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# Speak Out Now

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## Reopen the Schools? Our Health vs Profits

As the U.S. COVID-19 death count approaches 145,000 people, Betsy DeVos, the Federal Secretary of Education, has embarked on a media blitz. Over and over, she has pounded home the same message: “The rule should be that kids go back to school this fall. They’ve been missing months of learning.”

DeVos’s response exposes the real guidelines of this society: the profits of the one percent are the main priority. To jump-start their economy, they hope to send millions of people back to work, but that requires a system of childcare for the children of many of those workers. It’s not learning they’re concerned with, it’s the profits produced by the parents of those children. And that means schools must be re-opened this fall, no matter how ruthlessly the virus is ravaging our communities.

To make it as plain as possible, Vice President Pence declared “We don’t want CDC guidance to be a reason why people don’t reopen their schools.” Instead, they prefer to play Russian roulette with the lives of children and school staff.

The science is crystal clear: schools can’t be re-opened until the community spread of the virus is stopped. And the only way to stop community spread is with widespread testing and contact tracing. The politicians have had five months to build these programs, but they twiddled their thumbs while Covid-19 liquefied the lungs of more than 142,000 people.

A recent report estimated that K-12 schools need between \$158 to \$245 billion to implement the CDC’s guidelines for re-opening schools. Yet when Congress passed the first Coronavirus relief bill, it allocated just \$13.5 billion for public education. Meanwhile, the U.S. government spent \$738 billion on the military this year, and some major cities spent up to half their budgets on the police. As schools have been starved of funding and the lines at the food banks have exploded, the billionaires have seen

their wealth increase by \$565 billion during the first three months of the pandemic. The priorities of this system couldn’t be clearer.

Although the politicians in both parties have proved incapable of responding to the virus, they’re more than prepared to use the crisis to continue privatizing public education. Trump has threatened to withhold federal funding from schools that re-open using distance learning, while DeVos has argued for increased school choice, a fancy term for increasing public funding for corporate-controlled charter schools and private schools.

The attempt to turn children and school staff into human guinea pigs brings to mind the words of the poet Langston Hughes, who reminded us that:

*The old and rich will live on awhile,  
As always,  
Eating blood and gold,  
Letting kids die.*

The burden of death and illness during the pandemic has been distributed unevenly across our society. Latinos, African Americans, and Native Americans, who make up a disproportionate share of the poor and the working class, have contracted COVID and perished at much higher rates. This situation is also reflected in our education system: the burden of overcrowded and underfunded schools is just another measure of the brutal, racist nature of the system we live in.

The protest movement that burst forward following the public execution of George Floyd shows our possibilities: we can’t look to the politicians to save us, we can only look to ourselves. This is a fight for the health and safety of students, families, teachers, and staff, against the interests of the one percent.

Online Townhall: **COVID-19: A Natural Event - A Human Made Catastrophe**  
**Saturday, July 25 4pm (PDT)**

Info at : [speakoutsocialists.org](http://speakoutsocialists.org)