

State and federal governments conceal COVID-19 outbreaks in US schools

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11 October 2020

Across the United States, the locations of COVID-19 outbreaks in schools are being deliberately hidden from the public, in order to prevent teachers and parents from drawing the conclusion that face-to-face instruction should stop. At the federal level, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Department of Education have no programs in place whatsoever to track coronavirus cases in schools or colleges.

The list of states not reporting outbreaks in schools includes California, Nevada, Idaho, Alaska, Wisconsin, North Dakota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Alabama, West Virginia, Florida, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Delaware. The rest of the states are split between having either limited data or district-level data, which often does not disclose the specific schools where an outbreak occurs.

Significantly, the locations of reported cases are known by state governments, and it is well within the capabilities of the state and federal government to report case locations. They are deliberately concealing this information as part of the broader back-to-work campaign to force parents to work in unsafe conditions, all to produce profits for the financial oligarchy.

The COVID Monitor website, which independently tracks coronavirus cases in school, has reported 42,778 cases in K-12 schools as of this writing, with most cases occurring after schools reopened en masse in late July. This figure is certainly an under-count, but nevertheless illustrates the criminality of school reopenings.

It is worth examining some of the specific efforts by the state governments to cover up the locations of outbreaks in schools.

In **Illinois**, the state government knows of at least 44 outbreaks at school buildings around the state and has deliberately withheld the location of these outbreaks from the public. The state's Democratic Governor J.B. Pritzker

has endorsed school reopenings, stating, "I'm very much in favor of trying to get our kids back into in-person learning." Classes started in-person during mid-August for most schools in the state, with an uptick in cases corresponding with this development.

As of October 2, at least 8,668 children ages 5-17 have tested positive for the virus across Illinois, with five children dying in the same age range. More than 1,800 public schools are open for in-person instruction, with roughly a quarter of students and staff attending only in-person and almost three-quarters attending at least partially in-person.

In Highland Community Unit School District 5 in Madison County, near St. Louis, which only announces cases by email to parents, there has been an outbreak with 25 cases confirmed after the district reopened with in-person classes. After having trended downwards, the county has seen a spike in cases since October 7, roughly corresponding to the start of in-person classes.

In New Trier Township School District 203 in Cook County, Illinois, which started on October 5 and announces cases every two weeks on its dashboard, at least 60 students and 13 school workers are now in quarantine. Cook county has also seen an increase in the seven-day average following school re-openings, although the full impact will probably be delayed due to the slow turnaround in testing. The county has recorded one of the highest confirmed cases and deaths in the US, with 63,990 cases and 1,967 deaths.

In **New Jersey**, teachers have collected data showing that 130 schools in the state have reported coronavirus cases. There is no significant effort by the government to track case counts in schools, with the recently launched state government website only showing 11 outbreaks in schools.

In Passaic Valley High School, there was an outbreak on September 18 reported by teachers that forced over

100 students into quarantine and ultimately caused the district to be shut down. The county has seen 19,702 cases and 1,255 deaths, with cases increasing following school reopenings that began on October 5. Democratic governor and multi-millionaire Phil Murphy has cited privacy laws as the reason for covering up outbreak locations.

In **Texas**, a report issued by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and Department of State Health omitted the locations of around 2,700 cases from schools with less than 50 students in the first week of school reopenings. The reason given by the TEA for the omissions was that by releasing case locations they would violate the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Texas had the highest number of new cases in the US yesterday, with another 3,324 people becoming infected. The state government is going to wait a full four weeks after publishing the first report to reevaluate districts' enrollment for in-person learning. The state and school districts lack any testing or contact tracing requirements, leaving it up to parents and teachers to self report cases.

In **Iowa**, which is currently a "red zone" as documented in a White House Coronavirus Task Force report, an effort by a concerned couple has revealed over 400 cases in schools across the state. Iowa officials have cited HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) to hide data in the pandemic.

Health officials in **Georgia** have recently dropped plans to report the number of coronavirus cases in schools from weekly reports gathered from schools, while only 70 percent were reporting case numbers in the state. As with other states, officials have speciously justified their refusal to report cases in schools with the claim that the public has no legal right to information on outbreaks.

In **Michigan**, the Department of Health and Human Services recently issued an emergency order to disclose COVID-19 cases at schools after the Michigan Supreme Court struck down an executive order by Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer to shut down schools and some businesses. This is following earlier efforts by Whitmer to hide the location of coronavirus cases in schools and workplaces.

On top of the deliberate efforts to obscure the location of outbreaks, all states lack a meaningful testing regimen for students and teachers, crippling any response to the virus.

The invocation of privacy laws as a pretext to withhold the location of cases in schools is based on a falsification of these laws. The US Department of Education states on their website, "FERPA's health or safety emergency

provision permits such disclosures when the disclosure is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals."

In addition to most of the aforementioned states, Indiana and Tennessee have cited the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act as a reason to obscure case locations, which is also false. HIPAA, just like FERPA, has an exemption which allows the release of information in the interest of public health and safety.

The Health and Human Services administration released a statement in light of the pandemic stating that "HIPAA Privacy Rule permits a covered entity to disclose the protected health information (PHI) of an individual who has been infected with, or exposed to, COVID-19" in certain circumstances, including in order to "notify a public health authority in order to prevent or control spread of disease."

Suffice to say, none of the health or school privacy laws prohibit the release of information that could be used to save the lives of students, teachers, and parents, and every citation of these laws by various state agencies and governors is fraudulent.

The deliberate cover-up of school outbreaks goes hand in hand with their reopening of schools. Obscuring the link between coronavirus cases and their cause is a key part of the reopening campaign being pursued by the two parties of the financial oligarchy. This raises the objective necessity of building independent, rank-and-file safety committees in order to accurately report COVID-19 outbreaks in school to ensure the safety of the vast majority of the population.



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