

# BAMN statement in support of the **NATIONAL STUDENT WALKOUTS** to defeat COVID-19 and shut down schools in favor of remote learning

## PUBLIC TRIBUNAL

Sat, Jan 22, 2022, 1PM EST / 10AM PST

Join the tribunal on Zoom. Visit [bamn.com](http://bamn.com) for details.

### CALL TO ACTION FOR STUDENTS:

\* Walkout! Strike! Sick out! Stay home! \* Take action to protect yourself, your friends, teachers, and communities! \* Shut down schools, return to online learning to defeat Covid-19! \* Support and help spread upcoming student walkouts/strikes in Oakland, Seattle, St. Paul, and other cities. \*

**Schools open + COVID-19 = DEAD CHILDREN**

High school student walkouts, sick outs, and strikes have started nationwide, and plans for many more are on their way for the upcoming days—our national movement fights independently again! BAMN supports the student actions planned for the upcoming week and invites every family, teacher, school worker, and all in our communities to support the students who are taking the necessary and courageous action to walk out, strike, stay out.

At a moment of arguably the worst time of the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing failures of this country's political leadership, students in Oakland, Chicago, Boston, New York, Seattle, Los Angeles, and other cities lead the way in action, with chants like "No teachers, no plan! We got to take a stand!" and "hey hey, ho ho, Lori Lightfoot's got to go!" This last chant, by Chicago students, shows most clearly the seriousness and importance of the leader-

ship of high school students to defeat the Covid-19 pandemic. Lori Lightfoot is the mayor of Chicago, the third largest public school district in the country. Lightfoot, a Democrat, has been one of the most prominent fanatic political leaders enforcing the policy to keep public schools open, no matter the high death toll and devastation of Covid-19 in our communities. Black, Latino/a and working-class communities are being especially ravaged with the latest surge of the Omicron variant. Chicago students have shown the way to fight, and if they keep up the walkouts, they can win online learning and also succeed in getting rid of the hated mayor. But that means we cannot stop now until we've defeated the Covid-19 pandemic and anyone who stands in our way, endangering the lives of our communities. Shutting down schools in favor of remote learning is the first step to defeating this pandemic.

BAMN is proud to have been fighting for mandatory Covid-19 testing, mandatory vaccinations, and most importantly, for quality, safe, remote learning since the beginning of the pandemic. We have taken the Detroit school district to court to demand mandatory PCR testing, we led pickets to block school buses to force the district to stop endangering students' lives and provide remote learning. As we started the 2022 year, Detroit was one of the few urban districts in the nation to start the year with remote learning. In other cities like Los Angeles, Flint, Oakland, San Francisco, Berkeley, we've held car caravans and held Zoom press conferences, fighting for all these demands. All along, we have understood that the same militancy and determination of the George Floyd Movement at a national level, independent from politicians, and prioritizing lives over corporate profits is the only way to defeat this pandemic. And we are re-energized by the recent student and teacher led actions, and excited to build our movement by any means necessary.

Our communities deserve to hear the truth and desperately need a leadership that is genuinely fighting for their well-being. A national independent movement led by students from K-12 to college, teachers, and community members acting through walkouts, strikes, sick outs and staying at home is the only way to defeat this pandemic once and for all. The actions of the teachers that went on strike in Chicago and the thousands more that have refused to go to in-person learning, together with the students that have walked out and are today planning their student strikes or choosing to stay home, with or without the support of their parents, have already saved thousands, if not millions of lives. Today, on Martin Luther King Jr.'s holiday, as we prepare for our next steps, we should be proud to stand on his legacy and remind our movement that actions speak louder than words.

## **Covid-19 + in-person school reopenings = DEAD CHILDREN**

Child hospitalizations have skyrocketed to their highest point since the pandemic began, while the political leaders of both parties are echoing the sickening policy of Donald Trump towards the nation's children: "We want them infected!"

The science is unambiguously clear: the choice between in-person and remote learning makes an enormous difference in the number of cases and deaths from COVID-19. In one study published by the Journal of the American Medical Association, "Association between statewide school closure and COVID-19 incidence and mortality in the US," researchers found that school closures were associated with a 62% reduction in case numbers and a 58% reduction in deaths. More studies from many other countries have reinforced what everyone already knew: in-person schooling is very efficient at spreading disease.

