composed of educators, parents and students, advocates the only scientific strategy against the pandemic: global eradication. It is imperative that nonessential workplaces and schools be closed until zero cases are reached, together with masking, mass vaccination, widespread testing, contact tracing and isolation of infected persons and other public health measures. There must be full income support for all workers affected by these measures.

We call on all educators, parents and students who agree with this perspective to join the global school strike on October 15 and join us in the fight for an eradication strategy.

Follow Lisa Diaz on Twitter: @Sandyboots2020. Send messages of support for Friday's strike to the our committee here. Messages of solidarity on Twitter should be sent using the hashtag #SchoolStrike2021 and should tag the Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education in Turkey (@tabankomiteleri).



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