



Speak Out Now

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School Re-Opening: False Choices

This system has offered us two choices: return to school in the middle of a pandemic, with conditions as they were before, or continue distance learning with conditions as they are now.

Before Covid-19, the [average fourth grade class](#) in California had 27 students. Under these conditions, physical distancing in classrooms is a fantasy. You can't physically distance 27 ten-year-olds.

Then what about the buildings? Science tells us that [air circulation](#) and filtration is key to preventing Covid spread in a classroom. Yet many classrooms across the country, don't have windows or functional ventilation systems. [Many school districts](#) have cut their custodial staff to the bone, leaving the custodians that remain to do the work of two or three people. Across the country schools are in a state of total disrepair. A few years ago, teachers in Detroit organized large-scale sick-outs to [protest deplorable conditions](#), including "multiple instances of rodents, mold, damaged roofs and broken glass." School nurses have faced massive cutbacks; in California, there is now just [one nurse](#) for every 2,500 students.

These conditions aren't the exception, they are the rule in poor and working-class neighborhoods. Like with Covid, the pandemic of systemic racism means the burden of a broken education system has fallen disproportionately on people of color. [Studies show](#) that across all school districts in the U.S., \$2,200 less is spent per year on each student of color as compared to each white student.

These are the conditions that the politicians and the bosses demand we return to. Their only other option, is to continue with distance learning as is.

Yet we know that for working-class children, distance learning has been a disaster. As many as 42 million people in the U.S. [lack internet access](#), with households earning incomes over \$75,000 "[twenty times more likely to have home internet access](#) than those at the lowest income levels." One in three

Black, Latinx, and Native American households [lack internet access](#). The [vast majority](#) of Americans think schools should provide students with laptops so that they can complete their homework. Many students are now left with spotty wi-fi service, low-quality laptops, or nothing at all. Students sitting in [McDonald's](#) parking lots for Wi-Fi access are a common story.

We've been presented with a false set of choices: return in the middle of a pandemic to overcrowded, underfunded schools with no ventilation, no nurses, and no soap, or continue distance learning with shoddy computers and spotty Wi-Fi access.

If teachers, custodians, bus drivers, students, and families were in charge, we could overcome the obstacles and begin making school safe for children. Retired nurses and other qualified health care workers could make sure that we'd have a health care worker at every site. They could provide community education and test students and staff. Schools could use now empty modern office buildings instead of buildings lacking even basic air circulation.

We could call back retired teachers and employ teacher substitutes who are currently out of work to shrink class sizes so that students can be safe and physically distanced. We could increase the custodial staff and ensure that every school has access to hot water and soap. And if high Covid rates make these solutions insufficient, we could provide free high-speed internet access and adequate technology to all students, along with increased mental health resources for student who are struggling with distance learning.

Our society absolutely has the resources to make this happen. America's 651 billionaires have a [net wealth](#) that tops \$4 trillion, and have become almost a [trillion dollars richer](#) during the pandemic. They and the other bosses have made their money off the work of others. We have every right to demand it be used to meet the needs of the majority, instead of fattening their bank accounts!