

Two months into school reopenings in the US: a balance sheet

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Two months into the fall semester, the reopening of schools across the United States has been a horrifying disaster. Both children and educators are dying of COVID-19 at a rate of at least three per day nationwide. In the last five weeks, 100 children have died, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). According to an unofficial tracker on Twitter, at least 311 educators have died since July 1, with the majority occurring since late July once schools began reopening.

The latest AAP report states that last week 225,978 children tested positive for COVID-19, and childhood cases have been steeply rising in every region of the country since July. Nationwide, the 7-day average of pediatric hospitalizations stands at 301.

In every region—from the South, where multiple governors are nakedly pursuing the “herd immunity” strategy and outlawing basic health measures, to the Northeast and West Coast where there are relatively high vaccination rates and the media and unions tout limited mitigation measures in schools—pediatric cases have rapidly spiked since schools reopened.

Contrary to the claims by the Biden administration that unvaccinated individuals are responsible for the current fourth wave of the pandemic, the AAP data, combined with local reports, prove that school reopenings are driving the terrible surge of COVID-19 in every corner of the US. The chorus of Democratic Party officials who promised that schools would be safe with proper mitigations are actively relaxing such measures and undermining the means for tracking the spread of COVID-19 in schools.

An essential element of the strategy to eradicate COVID-19 globally, which is the only viable and scientific response to the pandemic, must include the closure of in-person education until the virus is eliminated. Combined with the closure of nonessential workplaces, mass vaccinations, universal masking and testing, contact tracing, the safe isolation of infected patients, and other public health measures, COVID-19 could be eradicated worldwide within two to three months.

South

In **Georgia**, a total of 47 educators have died this school year alone and an average of one educator has died each day since August 11. At least 15 children have died from COVID-19 in the state since the start of the pandemic, including four in August alone. Earlier this month, state epidemiologist Dr. Cherie Dreznik said that 60 percent of all outbreaks in the state were occurring in K-12 schools.

Two educators in Georgia died on September 21, Sharon McClellan and Joe Harris. McClellan, 50, taught STEM at Welch Elementary. Her death follows that of Welch’s School Resource Officer Frankie Guitierrez, who also died of COVID-19 two weeks earlier. Harris, 35, was a teacher at Lyman Hall Elementary School in Hinesville and the mayor of Riceboro.

Florida, which has five of the 10 largest school districts in the US, is once again deliberately falsifying its pandemic data. A backlog of 1,213 deaths from COVID-19 was reported yesterday, including 189 that occurred prior to August 26, according to the Miami Herald.

On Wednesday, Dr. Joseph Ladapo, Ron DeSantis’ newly appointed surgeon general and a signatory of the Great Barrington Declaration, announced changes to school quarantine protocols. Under the false pretense of allowing parents to decide what is best for their children, students who have been exposed to COVID-19 can go to school “without restriction” and students who choose to quarantine may only do so for seven days if asymptomatic.

In August, at least 15 school personnel died in the Miami-Dade school district in a 10-day period. From July 30 to September 9, the state’s pediatric deaths more than doubled, with 10 children below 16 years of age dying in that period. The state obscures pediatric cases by including 16- and 17-year-olds in an adult category.

Since the start of the semester, over 22,000 children have tested positive for COVID-19 in **Mississippi**. The state recently surpassed New Jersey for the highest cumulative per capita COVID-19 death rate in the US, with roughly one in 312 people dead. There have been seven pediatric deaths in the state since the start of the pandemic, and four of those have occurred in the last two months.

Last week, the Board of Trustees for the Mississippi Institutions for Higher Learning became the first higher-ed governing body in the country to ban public universities and colleges from mandating COVID-19 vaccination for faculty, staff and students.

There were 6,382 K-12 cases recorded last week in **Alabama**. The state does not publish a cumulative tally of cases over the school year, preventing the weekly figures from being examined over time.

The quarantine and contact tracing protocols in place last school year have been reduced or eliminated. Last year, school officials had to notify families when their children came into contact with anyone who tested positive. This year, schools are only required to report known cases to the state.

Dr. Karen Landers of the Alabama Department of Public Health bluntly told local news, “Based on widespread community transmission and the number of daily positive COVID-19 cases and close contacts... the Department of Public Health is unable to investigate, contact trace or issue quarantine orders for all positive cases and close contacts.”

According to state health officer Dr. Scott Harris, a recent drop in hospitalizations is due in large part to an increase in deaths, which exceeded 100 per day this week. The state also made national news after an unofficial announcement that there were more deaths than births in 2020, a first in the state’s record that dates back to 1900. A study by the University of New Hampshire Carsey School of Public Policy, published in May, found that deaths exceeded births in twenty-five states in 2020, up from only five in 2019.

Nearly half of **Louisiana’s** 16 pediatric deaths have occurred in the past

two months. The seventh child to die since mid-July was announced on Wednesday, only five days after the sixth.

