

Haphazard plans to reopen US schools spur growing opposition among educators

By Renae Cassimeda
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Opposition among educators, parents and students is mounting across the US against the push by the Trump administration and the ruling elite to rapidly reopen schools—a move which coincides directly with the homicidal drive by the ruling class to force workers back on the job amid the deepening COVID-19 pandemic.

In recent weeks, Americans have witnessed the pandemic worsen throughout the country as a result of the measures pushed through by state governors to lift restrictions and reopen state economies. The number of new COVID-19 cases surpassed 65,000 on Monday and Tuesday, while last Friday saw a single-day record for new cases at 71,787.

Throughout the US, public school districts are rushing to implement plans for reopening in the fall. Plans range from fully in-person learning, fully online, or blended models with both in-person and online instruction.

The two largest school districts in California, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD), released a joint statement Monday announcing they will begin their school years fully online. LAUSD will begin classes August 18 while SDUSD will begin August 31. LAUSD and SDUSD serve a combined 20 percent of the 6 million public school students throughout California.

The move to a fully online format was announced as a temporary measure, with the joint statement noting, “both districts will continue planning for a return to in-person learning during the 2020-21 academic year, as soon as public health conditions allow.”

The announcement comes in response to a surge in new cases within the state due to a series of lifted restrictions spearheaded by Democratic Governor

Gavin Newsom in recent weeks. Yesterday saw the highest number of new cases in California, 9,561, while yesterday’s death toll was the second highest for the state at 139.

The statement by LAUSD and SDUSD cites contradictory and vague guidelines set forth by the state government, argues the pandemic is not under control and calls on the federal government to provide more funding so that schools can “reopen in a responsible manner.”

Also on Monday, a meeting of the Orange County Board of Education, which presides over multiple school districts in Southern California, approved its guidelines for the full reopening of schools on August 31 through in-person learning, the most reckless model which is being heavily promoted by the Trump administration.

In gross disregard for the lives of educators, students and their families, the guidelines advised against the use of masks and social distancing measures. It states, “K-12 children represent the lowest-risk cohort for Covid-19. Because of that fact, social distancing of children and reduced census classrooms is not necessary and therefore not recommended. ... Requiring children to wear masks during school is not only difficult—if not impossible to implement—but not based on science. It may even be harmful and is therefore not recommended.”

As the board meeting took place, parents and educators rallied outside the venue opposing the plans to reopen in person. Though the guidelines stipulate recommendations for school districts, each district may choose exactly how it plans to reopen with in-person learning. Multiple school districts under the Orange County Board of Education are planning on beginning the school year with a fully online model, similar to

LAUSD and SDUSD, in response to the surge in cases and growing opposition by parents and educators.

The antiscientific rhetoric being put forward by the Orange County Board of Education, claiming that schools are safe and kids simply do not get the virus, is a criminal lie that is being rejected by educators and parents. School districts, including LAUSD and SDUSD, have noted in prior weeks that they want to reopen, but only in response to wide opposition to in-person learning have some districts begun opting for a fully online model at the start of the school year.

Various rallies and actions by educators, parents and students are erupting across the US against the palpably unsafe return to school.

Teachers in Austin, Texas have organized a rally for “Safe School Opening,” with a list of demands including online instruction until county infection rates are below 0.05 percent.

Teachers and parents in Loudoun County, Virginia protested Monday outside a Board of Educators meeting for Loudoun County Public Schools in opposition to the reopening plan for a hybrid model, which would include in-person learning when classes resume. Outside the board meeting, one teacher carried a sign with the words, “I can’t teach from a hospital or grave!”

In Lawrence, Kansas teachers protested outside the Lawrence Public School District board room opposing the district’s plan to reopen schools with in-person instruction. They demanded proper PPE and social distancing guidelines in schools, and that 14 days must elapse with zero new COVID-19 cases in Douglas County before they would be willing to resume in-person classes.

In St. Louis, Missouri teachers, parents, and students held a sit-in on Monday protesting the St. Louis Public Schools plans to reopen with in-person learning.

Teachers in Manteca and Ripon, located in central California, are planning a “Social Distancing Safety Rally” on Thursday to protest the Manteca Unified School Board’s decision to reopen schools with a fully in-person format.

Parents from Arlington Public Schools in Virginia created an online petition calling for the district to implement a fully online learning format for students. Their online petition request reached 2,382 signatures as of Tuesday evening.

While these protests have been organized in part by the local teacher unions, they are only doing so to maintain credibility in the eyes of teachers. For their part, the National Education Association (NEA) and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) have been promoting the Biden election campaign and the fraudulent HEROES Act.

The Socialist Equality Party calls on educators, parents and students to build on the mass opposition to schools reopening and to form independent rank-and-file safety committees in every school and neighborhood, to prepare a nationwide strike to stop the unsafe reopening of schools. Educators must demand a major expansion of funding for education, which would include a program to rebuild the schools and hire the necessary staff to provide high quality, safe and equal education for all.

A paraeducator from Massachusetts explained why a nationwide strike is needed, saying, “I think it would help to have a nationwide strike. Just talking about it with administration won’t sway them. We have to show them we won’t sacrifice ourselves because they say it’s safe. They say children don’t get sick, but we do, and we’re not going to risk our own lives or infecting our families.”

Dylan Lomangino, an elementary Orchestra teacher at Riverside Magnet School in East Hartford, Connecticut, expressed support for a nationwide strike. “What I’m hearing from the NEA is that their big solution is to vote for Biden. But what else? I realize we have to fight against capitalist interests. How do we use our collective strength to get what we need is the ultimate question. We have more leverage because parents and students are invested in schools, so we can actively work against a government that represents capitalist interests.”

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