

## Reopen schools? Sure, but when and how?



By Ben Sears

Readers might be excused for getting the impression that parents and teachers are locked in conflict over the issue of sending kids to school during the pandemic. Teacher unions have been charged with “blocking” school reopenings. However, even a quick look reveals that these charges frequently have come from forces who have long sought to undermine public schools in the name of “free markets” and “educational choice,” such as the conservative Cato Institute.

But hearing what the stakeholders actually have to say gives a more layered and more balanced picture. The dominant impression one gets is that school workers and parents (that is, those whose children attend the schools) are well aware of their common concerns, and that these concerns stem from conditions that long predated the current crisis. Granted that this issue is not simple and that it’s more than a rehash of old questions, but it sure looks like the matter of when and how to reopen schools safely is heavily influenced by the challenges that have long roiled public education. And the strongest parent voices, such as “Open Schools California,” have been those calling for specific measures that will make it possible to open schools safely.

Are there disagreements? There are, some strongly felt, but not primarily between parents and school workers. Instead, it could be argued that the

differences of opinion are more often between, on the one hand, school administrations and academic sources, who may indeed have sound research to back them up, calling for quick reopening and, on the other hand, teachers and parent organizations who are all too often faced with opening school buildings where the agreed-upon safety conditions have not been met. For instance, the Philadelphia Parents United for Public Education says on their website that they are “disturbed with the

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[school] district’s insistence that the delay” in opening schools is due to the “mediation” with the “Philadelphia Federation of Teachers.”

One can find powerful testimonials from school workers who have been pressured to return to schools before safety conditions are in place. For

**Reopening the schools is not as easy as the conservatives would have us believe.**

example, in Philadelphia scheduled reopenings were postponed twice while the teachers union insisted that an agreed-upon 3rd party arbitrator be given time to complete the necessary investigation. To cite one example, the union's checklist calls for the school district to provide each staff member with adequate face coverings rather than one mask for the year, as the administration initially offered. Schools there are now opened for a limited time.

And all this comes on top of the challenges faced by most parents everywhere during the pandemic. Having to care for children when schools are closed has forced many "frontline" parents to choose between leaving the kids with an older sibling — sometimes not much older — and quitting the job to stay home. And for teachers, having to teach remotely has proven to be an even greater challenge than providing in-person classroom instruction. So when teachers are reluctant to return to school buildings, it's not as if they are at home doing nothing. "We are still doing our jobs with our whole

hearts," said one Philadelphia teacher who faced preparing to teach in a room that had not been cleaned or supplied with the proper number of chairs or desks when she returned.

So what are the take-aways for educators from the pandemic? Maybe we can boil them down:

1. Make sure public schools everywhere in the U.S. get the resources and the personnel they need so they can actually make real the recommendations of education researchers.
2. Consider what the priority needs of school districts are. Some districts will continue to face more challenges than others. True, some choices may have to be made: more school police or more school medical personnel and more comprehensive programs?
3. Listen to school employees and parents and help them work together.

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## **Brazilian State of Maranhão obtains 4.5 million doses of Sputnik V vaccine**

**By Special to People's World**

**T**he Governor of the Brazilian State of Maranhão, Flávio Dino, a member of the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB), signed a contract on March 17 with the Sovereign Russian Fund authorizing the acquisition of 4.582 million doses of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine to combat the coronavirus. This vaccine, produced by the Gamaleya laboratory, has a 91.6% rate of efficacy, according to data published in international scientific reviews.

"The Sputnik vaccine is being used in more than 40 countries. It is certified and authorized by several health agencies around the world. For that reason, we consider it as one more pathway toward enabling us to fulfill our fundamental duty to protect life, public health, the economy, and business. Besides prevention, and besides hospital care, we have this additional guarantee with the help of vaccination," said Gov. Flávio Dino.

Negotiation for the purchase of doses began last year through the Northeast Consortium, but contracts are signed directly on the state level. In all, there will be 37 million doses acquired by the states and fulfilling the National Immunization Plan (PNI) for the vaccine, under the general co-

ordination of the Ministry of Health.

In case the Ministry of Health is not interested in acquiring these doses purchased by the states, the first lot of Sputnik V should arrive in Maranhão in April, all ready to be administered. The schedule of delivery will go through July, with the capacity of vaccinating more than 2.2 million residents of the state.

Payment will go according to the shipment of doses to Maranhão. For shipment of the vaccines, 25% of the value of the lot will be paid. The other 75% will be paid after delivery. By the end of the contract, the government of Maranhão will have invested R\$ 253 million (US\$45,423,500) of its own resources for vaccination.

"We are prepared to do this because we have an honest, transparent administration ready to take on this burden ourselves. We expect delivery to start in stages beginning in April so that we can offer one more piece of hope to the people of Maranhão in confronting and conquering the coronavirus," concluded Gov. Flávio Dino.

**The Sputnik vaccine is being used in more than 40 countries. It is certified and authorized by several health agencies around the world.**

# Chicago activists back a new ordinance for serious police reform



By Earchiel Johnson

**W**ith the high-profile police murders of Laquan McDonald and Rekia Boyd in their past, the citizens of Chicago may be getting closer to establishing an elected police accountability council.

The Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression and the Grassroots Alliance for Police Accountability have united around a compromise ordinance they want the city council to approve. Passage of the ordinance would result in the establishment of the thus-far elusive goal of an elected police accountability council.

