Two Texas teachers die of COVID-19 in the same school district

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Two social studies teachers at Connally Junior High School near Waco, Texas, David McCormick, 59, and Natalia Chansler, 41, died just days apart from COVID-19. Both teachers fell sick after the school had reopened for in-person classes. The double tragedy is only one indication of the horrific conditions facing teachers, students and parents as US schools reopen for face-to-face classes.

The small school district is on the northern edge of Waco, a city of 125,000 people located about 100 miles south of the Dallas-Ft. Worth metropolitan area. It has one high school, one junior high, and three elementary schools. The two deaths have had a devastating effect on the surviving 180 teachers and 2,400 students, and on the wider community.

David McCormick was on campus for face-to-face teaching only for the first day of school, August 18, and fell sick quickly, passing away six days later. Chansler taught for the first few days, fell sick, and died last week. The Connally Independent School District has cancelled in-person classes, but only until September 7, as well as all sports and other school-related activities. On-line classes are continuing.

The district said it would provide COVID-19 rapid testing for all junior high staff on Sunday, and would offer testing to students and parents as well, scheduling a September 13 vaccination clinic—six days after in-person classes resume.

Initially, the district limited the testing to students who may have been in contact with either of the deceased teachers, though the definition of “close contacts” under Connally’s own rules is worlds away from the actual science. For example, according to the Connally ISD Back to School Guidelines 2021-22, those who were more than six feet away or more, who “properly” wore masks, or were in contact for less than 15 minutes, are not counted as close contacts. “Ventilation,” “presence of dividers” and “case symptomology” are also considered.

According to the running tally kept by Johns Hopkins University, McLennan County, which includes Waco and the Connally district, has had 34,242 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 533 deaths since the pandemic began, including eleven deaths in just the three-day period, Saturday through Monday. Some 13 percent of the population have contracted COVID-19, and only 39 percent are fully vaccinated.

Hospitals in the area are overwhelmed, with zero ICU beds remaining in the administrative district encompassing roughly 345,000 people, according to the Texas Department of State Health Services.

As of Friday, there were over 400 active cases at schools in the county. Despite the clear threat posed to children, the Texas Education Agency makes quarantining and self-isolating a matter of personal choice, in direct contradiction to science, with parents being allowed to send back exposed children regardless of whether or not they may be infected.

In the county, as elsewhere, children and teens account for a growing number of cases, with nearly a third of the cases on August 27 being among those 19 and younger and roughly a quarter of cases since April being in the same age range. This increase in youth cases has been accompanied by a spike in deaths among the younger population with three infants dying since April 2021 and four people age 20-29 dying in the same time period.

CISD is a small school district which does not post its Covid-19 case numbers, so the exact extent of the infections at the school are unknown, but given the multiple deaths and the closing of the district it can safely be assumed to be endemic in CISD. According to the *Texas Tribune*, almost 81 percent of the school population is economically disadvantaged, 20 percent more than the state average.

The district admitted that children may have trouble handling the news of the deaths, and offered its “condolences” to the deceased teachers’ families. This underscores the fraud of the claims made by the political establishment of that a major concern in reopening schools is the mental welfare of the students. They are more than willing to introduce death into children's lives—the deaths of teachers, classmates and parents—so that their parents can go to work producing profit for big business.

McLennan County is only a microcosm for what is taking place in large cities, small cities and rural areas across the

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United States.

Nationally, there has been an increase in the numbers of teachers and students dying as schools reopened. @LostToCovid has documented 48 school personnel lost to COVID across 21 states, all within the last month with most in the last two weeks. Educators in their 20s, 30s, and 40s are losing their lives across the country, with one as young as 21 years old, under conditions when many schools have not even opened yet. Tawney Webb, 45, a beloved teacher at Hillecrest Elementary in Nederland ISD in Nederland, TX was one of these casualties, dying August 24 .

The situation in Texas as a whole is disastrous, with the state basically out of ICU beds. According to the latest data from the state government, only 359 available ICU beds remain for a state which is home to more than 29 million people. Almost a quarter of the total staffed hospital beds are occupied by patients with Covid-19.

The implication of this disastrous state of affairs is that anyone requiring an ICU bed will not receive it, leading to a massive increase in preventable deaths not just from COVID-19 but any other condition requiring ICU treatment. These include (but are not limited to); trauma (such as workplace accidents, car accidents, etc.) traumatic brain injuries, shock, heart failure, post-operation infections, cancer, sepsis, and aneurysms.

Monday and Tuesday alone accounted for over 30,000 cases in Texas. Worldometer reported 248 deaths on Tuesday alone in Texas, and 257 more on Wednesday. The state health agency reported 20,256 cases among students in Texas K-12 schools in a mere two weeks since August 8, while 7,488 staff cases were reported.

According to a UT Southwestern Medical Center paper first released August 31, North Texas, which includes the Dallas-Fort Worth area, is seeing the fastest growth in hospitalization among the 0-17 age group. The increase roughly corresponds with the reopening of schools in the area starting in August, and is indicative of the process at hand as schools reopen across the US.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott and his Republican counterparts in other states have relentlessly fought any public health measures against the pandemic, whether it be masks, closure of non-essential business, closure of schools, unemployment, or eviction moratoriums. Essentially, the right to spread deadly pathogens with reckless abandon is a government sanctioned “right” in Texas.

Nationwide the school reopening campaign has been led by the Biden administration and the Democratic Party, as well as the teachers unions. Both the American Federation of Teachers and National Educators Association, respectively, are campaigning to convince teachers as well as parents that the reopening is safe. The AFT has sent $5 million to union locals to promote the return to in-person classes. Democratic state governments, as well as Republican ones, have worked incessantly to reopen schools at all costs.

This is under conditions where over 40 million people, or roughly 12 percent of the US population, have been infected with the virus and with a surge in daily deaths to well over 1,000 per day. Over the past month, the number of children hospitalized around the country has surged to nearly 2,200, a 50 percent increase since the start of August.

The Democrats, while advocating certain mitigation measures, are just as dedicated as the Republicans to reopening, as shown by the record of Democratic governors in the states where they control the government. New Mexico eliminated requirements for school shutdowns as the number of schools where outbreaks would have forced a shutdown reached 18. Michigan’s governor has repudiated masking requirements in schools. California has reopened schools and kept them open despite mass outbreaks.

Essentially, the “mitigation” policy of the Democrats—masking, vaccine mandates, and other limited and piecemeal measures—and the Republicans policy of dropping all restrictions, are both based on demanding workers “live with the virus”, which in reality means living with mass death and long-term illness. The differences, in the final analysis, are negligible. Their policy orientation is fundamentally to the financial oligarchy and its insatiable drive for profit, regardless of the cost in lives and health.

The only force that has consistently advocated for the eradication of the disease, besides scientists, has been the Socialist Equality Party, which has held public forums with scientists to educate the public on the danger of the virus and the methods by which it must be eradicated through lockdowns and other public health measures carried out to the maximum, while the world population is vaccinated.

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