

# As COVID-19 infections and deaths mount in Texas schools, districts scramble to fill staff shortages

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As schools experience more cases and deaths from COVID-19, the inadequacy of mitigation measures promoted by the Democrats and unions becomes starker. At the same time, Republicans have redoubled their efforts to block any obstacles to their homicidal “herd immunity” policy. One of the states most ruthlessly pursuing the “herd immunity” strategy is Texas, where a growing number of educators and students have died from COVID-19 amid a wave of mass infections throughout the state.

On September 1, Sheri Wise, a 66-year-old part-time secondary guidance counselor at Trivium Academy, a K-11 charter school in the Dallas, Texas suburb of Carrollton, died from COVID-19 complications. She had “done everything right,” as she said on Facebook on August 23, not only getting fully vaccinated, but getting a third shot. She had always worn a mask at work and avoided close contact, adding on Facebook, “Haven’t hugged my mom in 16 months.”

Nonetheless, she exhibited flu-like symptoms a few days after getting her third vaccination shot and it was found that she had already been infected prior to getting the shot. Noting the possibility that she was infected at work, she wrote, “Is that where I got it, who knows? It proves that you can do all the right things and still succumb.”

Ms. Wise had retired after 20 years as a guidance counselor at Plano High School, and as a theater director at Bay City Independent School District (ISD). She took occasional substitute teacher assignments until asked by a friend to take the position at Trivium.

Three days after her Facebook posting, Trivium Academy announced the closure of its campus when an outbreak of the virus infected 10 percent of the student

body. A week later, after a short time in hospice care, Sheri Wise died.

While the overwhelming majority of deaths from COVID-19 hit unvaccinated people, “breakthrough” cases like Ms. Wise’s, though rare, are not unheard of. As of September 10, there were 7,781 breakthrough infections in Dallas County alone among fully vaccinated individuals, with 47 of them resulting in death.

On September 15, Fort Worth ISD confirmed that two staff members had died of COVID-19 that week alone. Richard Zarza, who died on September 13, was a robotics and engineering teacher at Southwest High School for four years. He was described by the school principal as “an amazing educator” who had a “passion for student success.” The name of the other deceased individual was not revealed.

Fort Worth ISD had more than 700 active cases as of September 10 among its students, with more than 4,500 quarantined, while at least 200 staff are currently infected with COVID-19.

According to *Education Week*, at least 17 educators in Texas have died from COVID-19 since the start of this school year alone, while 129 have died since the start of the pandemic. Tens if not hundreds of thousands of students and staff have been infected with the virus over the past year.

One result of these grim statistics is a spike in absences and resignations of teachers and bus drivers. School districts across the state are frantically seeking substitute teachers to fill in slots left vacant by teachers who fear going to unsafe classrooms or who have fallen victim to the pandemic.

In Copperas Cove ISD, located about 70 miles north

of Austin, pay for substitute teachers has been increased from \$75 a day to \$105 to try to fill vacancies. Those with college degrees will earn \$130 a day if they end up hired for a long-term position, while in some districts standards have been loosened.

In North Texas, Princeton High School raised its hourly pay for bus drivers from \$17.50 to \$22 with a \$1,000 signing bonus and offers to pay for applicants to get their commercial driver's license.

For bus drivers, Copperas Cove ISD has raised its hourly pay of \$14.65 to \$18, with a \$250 incentive each semester for 30 consecutive workdays. These less than impressive enticements are not enough, leaving the district still short, so Copperas Cove has resorted to another tactic: hiring teachers to fill in as bus drivers.

In Garland ISD, there is a shortage of 22 drivers, and mechanics and teachers have been called on to sub for the bus drivers. According to 21CBS DFW, "Garland is offering drivers pay starting at \$21.21 an hour, full-time benefits for the part-time gig and a two thousand dollar bonus. It's going even further, though, to establish its own driving school, so that it can train, test, and certify drivers for their CDL in house."

With COVID-19-related benefits drying up, Texas school districts, and school districts nationwide, are resorting to increasingly desperate gambits to lure workers into unsafe classrooms and buses. At the same time, Texas Governor Greg Abbott and Attorney General Ken Paxton, along with the Republican-controlled legislature, continue to push for full reopenings without any mandated safety measures.

Paxton joined state attorneys general from 23 states in signing a letter warning President Joe Biden that they will legally challenge even insufficient measures like a proposed vaccine requirement for private-sector health care and federal contract workers. The letter hypocritically claims, "Your plan is disastrous and counterproductive," and threatens, "If your Administration does not alter its course, the undersigned state Attorneys General will seek every available legal option to hold you accountable and uphold the rule of law."

As if the Republicans and the sections of the ruling class they represent care at all about workers' health and lives, it goes on to claim, "Your vaccine mandate represents not only a threat to individual liberty, but a public health disaster that will displace vulnerable

workers and exacerbate a nationwide hospital staffing crisis, with severe consequences for all Americans."

As reported by wfaa.com, "In lieu of vaccine or weekly testing requirements, the prosecutors proposed that some companies could have employees work remotely, rather than report in person."

According to worldometers.info, of the 23 states that the attorneys general speak for, 20 have a higher number of COVID-19 cases per million population than the national average. In fact, 16 of the 23 states are among the 20 states with the greatest number of infections in the US.

The Biden administration, which reopened the economy under the banner of a "declaration of independence" from COVID-19 on July 4, bears enormous responsibility for the massive wave of infections and death that ensued.

Both the herd immunity rampage advocated by the Republicans and the mitigation measures of the Democratic faction of the ruling class are aimed at guaranteeing the extraction of profit, not at the protection of the lives and welfare of workers and their children. Only a mass movement of workers, guided by a strategy aimed at using all the tools available to curtail transmission, can bring about the elimination and ultimately global eradication of COVID-19.



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