

Speaking for the financial oligarchy, Bloomberg News declares, “Post-Pandemic America Has More Teachers Than It Can Afford.”

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Earlier this month, billionaire Michael Bloomberg’s news agency bluntly stated the attitude of the American ruling elites towards public education. The article was entitled, “Post-Pandemic America Has More Teachers Than It Can Afford.” It admits to the “gravely skeletal” condition of schools across the US while demanding the evisceration of what remains as “unaffordable.”

This pronouncement from Bloomberg, a creature of Wall Street speculation now worth over \$100 billion, is obscene. But the former New York City mayor, a Republican-turned-Democrat, speaks for the priorities of both capitalist political parties. Trillions of dollars have been lavished by both parties on corporate and bank bailouts, on the one hand, and the horrifying escalation of imperialist wars, including some \$1.7 trillion for a massive overall of US nuclear weapons, on the other.

It goes without saying that the bipartisan cabal of oligarchs who claim “there is no money” for schools have funneled quite a bit into their own pockets over the past few years. The combined wealth of US billionaires nearly doubled between 2020-24 from \$2.947 trillion to \$5.529 trillion.

Further, the claim that we inhabit a “post-pandemic” world is a lie designed to justify the dismantling of essential precautions and healthcare for the working class. Most recent wastewater analysis shows that approximately 600,000 COVID-19 infections are taking place daily across the US, 800 deaths per week and an unknown thousands being stricken with the multi-factor medical conditions, often debilitating, of Long Covid.

The immediate cause of schools’ economic shortfalls is the Biden/Harris refusal to replace the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER). These funds had to be spent or allocated by September 30, meaning that school districts across the US are now on the other side of a massive “fiscal cliff.”

This tsunami of cuts has already cost thousands of educators their jobs. Education analyst Chad Aldeman has predicted as many as 384,000 full-time jobs may be eliminated. From coast to coast, children are facing school closures, classrooms without teachers, cuts in the arts, and a lack of social support. Mental health professionals, counselors, and tutors are losing their positions en masse.

“We are gravely skeletal in ways that will not be good for students, for the community, for teachers or schools,” says Andrea Castañeda, superintendent of Oregon’s second-largest school district, Salem-Keizer, according to the Bloomberg report. It notes, “the district reduced its budget by about 377 full-time positions, or about seven percent of its workforce, which involved about 100 staff layoffs in the spring, as it stared down the loss of \$151.8 million in federal funds.” Castañeda underscored the impact, calling it “a historic level cut.”

The nationwide “gut punch” to schools

- On October 9, a group of students and parents marched through **San Francisco** to oppose the plans of the district to close or merge 13 schools including San Francisco Public Montessori. “Save our school. Save our school,” students chanted, speaking up against the closure of Harvey Milk Elementary in the Castro District. Teacher Leanne Francis, who taught at the school for 30 years, told ABC7, “I feel sick to my stomach. We all do. We feel like it’s a gut punch.” The district has a \$400 million budget deficit and will make a final decision on closures by December.

- In **Chicago**, Acero Charter Schools announced this week that it will close seven of its 15 schools, affecting over 2,000 students and cutting 270 jobs. The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) board has drafted a plan to close or consolidate as many as 100 schools to close a \$1.2 billion school budget gap. CPS teachers are working without a contract and have been told there is no progress on talks. However, the Chicago Teachers Union, in alliance with Democratic Mayor Brandon Johnson, a former CTU lobbyist, has refused to call a strike and rally educators against the massive attack on public education in the city.

- In **Illinois**, which comprises both urban and rural districts, nearly 60 percent of public-school teachers and support staff are considering quitting the profession due to low wages. Similarly, 1,113 teachers quit last year in **Wichita, Kansas**, where despite the closing of schools, the districts is short of educators.

- More than half of **Texas** school districts face budget shortfalls, and school closures are on the agenda in Plano, Coppell, Lewisville, and others. Students and parents rallied in defense of Coppell ISD’s Pinkerton Elementary last week, while Lewisville faces a \$4.5 million budget deficit and is looking to close or consolidate 20 schools. The ending of ESSER funds is compounded by the flat-lining of per-pupil state funding since 2019. “Texas lags well behind all other states in funding for public education,” the superintendent of Lewisville Independent School District said to CBS News. “They’re \$4,000 behind the national average. We actually have less money now, when you account for inflation, than we did in 2016. So, school districts are being forced to look at every single expenditure they have.”

- **Houston**, facing a \$450 million deficit, has cut hundreds of positions, eliminating wraparound resource specialists including mental health and telehealth specialists.

- **Seattle**, which initially announced 21 school closures, confronted a storm of opposition from educators, parents, and students. With a \$100

million budget deficit, the district reduced the proposed closures to five and will make staff cuts to make up the difference. Around Washington state, **Yakima** cut 138 jobs, **Walla Walla** closed its preschool, and **Mount Baker** cut its paraprofessionals and custodians. Dan Steele, assistant executive director of the Washington Association of School Administrators said that any districts that escaped cuts this year “are probably going to be in that boat next year.”

