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STRUGGLE LA LUCHA

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As omicron surges: Teachers, students resist unsafe schools

By Greg Butterfield

Members of the Chicago Teachers Union voted to take classes remote for several days in defiance of the city administration. Thousands of New York City students walked out of classes to protest unsafe conditions. Furious staff, youth and families from Oakland, California, to Columbia, Missouri, and Boston are demanding the return of remote learning options, increased testing and safety measures in schools.

We all remember Donald Trump's racist, anti-immigrant slogan, "Build that wall." Now the Biden administration and its allies in the corporate media have "built a wall" of dangerous denial around the spread of COVID-19's omicron variant in public schools across the U.S. And teachers, school staff, students and families are fighting back.

Along with healthcare and retail workers, school workers and students have been on the frontlines of the pandemic since early 2020 – never more so than today. Crammed into overcrowded classrooms without adequate ventilation, testing or PPE, schools are omicron superspreaders – ones that federal, state and local officials insist remain open despite all evidence to the contrary. Why?

Advocates for keeping schools open and denying a remote option cite "learning loss" as their primary reason. But in cities like New York, home of the country's largest public school system, so many thousands of students and teachers are sick that little learning is going on in most classrooms. In many schools, students who come in are packed into even more dangerous conditions – like auditoriums and lunchrooms – because so many peers and staff members are out sick.

As enraged teachers and students have been saying for weeks, most want to teach and learn in a classroom environment. But that can only happen when it is safe to do so. Withholding remote options and safety measures during a pandemic surge is the greatest source of "learning loss" as parents keep their children home and many students and teachers fall ill.

Childhood infections and hospitalizations have skyrocketed since mid-December. Omicron is a variant of COVID-19 that is highly transmissible and often results in "breakthrough cases" among those who are already vaccinated. But offi-

Brooklyn, N.Y., teachers demand 'safety not swagger'

cialists have only gotten more dug in about keeping schools open, without any remote option.

It's not just pro-Trump anti-maskers who are responsible. Some of the worst offenders are Democratic allies of the Biden administration, including incoming New York Mayor Eric Adams and his predecessor, Bill de Blasio, and Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, who locked teachers out of their remote classrooms.

The real reason – which is becoming clearer to more and more workers – is that the capitalist economy demands it. Profit-hungry capitalists find their businesses short staffed. Keeping schools open is a way to force parents to come to work, often in unsafe conditions. The health of the community – including elders, people with chronic illnesses, and younger children who have not yet been approved for vaccination – is not a priority for the capitalists and their bought-and-paid-for politicians.

Baltimore: a case study

Baltimore, a predominantly Black city, is a case study in what is happening around the country, including larger cities like Chicago and New York.

The school superintendent and Democratic city administration refused to heed the Baltimore Teachers Union, which asked them to act preemptively to protect teachers, students and the community before the scheduled return to class-

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Students at Lower East Side Prep High School joined a citywide walkout for COVID safety in New York, Jan. 11.



PHOTO: SHAWN LARICA



SEL PHOTO MARQUE VANDERBENT

MLK Day organizers say 'NO COPS in commemoration'

By John Parker

Los Angeles – The Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice, Martin Luther King Coalition, Unión del Barrio, the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Movement, Coalition to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal, South Central Tenants Union, Puerto Rican Alliance, BAYAN USA, Harvard Boulevard Block Club and Socialist Unity Party are just a few of the organizations supporting this year's MLK March for Social Justice. Because of the recent COVID surge, this year's event will take the form of a car caravan.

Many of these groups were part of the news conference Dec. 30 announcing the caravan on the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, Monday, Jan. 17. The enthusiasm felt from the organizations at the media event comes from this being the first time in over three decades that the MLK events will exclude the police and not disrespect the legacy of Dr. King.

In addition, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. military organizations are not invited to have contingents or any representatives.

Many in South Central, where the MLK Parade occurs, see the recent killing of 14-year-old Valentina Orellana-Peralta, a recent immigrant from Chile, as yet another horrible reminder of the terror created by the police forces against the predominantly Black and Brown community. Her

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Fatima,
Fatoumata,
Muhammed
Drammeh



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