

“A game of Russian Roulette with the lives of children”

As statewide cases hit half a million, opposition mounts in Florida to school reopening

By Nancy Hanover
10 August 2020

With many Florida school districts set to open this week and thousands more infected with COVID-19 every day across the state, teachers from across Florida marched on Republican Governor Ron DeSantis’ mansion Saturday to protest his statewide mandate for fully in-person instruction. It was one of dozens, possibly hundreds, of protests against the reopening of schools held across the US over the past month.

On Saturday, Florida hit the ghastly total of 526,577 COVID-19 cases and 8,109 deaths. Test positivity rates stand at 13.3 percent, indicating a chronic lack of testing and therefore a substantially greater prevalence of infection than the official numbers. For three weeks in July, the number of daily new cases averaged more than 10,500, and Florida is now second only to California in total COVID-19 cases.

“We’ve called upon the mayor and local officials to return us to Phase 1 due to the increase in COVID-19 deaths,” said teacher Alex Ingram, marching at the governor’s mansion, according to *Florida Today*. “We have called upon the school board to close schools. We’ve called on the health department to close schools. Now we’re calling on the governor to close schools.”

DeSantis, a loyal acolyte of the Trump administration, claimed throughout the summer that if school boards wanted to close districts, they needed to be authorized by their local health department. Then he issued a directive to health directors to refuse to close schools. As a result, *USA Today* noted, “In county after county the health directors’ refrain to school leaders was the same: Their role was to provide information, not recommendations.”

“When we voted to reopen schools, I’ll be honest and tell you I did it because we are under an executive order

to do so,” Marc Dodd, a school board member in Lake County, Florida, said last week. “Do I think they’re safe? Absolutely not.”

Meanwhile, it was announced on Sunday that 97,000 children nationally have tested positive for coronavirus from July 16–30, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. With the US now posting over five million total cases since the start of the pandemic, more than 338,000 have been children. These numbers demonstrate the criminal recklessness of a return to school being justified with the lie that children are either less susceptible or cannot transmit the deadly virus.

Nevertheless, across the US, both Democratic and Republican state officials are presiding over the herding of young people into schools, sanctioning the suffering and deaths of children, teachers, staff and families in the name of the “economy.” By this they mean getting parents back on the job producing profit.

The bipartisan character of the campaign to reopen schools was on full display Friday, when New York’s Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo declared, “Good news, all schools can reopen.” His statement paves the way for the reopening of all schools across New York, including the largest school district in the US, which will set a precedent for other states and districts to follow.

For its part, the 150,000-member Florida Education Association (FEA) recently did a survey of 44,000 educators and 5,000 parents, showing that 76 percent did not feel their school could be reopened safely. Refusing to call for statewide strike action, however, the FEA opted instead to file a lawsuit July 20 against the statewide reopening. Predictably, the suit has been sandbagged by authorities. On Thursday, the venue for the trial was

relocated, and other procedural barriers are anticipated. Meanwhile, students by the thousands are being forced back into the classroom.

Speaking to the *World Socialist Web Site*, a Florida music teacher with over 25 years of experience denounced the mandate for a return to school. She agreed that it was entirely motivated by the broader campaign for a return to work. “This decision is 100 percent economically driven. We teachers are ‘revered,’ given little muffins and cards on Teacher Appreciate Days. But the bottom line is that we are shouldering the responsibility for getting the economy going. That’s what’s being placed at our feet.”

She added, “It is fundamentally irresponsible. It is all about childcare. Meanwhile, teachers are now spending their own money on personal protective equipment and building little plexiglass devices to protect themselves and their students.

“In our county, we had 350 people march on the local health department. We have a large contingency of parents behind us. We call them a ‘momfia.’ We have had the highest rate of COVID in the state and the highest pediatric rate.

“I am slated to return to the classroom on Tuesday. Since my county provides the option to go virtual, purchasing webcams for parents, I will have a camera on me all day. I am now responsible for providing the same quality of education, both live and virtual at the same time. I have no idea how that will work out.”

The music teacher shared a letter she had recently written to protest the resumption of face-to-face instruction. Addressing school board members, she said, “I am writing this letter with the hope of getting you to listen—authentically LISTEN to my concerns, which by no coincidence, are shared by hundreds of colleagues, community members, parents, and families.

“We do what we do with intention, integrity, and at a grueling pace—often at personal sacrifice mentally, emotionally, physically, and financially. Regardless of the workload (which only increases each year), we persist. We spend our own personal time and money taking course after course, training after training—all to better serve our students. Each year we are presented with new mandates and expectations and each year we are grossly underfunded and micromanaged almost to the point of insanity.”

She emphasized, “We cannot provide world class rigorous, standards-based, differentiated and developmentally appropriate instruction within the

practical and physical challenges of a raging and novel disease that has ravaged the entire planet and killed hundreds of thousands of human beings. It’s not in our rear view mirror. We do NOT have it under control whatsoever. How many local health officials have you ignored? **IT IS IN OUR COMMUNITY. IT HAS INFECTED OUR NEIGHBORS.”**

Referring to the inevitable proliferation of the virus as a “game of Russian Roulette with the lives of children,” she stated, “We want to work. We want to earn every penny of our paycheck. We are not in a position to not work. We have car payments and mortgages and medical bills. We are only asking that you look at the data **READILY AVAILABLE TO YOU** and make a decision that protects the lives of students, staff and families. This is fixable. Do you have the fortitude to do what is right? Because if you don’t, the consequences will not be fixable. Not now. Not ever.”

These sentiments are echoed across the US, as workers are horrified at the dangers of a return to work, but even less inclined to allow their children to be an “experiment,” as recently proposed by Dr. Anthony Fauci. The most recent polling numbers by NPR/Ipsos shows that 82 percent of K-12 teachers nationally are concerned about returning to in-person teaching this fall, with two-thirds preferring remote instruction.

Teachers are not speaking out not just for themselves, but for their students and communities. We urge all opponents of the homicidal demands of the Democrats, Republicans, unions and big businesses to the profit-driven return to work and school to contact us today and sign up for the *WSWS Educators Newsletter*.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>