The groups have sent out a statement outlining their support for the new city ordinance. The statement says that “the law gives residents a decisive role in shaping public safety in their neighborhoods and across the city and creates the most democratic police oversight system anywhere in the country.”

The organizations are combining forces in hopes to have enough votes in the city council for what they see as a major step in the direction of reform of policing in a city in which there have been deep divisions between law enforcement and the communities it is supposed to serve.

Thousands of Chicagoans have marched in protests, gone door to door, and gathered over 100,000 signatures in support of police reform. After years of committed grassroots organizing and meeting with elected officials, both organizations hope their efforts will result in the historic establishment of an

all-elected civilian police accountability council.

The March press conference they called brought together representatives from a long and diverse list of community organizations, all committed to community control of the police. Among them were representatives from SEIU Local 73, SEIU Healthcare Illinois/Indiana, the Illinois Nurses Association, United Working Families, the Chicago Teachers Union, Chicago Black Lives Matter, Chicago Women Take Action, One Northside, the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs, the Inner-city Muslim Action Network, and Good Kids Mad City – Chicago.

Sophia King, the alderman from the city’s 4th ward and chair of the city council’s progressive caucus called the ordinance a “people’s bill.”

Alderman Roderick Sawyer of the 6th Ward said, “We originally had divergent paths but thanks to Mayor Lightfoot for pulling us together by delaying what we thought was a vote for transformative change. Now we have a true people’s ordinance, a unity ordinance that we feel is the most transformative police oversight bill in the United States.”

The mayor originally did not sign onto a specific plan for police reform but is now backing the idea of an elected community board for police oversight.

Alderman Carlos Ramirez-Rosa of the 35th Ward said, “Simply put, policing in Chicago is broken. It has been for a very long time.” The groups have called upon Chris Taliaferro, the chair of the council’s Committee on Public Safety to bring the law to a vote in the full city council.

**Coalition cites growing support for an elected police practices oversight board in the city.**

## LOCAL NEWS

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### Words 'climate' and 'science' return to EPA website after four dark years under Trump

By Andrea Germanos

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on Thursday brought back its climate change website — a resource the former Trump administration had yanked.

Climate facts are back on EPA's website where they should be," newly confirmed EPA Administrator Michael Regan said in a statement Thursday.

"Considering the urgency of this crisis, it's critical that Americans have access to information and resources so that we can all play a role in protecting our environment, our health, and vulnerable communities," Regan continued. "Trustworthy, science-based information is at the foundation of strong, achievable solutions."

New information on climate science and the crisis' impacts will soon be added to the website, the statement added.

In April of 2017 the Trump administration, with Scott Pruitt at the helm of the EPA, rendered the agency's climate change site useless, with readers being redirected to a page that said, "It is being updated."

The relaunching of the site was welcomed by the Union of Concerned Scientists, who said it was "back and better than ever!"

Donna Chavis, senior fossil fuel campaigner for Friends of the Earth and an elder of the Lumbee Nation, said at the time that "Regan and the EPA have a new opportunity to place environmental justice at the center of the agency and the United States' approach to the climate crisis."

Chavis also urged Regan to "take bold and visionary steps to rebuild the EPA and address the very real climate crisis we face in the U.S and globally. It is time we all do better."

## Ley de ayuda por COVID evita miles de despidos en Hawái

BY AFSCME EN ESPAÑOL

Hacia finales de 2020, oficiales estatales de Hawái enfrentaban un déficit presupuestario de más de \$2 mil millones en gran parte por la pandemia del coronavirus. El Gobernador David Ige dijo que se podría ver obligado a despedir o descansar a miles de empleados estatales, muchos de ellos miembros de AFSCME, a partir de julio.

Pero estas medidas drásticas ya no serán necesarias.

La razón es que el Congreso ha aprobado, y el Presidente Joe Biden ha firmado, el Plan de Rescate Estadounidense (American Rescue Plan o ARP) de \$1,9 billones, que contiene casi \$700 mil millones para apoyar los servicios públicos en nuestro país, incluyendo \$350 mil millones en ayuda flexible a estados, ciudades, localidades y escuelas.

Esto es una muy buena noticia para los 40 mil empleados estatales y de condados que son parte de la Asociación de Empleados del Gobierno de Hawái/Local 152 de AFSCME, y para los 13 mil empleados que forman parte de Trabajadores Públicos Unidos de Hawái/AFSCME.

A través de nuestra campaña para financiar el frente, miembros de AFSCME en todo el país lucharon por lograr que el Plan de Rescate Estadounidense se volviera realidad. Como bien lo dijo el Presidente de AFSCME, Lee Saunders, su activismo resalta la diferencia que puede lograr una unión.

Si no fuera por los miembros de AFSCME uniendo sus fuerzas y levantando sus voces para apoyar la ayuda financiera a estados, ciudades, localidades y escuelas, comunidades en todo el país hubieran experimentado recortes graves de servicios públicos vitales. Y cientos de miles de miembros de AFSCME que trabajan para gobiernos estatales y locales podrían haberse encontrado desempleados.

Miembros de AFSCME realizaron casi 80 mil llamadas y enviaron 50 mil cartas al Congreso para pedir ayuda estatal y local. Trabajaron de la mano con cientos de gobernadores y otros representantes electos y colaboraron con socios en los mundos de negocios y organizaciones sin fines de lucro. Además, compartieron sus historias personales con los medios para resaltar sus sacrificios en el frente de la guerra contra el coronavirus.

En breve, los miembros de AFSCME ayudaron a hacer posible este histórico paquete de ayuda

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