Days before Hurricane Ida, there were 453 cases reported in New Orleans Public Schools, leading to 4,657 students and staff in quarantine, or nine percent of the combined student and staff population. After returning to school following a three week closure, there are 34 active cases in the district.

There have been at least 126,687 students and over 25,000 educators infected since August 8 in **Texas**. Major outbreaks are ongoing throughout the state, including more than 4,400 infections total in the Fort Bend district in Houston.

Midwest

In **Michigan**, where about 60 percent of students attend districts that require masks, there were 98 new outbreaks reported in K-12 schools on Monday, accounting for 56 percent of total outbreaks in the state. Another 14 percent of outbreaks occurred in a category that includes childcare, after school programs and youth sports. Schools have only been open one month.

Across **Illinois**, there have been 206 outbreaks in K-12 schools over the past month. Pediatric cases have steadily increased since July, with infections in ages 5-11 jumping from 391 the week ending July 17 to 3,300 the week ending September 11, an increase of 843 percent.

In **Minnesota**, there have been over 1,600 cases in K-12 settings in the first two weeks of school and health officials announced Thursday that two school staff members have died in the same period.

Northeast

New York City, the largest school district in the country with 1.1 million students, is touted as having some of the strongest mitigation measures in the country. Yet Democratic mayor Bill De Blasio announced Monday that unvaccinated children will not be required to quarantine after close contact with a student who tested positive if they were both masked and three feet apart.

The Situation Room, the inter-agency body that is responsible for tracking cases and deciding on quarantines and closures in the district, has slashed its operating hours since last year, leading to a dangerous lag between infections and quarantines.

Educators have shattered any illusion that even these inadequate measures can be maintained. An internal survey done by the United Federation of Teachers found that 92 percent of respondents said that students cannot maintain three feet of distance throughout the day; 89 percent said students are not following mask protocols; and 98 percent believe neither the mayor nor the Department of Education have a proper safety plan in place.

While the UFT estimates that 90 percent of teachers in the district are vaccinated, there have been 1,689 confirmed cases among staff and students and 1,294 classroom closures in the first 10 days of school.

There have been school outbreaks across the state of **Maryland**, leading to thousands of students being quarantined and at least one school shutting down entirely. In Hartford County, 1,100 students are in quarantine or isolating after 158 students and 44 staff tested positive. In Baltimore City Public Schools, 240 students tested positive last week, up from 185 the previous week. In Carroll County, 6 percent of the student

body is currently quarantined.

West

Across **California**, a state run by the Democratic Party, efforts are being made to relax testing and quarantine protocols in schools and hide the spread of COVID-19 in workplaces.

Citing a low test positivity rate, Long Beach Unified School District has paused all student testing for a week. Still, roughly 650 students and 25 staff tested positive in the first three weeks of school.

The Los Angeles County health director recently said that school districts in Los Angeles may now adopt loose quarantine protocols for unvaccinated students, as long as they were wearing a mask when exposed. Already, vaccinated students are not required to quarantine. As of September 17, there were 1,465 active cases and six outbreaks in Los Angeles Unified School District, the second largest in the US with over 600,000 students.

Meanwhile, the California Senate unanimously passed a bill on Friday that would allow for outbreak data to be hidden from workers. The bill would expand the employers exempt from the COVID-19 outbreak reporting requirement to various entities including community clinics, adult day health centers, community care facilities, and child day care facilities. The bill will go into effect immediately if signed by Governor Gavin Newsom.

In the school districts surrounding **Seattle, Washington**, two weeks into the semester there have already been 195 cases among students and 73 among staff. While Washington has one of the highest vaccination rates in the US (at 62 percent) as in Alabama, a recent decline in hospitalizations is at least in part due to an increase in deaths, according to Washington State Hospital Association CEO Cassie Sauer.

The accounts above represent a summary of the catastrophe unfolding across the country.

From the ultra-right wing DeSantis/Ladapo duo in Florida to the liberals in New York and Los Angeles, politicians from both capitalist parties are reducing quarantine requirements despite pediatric cases near or exceeding all-time highs. In Washington, run by Democrats, and in Alabama, run by Republicans, hospitalizations are declining in large part due to an increase in deaths.

Far from pursuing a more scientific and humane pandemic policy compared to the Republicans, the Democratic Party, backed by the teachers unions, is essentially following the same playbook. The mitigation strategy has been exposed for what it really is—herd immunity with palliative care.

Against the grotesque ruthlessness of the herd immunity camp, as against the impotent half-measures of the mitigation proponents, the working class must adopt a perspective that demands the global eradication of COVID-19. Scientists have shown that even the Delta variant can be eliminated within the space of two to three months. This begins with the fight to immediately stop all in-person learning, which will only be organized through the development of rank-and-file committees independent of the unions and big business parties who have enforced the reopening of schools.



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