With over 26,000 COVID-19 cases at more than 750 US colleges, campus opposition erupts

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A catastrophe is unfolding at colleges and universities across the US as millions of students, teachers, and staff are being forced to return to campuses for in-person learning amid the raging COVID-19 pandemic. According to real-time information gathered by the *New York Times* at least 26,000 COVID-19 cases have been reported at over 750 campuses, with at least 64 deaths since they began reopening for the fall semester.

As many experts had warned, the reckless reopening of colleges and universities has led to a spike in cases on campuses and in college towns. The majority of these new cases have occurred within the past month alone.

The University of Alabama at Birmingham, which has a student population of 22,000, has the most cases recorded of any college campus, with 972 cases recorded, amounting to roughly four percent of the student population. Before opening, the university had claimed that an expansion of "in-house" university-owned testing, combined with rudimentary tracking and mask wearing would prevent an outbreak. The outcome of the Alabama "experiment" has proven to be a complete disaster for the university and for the state as a whole, which is now one of the leading coronavirus hot spots.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which reopened on August 14, held in-person classes for a week before being forced to go online. It currently has the second most cases, with 835 recorded. UNCCH reopened residence halls at full capacity, which the CDC warned was the "highest risk" model for dorm reopening. This is following outbreaks during summer sports practices, where 37 players and staff tested positive for the virus.

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign has seen 448 new cases.

The University of Arkansas now has 151 new confirmed cases, following the reopening of in-person classes on August 24. In late July, the university announced that a mere 28 percent of classes would be held online, with the vast majority being in-person.

Adrian College, a small private liberal arts college south of Detroit, reported Monday that a staggering 6.5 percent of its 2,235 students and staff have tested positive for the virus after reopening on August 24 with face-to-face classes.

Despite major outbreaks, many of these schools are still resisting pressure from students, parents, and workers to switch to online learning.

Iowa State University in Ames, according to the NYT data, has the highest transmission rate in the country, with a 28 percent positive test rate. Despite this staggering fact, the university president sent an email to staff and students, on the heels of the NYT report, reassuring everyone that the disease is "under control," adding that the "appearance" of spread is just due to a large portion of those tested being positive. This explanation ignores completely the simple fact that there are now 500 more cases at the university than there were a week ago. The president also stated that there is no plan to close the university or move to entirely online classes.

Kent State is following a similar model. The university announced Monday that all university-sponsored events, meetings, and gatherings of more than 10 people on campus would now be required to be held virtually. This announcement comes after 12 new coronavirus cases were reported for the week beginning

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August 24. However, the university says this development will not affect in-person classes, which will continue as planned.

As startling as these statistics are, in all likelihood the reported figures on campus outbreaks represent a fraction of the actual number of cases. Many universities are not required to publicly report their confirmed cases. Furthermore, the majority of schools do not possess the capacity to adequately test students, staff, and faculty on a regular basis.

In addition to the deliberate efforts by the White House to tamper with numbers by decreasing testing, there have also been efforts on the state level to conceal confirmed COVID-19 cases on college campuses.

Bridge, a Michigan nonprofit, nonpartisan news site, reported Tuesday that Michigan is concealing information related to new infections. In mid-August, the state acknowledged that only 14 COVID-19 outbreaks had occurred or were ongoing at schools and universities. Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer has refused calls to release details, such as the names of schools where the coronavirus has spread. The only details released were on the "region," which fails to name schools. She has also deliberately concealed information on outbreaks in longterm care facilities, only releasing the names of facilities after immense pressure following hundreds of nursing home deaths.

Resistance to these reckless policies is growing by the day among students, faculty, and workers. Students at the University of Alabama at Birmingham staged a mass "die-in" protest against the reopening before the beginning of classes. Students at the University of Georgia, University of Arizona, and other campuses have held similar protests. There are countless student petitions circulating with tens of thousands of signatures on the internet against in-person teaching. And there have been numerous petitions, such as at Texas A&M University, where faculty and staff have signed open letters protesting the administration's handling of the pandemic.

Last month, the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee was formed as a national network to unify the struggles of teachers, school employees, parents, and students independently of the unions and to prepare for a national strike to halt the unsafe opening of schools. A local rank-and-file committee has been established in Duval County, Florida, and more are being set up in a growing number of states and districts across the country. The Socialist Equality Party and its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, urge students, faculty, parents, and others to join this committee and take up the fight to stop the reckless drive to reopen schools.

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