

Michigan K-12 schools see another huge increase in COVID-19 outbreaks

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COVID-19 continues to rip through Michigan's K-12 schools. New data shows that last week there were a record 44 new outbreaks in schools across the state, an increase of more than 50 percent over the previous week. This brings the number of ongoing outbreaks in Michigan schools to 126, with a total of 606 COVID-19 cases among students, teachers and staff.

As these latest figures show, the spread of COVID-19 through Michigan schools is not only continuing but accelerating, with an increasing number of new outbreaks each week for the past month in virtually every part of the state.

Grand Rapids and its surrounding suburbs, which comprise Michigan's second largest metropolitan area, with a population over one million, are the state's current hotspot for COVID-19 outbreaks in K-12 schools. Twelve different schools across Kent County now have ongoing outbreaks, with a staggering 138 teachers, students and staff infected so far.

The state's largest ongoing school-related outbreak is connected to Rockford High School, located north of Grand Rapids. The outbreak was detected in the first days of October, with four cases initially reported on October 5. By October 12, the number of cases had increased to 10, prompting the closure of the high school and a switch to virtual learning. Despite this, the outbreak has continued to spread further each week, and as of November 2 there are 29 Rockford High students, teachers and staff who have tested positive.

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The **Detroit metro area** (Wayne, Macomb and Oakland counties, with a combined population of over 3 million) has 22 ongoing outbreaks totaling 84 cases in schools spread out across the cities of Detroit, Canton, Wyandotte, Romulus, Troy, Oxford, Clarkston, Ortonville, Rochester Hills, Warren, Clinton Township,

St. Clair Shores, Chesterfield, Macomb, Mount Clemens, Ira and Romeo.

Genesee County, whose largest city is Flint, has 10 ongoing outbreaks with 35 cases in schools across Flint, Burton, Swartz Creek, Grand Blanc, Lindon, Davison and Fenton.

Rural Michigan schools also continue to see increasing numbers of cases and outbreaks. The state's largest new outbreak infected 11 people at Benzie Central High School in the village of **Benzonia**. Located in the northern Lower Peninsula near the Sleeping Bear Dunes, Benzonia has a total population of about 500.

Michigan's rural **Upper Peninsula** has 11 ongoing outbreaks with 69 total cases, including four new outbreaks last week in Marquette County. All of the UP, as well as all of northern Michigan, has now fully reopened for face-to-face learning, according to Burbio's K-12 School Opening Tracker.

There were also new outbreaks last week in four different schools in the city of **Lapeer**, which is located north of Detroit and east of Flint in Michigan's rural "Thumb" region. With a population of 8,600, Lapeer now has ongoing outbreaks in six of its schools.

Parents and other community members are not included in Michigan's official tallies of school-related outbreaks, but it is clear that schools are a major vector for the spread of COVID-19 throughout the general population. Yesterday, Michigan's Department of Health and Human Services reported 4,101 new cases statewide—Michigan's highest daily figure since the pandemic began—as well as 17 deaths. This brings the state's total number of confirmed cases to 192,096, and deaths to 7,419.

The pandemic is spreading through schools not only in Michigan but throughout the country. Last week,

61,000 children across the US were diagnosed with COVID-19, the highest number since the onset of the pandemic. The tragic death of a thirteen-year-old eighth grader in Missouri from the disease showed once again that children can not only spread the deadly disease but can also succumb to it.

Some 60 percent of K-12 public school students across the US are now attending schools that conduct in-person learning either all or part of the time, up from 38 percent after Labor Day, according to Burbio.com. Less than 40 percent of US students now attend schools that provide only virtual learning.

Detroit Public Schools Community District, the largest district in the state of Michigan, with over 50,000 students at 100 schools, is among the growing number of districts across the US to introduce a “hybrid model,” which combines the danger of in-person learning with the difficulty of poorly-implemented virtual learning, in an effort to move toward a full reopening as quickly as possible.

The reopening of schools in major Democratic Party-controlled cities like Detroit, Houston and New York City is an essential component of the bipartisan policy of “herd immunity” that has been officially adopted by the Trump administration. According to this homicidal policy, all workers, including the millions of working-class parents and guardians of school-aged children, are to be forced back to work as quickly as possible to churn out profits for the rich, causing hundreds of thousands to get sick and die and millions more to suffer horribly.

The implementation of “herd immunity” in Michigan schools is being overseen by Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer. Her reckless “Return to School Roadmap” was issued in July as a supposed blueprint for the complete return to in-person learning in 2021, but even the inadequate guidelines contained therein are now being completely ignored. The document recommends that schools do not open unless there are “continued case and death rate improvements, and outbreaks can be quickly contained,” which is clearly not the case at present.

While there exists massive opposition among teachers, parents, students and workers everywhere, the trade unions are conspiring in the reopening of schools by ignoring and downplaying the danger while fighting to tie workers to the Democratic Party.

The most recent “weekly update” on the American Federation of Teachers of Michigan (AFT-Michigan) website, posted over two weeks ago on October 20, is entirely dedicated to a recap of a bus tour to get out the vote for Joe Biden and the Democrats, featuring AFT president and Democratic National Committee member Randi Weingarten. It does not even mention the reopening of schools or the deepening spread of COVID-19.

In September, the AFT-Michigan played a central role in selling out the nine-day strike by 1,200 graduate student workers at the University of Michigan. After the student workers courageously went on strike against unsafe teaching conditions and rejected an offer from the university that addressed none of their concerns, AFT-Michigan president David Hecker was brought in to take over negotiations. He promptly orchestrated the passage of an essentially identical offer, sending the students back to work under the threat of state injunction.

The Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee was founded to unite the widespread opposition to school reopenings that exists not only in Michigan, but across the US and internationally. We are fighting to unite educators, parents and students with the broader working class in order to halt in-person instruction, stop the spread of COVID-19, provide the resources for high-quality virtual learning for all students, and prepare for a general strike to defend all the social rights of the working class. Teachers, parents, students, and all workers who oppose the deadly reopening of schools and workplaces should join the committee now at wsws.org/edsafety.



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