- **Denver** closed three schools last year and said additional closures will follow finalized enrollment data in December.

- **New York City**’s financial plan calls for a reduction of nearly 900 full-time teachers this year and an elimination of 2,708 positions over the next two years.

- **Pittsburgh** schools have presented a reorganization plan to close 16 schools, sparking intense community anger. “There is no reason for these cuts,” a parent told the *WSWS*. “You look at how much money is being spent on war and the rich keep getting tax cuts.”

- On October 1, **Duval County, Florida** (includes **Jacksonville**) approved a five-year plan to close 18 schools and build six new ones.

- **Clark County Schools** (includes **Las Vegas**) are carrying out huge cuts on a school-by-school basis. A teacher at Steve Schorr Elementary told FOX5 that their school must eliminate \$225,000, cutting positions and benefits for educators. Parent Heather Seltzer told FOX5 that class sizes will increase, “It’s already packed, and teachers are spread thin. It’s not fair.”

- Several **Philadelphia** public schools will “likely” close over the next few years, the city Board of Education president said September 17, stating that the school district’s leadership is “done kicking the can down the road.”

- **Elkins, West Virginia**’s board of education plans a November decision to close two schools. *The Inter-Mountain* reported on an October 1 school board meeting where workers spoke out. Sam Roy, a member of the Whitmer Fire Department, said, “There’s several things you need to take into consideration when closing these schools. This means busing approximately 106 children across Middle Mountain, Rich Mountain and Shavers Mountain. I travel these roads almost every day and they are really dangerous. During the winter it snows so much on these mountains that the state road can’t keep up with the amount of snow that is coming down. When you think about it, is it worth losing one child’s life over money? It’s not to me.”

Role of the teacher union bureaucracies

This crisis, however, is a million miles away from the offices of the pampered bureaucrats of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA). Instead of unifying educators and mobilizing strike action against these cuts, the labor bureaucracy is focused on its own bread and butter (more likely, toast points and caviar). It is plowing millions of dollars into the campaigns of warmonger Kamala Harris and her party in the hopes of maintaining their clout and legal right to dues collections amounting to hundreds of millions.

While AFT President Randi Weingarten tweets her loyalty to Kamala Harris, lends support to the Zionist genocide and enthuses over war with Russia, educators are left to fend for themselves. As a long-time member of the Democratic National Committee, Weingarten has been party to the transfer of billions of dollars out of education and into prosecuting US wars.

The role of the bureaucracies in the educators’ unions has been to actively block educators from joining together to oppose the devastating effects of the “fiscal cliff” and, frankly, even preventing educators from

being aware of the struggles facing schools across the state or nationally. By design, teachers are balkanized district-by-district and fed lies about “accounting errors” or alleged “years of over spending,” when the truth is that the financial oligarchy is moving to shred the very right to public education.

The Trump-aligned Project 2025 makes no pretenses of this. It would replace Title I and Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) funding with block grants to states, eliminate the Department of Education, and accelerate privatization. However, such measures would merely intensify the cuts the Democratic Party have overseen, both on the federal and state levels.

The Biden-Harris decision to allow the end of ESSER funds is the culmination of years of defunding public schools and supporting various privatization schemes.

More than half of states now have at least one private school choice program, according to *Education Week*. Many have several. Twelve have programs that currently or eventually will accept applications from all students in the state. This school year, for the first time ever, more than one million of the nation’s 50 million K-12 children took advantage of private school choice, further draining the coffers of public education. These “innovations” were promoted and subsidized by the “school reform” agenda of former Democratic President Barack Obama and his Education Secretary Arne Duncan.

The end of the ESSER grants will be accompanied in many states by cuts to other funding streams for education, as a direct result of tax cuts to the wealthy. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) found that 17 states are pursuing two or more policies that would cut education revenue even as they face a loss of more than 5 percent in education funding due to the end of ESSER. Arkansas, for example, is facing a 6.8 percent decrease in education funding due to the end of ESSER, even as it is pursuing income and property tax cuts and funding shifts to school vouchers. The CBPP report estimates that the ESSER loss, as well as these tax policies, will result in a loss of nearly \$2 billion in education funding in Arkansas in the 2025 fiscal year.

Overall, CBPP says these tax cuts to businesses and the rich will total \$111 billion in lost revenue to schools by 2028.

These are but a brief selection of some of the recently announced attacks on education. The facts clearly establish the need for the building of the Rank-and-File Educators Committee (US), independent of the two political parties of big business and the trade union apparatus. Affiliated with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, the RFEC is creating lines of communication among educators and advancing a political program to stop the bloodletting and demand billions for education. This is a fight against the domination of society by a financial oligarchy that has no interest in the future of the next generation or the preservation of culture and learning, only their ill-gotten wealth and escalating wars for geopolitical control.



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