

Whose Kids? Our Kids!

The Attack on Public Education

As public schools enter their third year of COVID, public education as a system is staggering on the ropes. Since 2020, more than half a million teachers have left the profession. Public school teachers all report that last year's challenges for student sociability and mental health were not functionally addressed. This year will be as challenging as the last two.

There has never been a more momentous time to redefine public education. Powerful forces intend to dismantle public schools and are launching a broad political attack. This is an issue that will cripple all of society if we allow it to proceed. Nor has there ever been a more important historical moment for young people to fight for a society that includes their leadership.

The fight is for a different vision of the future; a future where strong, healthy, clear-thinking people rise in common to address the merging crises that today threaten humanity and the planet. In opposition, a well-organized and directed fascist offensive operates to weaponize real issues into fake ones designed to foment anger, fear, and distrust. Fascism requires a mass movement to justify the open dictatorship of corporate power.

In July, Betsy DeVos, who was Trump's highly destructive secretary of education, and Laura Ingraham of Fox News renewed calls for abolishing government control of public education and replacing it with "parental choice." Texas Senator John Cornyn even tweeted that the Supreme Court should reverse *Brown v. Board of Education*, which would reinstitute Jim Crow segregation.

Opposing Public Education

Fascism undermines public education because schools historically strive to produce people who think. Funded by billionaires like the Koch brothers, the attack on science and learning intends to abolish public education, a way to ensure the public remains powerless and obedient. They proclaim "parent rights" to curtail what children are allowed to learn.

Parents have always had the right to participate in community decisions about education, but they have never had an individual right to veto what their child will learn. The United States has long recognized that education is a public good that must be guaranteed by the government. The law accepts that children have different needs than their parents. The government sets basic educational standards that apply to public, private and religious schools. Even home schools do not have absolute parental rights over what and how their children learn.

Children have a right to learn the truth about U.S. history and to learn critical thinking skills. They have a right to multicultural literature and art, to play, to explore, to use their imaginations and expand their horizons. Children have a right to robust health education, which includes information about sexuality and sexual orientation, so that they can grow into healthy adults, instead of being hobbled and shamed for having human impulses.

In the privatized marketplace, the only individual rights you have depend on how much money you have. Hence the rights of children, like most rights, are bare shadows of what they should be. The United States is the only country in the world that is not a party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child! The United States incarcerates more children than any other country. Now the attack on youth is moving from the streets to the schools.

The horrible massacre in Uvalde occurred because politicians [dare not control assault rifles](#), since this would hurt the profits of gun corporations. School districts have likewise been stampeded to spend billions of dollars to militarize schools with corporate security systems that turn schools into prisons. Schools have likewise become markets for profit-making tech platforms that determine the content of public education with very little public discussion.

States' Rights Set up Schools to Fail

States' Rights block the ability of the federal government to develop a national approach. The U.S. Constitution permitted states to block federal power because slaveholders worried that federal power might free the slaves. States' Rights have been used to block health care, unions, school funding, and environmental protections. States' Rights are the foundation for more than a century of Jim Crow terror in the South. The attacks take different forms, depending on the state, guaranteeing a patchwork quilt of how public education is sabotaged. However, in every case, these notions allow corporations to move in and abolish democracy in our schools.

Rural schools across the country are on the verge of collapse because, absent a federal system, local communities must pay for their schools. But in rural areas there is a limited industrial base or no taxes on outside corporate companies so there is little revenue. Most states offer minimal funding to rural school districts. These districts lack modern buildings, have little broadband and often do not even have clean water. Instead of improving schools in West Virginia's small communities, the state is consolidating them into larger schools, forcing children from several communities to endure long bus rides. As one educator in West Virginia said, the policy is "stack them deep and teach them cheap."

Here the legacy of the high stakes testing regime, pushed by both Bush and Obama, comes home. Rural schools often do not do well on such narrow, standardized tests; then the state steps in to “close failing schools.” Mississippi has seized control of 20 districts.

Since the Oakland, California, school district was taken over by the state in 2003, it has closed 20 public schools and opened more than 40 charter schools. Every school it closed has a majority of Black or Brown students. When school board members voted to stop closing schools last year, the county superintendent threatened to replace them and stop paying their salaries. The majority on the school board folded and now intend to close six more schools by the end of this school year.

The battle is over whether the community or the corporations will control the schools. Hundreds of speakers at every Oakland school board meeting since January have demanded that no schools be closed. Parents, teachers, and the community have occupied Parker Elementary since it was closed, making this the longest school occupation in U.S. history.

Oakland is the poster child for the new “rentership society” that corporations are imposing across the country. Sixty percent of rental housing and 90 percent of rental apartments

in the city are controlled by corporations. The city is financing massive market-rate housing in communities where families have lived for generations. These communities are what is left of the old industrial era working class that has been made redundant by technology. As rent goes through the roof, the school district closes the schools that anchor these communities. Real estate developers move in, take over the closed schools, and reopen them as charters or even as private rental housing!

School vouchers, like charters, speed up the death spiral of public schools by draining money away from public education. Arizona has just passed the country's most extreme voucher law. This law gives parents a \$7,000 per child voucher to move out of public schools. The voucher is a debit card that can be used to pay for private schools, religious schools, homeschool expenses, tutoring, online classes and now "micro-schools."

West Virginia has proposed a Hope Scholarship voucher of \$4,300, which can be used for micro-pod and parochial schools. This violates the state constitution. Teachers, parents, and students are fighting this through an injunction.

Micro-schools emerged during COVID, when small groups of affluent parents pooled resources to hire teachers. The [Orlando \(Florida\) Sentinel](#) in 2017 found massive voucher

expansion led to the creation of low-cost and low-quality “voucher schools.” These were private schools that were inexpensive enough for low-income parents to cover tuition expenses with voucher funds alone, but so poorly regulated that repeated problems arose. Schools were set up in decrepit strip malls, violated health and safety requirements, and hired teachers without credentials. Such micro-schools often take the money and disappear. Vouchers, charters, and micro-schools re-establish segregated schools since they claim to be private and no longer under public control.

Taking the Offensive against Fascism

Government in the United States is mostly under the control of corporations and their private property. Fascists rally the genuine anger of people against the government, and then project that the way forward is a corporate dictatorship, like slavery was. The reality, however, is that only government can guarantee basic human rights and needs. Revolutionaries today recognize that the people must compel government to do this.

Tyrants tried to destroy ideas quite often in the past, but the people with those ideas revolted against them and destroyed them instead. Education is always political because it is a battle over ideology, knowledge, power, and the future.

Once people recognize that buzzwords simply disguise corporate business plans, they reject these notions and take the offensive. This step requires revolutionaries to regularly expose the specific concrete issues of class, white supremacy and political power that lurk behind every school crisis, and that block our imagination and ability to unite for our kids and for their future.

September/October 2022 vol.32. Ed5

This article originated in Rally, Comrades!

P.O. Box 477113 Chicago, IL 60647 rally@lrna.org

Free to reproduce unless otherwise marked.

Please include this message with any reproduction.