As teachers are getting infected and calling out sick, and school districts are unable to find staff, including substitute teachers, districts have gone as far as recruiting parents or anyone willing to stand as a "substitute" in a classroom to keep schools open. School districts are recruiting anyone to be a babysitter to keep schools open, so parents can be forced to go to work and keep the profits rolling in for those who have gotten ridiculously rich from this pandemic. Students refuse to risk their health or get their families sick for the blood money of billionaires.

The rapid home testing plan being pushed by the federal government is a complete farce. As it is, Covid-19 rapid tests, developed at the beginning of the pandemic, have not kept up with the evolution of new Covid-19 variants. They have a high rate of false negatives, setting up students to pass the virus along while thinking they are safe and clear. But more than that, the plan has been completely inadequate. There is little oversight, lack of accessibility, no way to truly confirm results by school districts, and the chance to contract the virus at school is dangerously high, regardless of testing.

Schools are being left to enforce their own safety protocols, and serious contact tracing is virtually non-existent, or simply cannot keep up with the high levels of infection. The information to parents and students is confusing, delayed or never given, and is constantly changing arbitrarily to keep students in schools. Most schools are not providing adequate masks for students and cannot enforce masking at school all day. Not to mention that there is no real way for students and staff to

safely distance inside school buildings. Vaccines are still being developed for younger children and have not been made mandatory for all students and staff. This is not in any way a safe learning environment. This is a complete disregard for life in favor of profits and a clear recipe for ongoing unnecessary death and suffering of our communities.

### **If students lead, our communities will follow**

BAMN stands in full support of teachers and teachers unions that have gone on strike, like the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), and we hope that more union locals will take actions of their own in the immediate future. However, we also understand that at the national and local level of some of the most prominent union, rank and file members continue to be betrayed by their bureaucratic leaderships who are just as committed to being the loyal servants of the Democratic party leadership and corporations. The CTU, after a 3-day strike, brought a vote on a tentative agreement, under great political pressure by Mayor Lightfoot and the media. The agreement was nothing but a slap in the face for all the teachers, students, and communities of Chicago.

The tentative agreement was narrowly approved by the membership, and teachers returned to in-person classes. The tentative agreement did not meet most of the basic demands for consistent and adequate testing, did not provide a permanent option of remote learning for teachers and students, did not call for mandatory vaccinations, mandatory testing, and or mandatory masking. Under the agreement, a school can only close for remote learning until either 30 % of teachers cannot attend school or more than 40 % students are absent because of isolation/quarantine!

The Chicago students, backed up by their teachers who only returned to schools with gritted teeth, are right to reject such ridiculous conditions in the schools. Their walkouts rang with the chants "...we got to take a stand" and "...Lori Lightfoot has got to go." There is no national plan to stop the Covid-19 pandemic. Political figures are trying to force us to accept the ongoing death and lasting damage of survivors of infection as the "new normal."

We do not have to accept a new way of life that unnecessarily puts our lives and the lives of our loved ones at stake, forcing us to accept unnecessary deaths simply because rich people want to get richer. Most of our communities understand the great wrong being inflicted on us, and given the chance, will follow the leadership to fight for our equality. The more

independent student struggles develop, either by walkouts or simply staying home, the more there will be brave teachers inspired by their students who will be prepared to act independently of their sellout misleaders who try to hold them back. The more parents will be prepared to keep their children at home and demand safe quality remote learning and pandemic financial assistance. *We deserve better, but like the Chicago students, we must fight for it, and we must fight independently.*

We invite all students, teachers, parents, and community to become leaders of the national movement by joining BAMN. Attend our next meeting, Zoom public tribunal, car caravan, or other actions. Contact us to organize a student BAMN chapter in your school or an EON/BAMN teachers' caucus. Help us plan our future actions and build our national movement.

2022.01.17

Shut down in-person schools immediately; provide remote learning resources for all

Mandatory vaccination for all students and school employees

Mandatory mask use, with districts providing high quality N95, KN95, or KF94 respirators for all

Mandatory PCR testing and contact tracing

Expand paid leave and economic assistance for parents and families, to support their children's ability to learn remotely

End the racist, second-class treatment of minority and immigrant communities—full resources and rights to health care regardless of documentation or status