

U.S. students walkout of classes, demand safer COVID protocols

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Public school students protest outside of the Chicago Public Schools headquarters after walking out of their classrooms on Jan. 14 in Chicago. (File photo)

Chicago, January 16 (RHC)-- Students throughout the United States have walked out of classes to protest inadequate anti-COVID-19 health measures, demanding a return to remote learning amid the persisting surges of the Omicron variant across the nation.

The walkouts came two days after 340,000 students in the major mid-western city of Chicago returned to the classroom following a five-day work stoppage due to demands by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) for tougher COVID-19 restrictions.

A student group in the city, known as Chicago Public School's radical Youth Alliance, organized a walkout at various city schools on Friday afternoon, followed by a rally outside the district's headquarters.

Protesting students in Chicago -- home to America's third largest public school district -- declared that they were "dissatisfied with the additional health protocols" that the CTU and city Mayor Lori Lightfoot agreed to.

Also in the major northeastern city of Boston, nearly 600 students from 11 schools walked out of classes on Friday, according to local press reports. The Boston Student Advisory Council, which called for the walkout, further posted a series of demands on Twitter, including two weeks of remote learning and improved Covid-19 testing for teachers and students.

An online petition started by a Boston high school senior saying schools are a "Covid-19 breeding ground" and demanding a remote option had gathered more than 8,000 signatures as of Friday morning.

The latest wave of infections has renewed the debate over whether to keep schools open, as officials seek to balance fears about the highly contagious Omicron variant with concerns that students could fall even further behind after two years of stop-and-start instruction.

Days earlier, students in New York City -- holding the largest school district in the U.S. -- and the state of Michigan also walked out of classes to protest deficient COVID-19 safety protocols and demanded remote learning across their respective school districts.

Students at several New York City schools staged the walkout to protest what they described as inadequate safety measures. Mayor Eric Adams had announced on Thursday that his administration was considering a temporary remote learning option for the significant number of students who are staying home.

Moreover, students in Oakland, California announced last week that they were prepared to go on strike if the school district did not start to provide KN95 face masks, increased COVID-19 testing and other precautionary measures.

Nearly 5,000 public schools across the US have closed for at least one day last week due to the pandemic, according to Burbio, a website that tracks school disruptions.

The development comes amid press reports that insist Omicron surge appears to be slowing in areas of the country that were hit first.

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