

# More than 200,000 American children have lost a parent or caregiver to COVID-19

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More than 200,000 American children have now lost a parent or primary caregiver to COVID-19, according to Dr. Charles Nelson, a professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at Harvard University. Nelson coauthored a study, published in *Pediatrics* in October 2021, on the impact of COVID-19 deaths of parents and caregivers. When the study was initially published, 140,000 caregiver deaths had been reported through June 30, 2021, which has now increased roughly 50 percent during the surges of the Delta and Omicron variants across the US.

The staggering figure of 200,000 children deprived of their caregivers represents incalculable social and personal loss, which will impact all those affected for their entire lives. According to a 2018 study published in *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, the loss of a parent predisposes children to “depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and functional impairment.” “The loss of a parent,” the study’s authors write, “is one of the most stressful events that a child can experience.”

These losses are devastating and destabilizing. Children are sometimes forced to move into homes with relatives they do not know well, while others face foster care or group homes.

“Under no circumstances should these children be put in institutions,” Nelson told *Newsweek* last week. “There is a risk, particularly for older kids, that they could be put in group homes or residential care, rather than placed with family.”

Tami Logsdon, the program director at the Children’s Bereavement Center of South Texas, told *Newsweek*, “We know circumstances of people as young as 20 who are attempting to care for three younger siblings.”

The disruption of bereavement can cause children to fall behind in school, Logsdon says, and many of them will struggle to catch up. Loss can also lead to behavioral changes, such as withdrawal or acting out. Experts warn that prolonged grief puts children at greater risk for substance abuse and suicide, in addition to relationship problems in adulthood.

On December 30, 2020, Margaret Garza’s husband David called her saying he was short of breath. Margaret called an ambulance for him, then called him back. “... the last thing I heard him say was, ‘please help me,’” she told *Newsweek*. David died from COVID-19 shortly thereafter.

Five years earlier, the Garzas had adopted two young boys

from the Texas foster care system. Julius, now 14, and Aidan, 12, entered foster care at ages two and four. “So when we adopted them, they had that stability of a mom and dad ... and then their dad died. That was taken away from them,” Margaret Garza said.

“I think they somewhat live in a little fear because they know that their dad died of COVID. They wear their masks, they wash their hands, all those things ... they’re very cautious,” Margaret Garza says of her sons.

The Garzas’ heartbreak is shared by hundreds of thousands of other families nationwide. On September 23, 2021, 46-year-old Misti Mitchem of Stafford County, Virginia, died in a Fredericksburg hospital just days after being diagnosed with COVID-19. Two weeks later, her husband, Kevin, 48, succumbed to the virus as well. Together, the Mitchems had five children; the four younger children, ranging in age from 11 to 17, were taken in by an aunt and uncle in South Carolina. Their remaining family has been forced, like so many survivors, to appeal to crowdfunding sites for help with the children’s needs.

While no one could responsibly attribute all 200,000 known caregiver deaths to school reopenings, there can be no doubt that this policy has greatly contributed to this horrific phenomenon. Last month, a New Jersey clinical psychologist told the *World Socialist Web Site* that in the first week of this year, two of their students caught COVID-19 at school and inadvertently infected and killed their mother and grandmother, respectively.

In August 2021, 12-year-old Marshall Hammond of Georgia lost his father Sean, a teacher and football coach. Marshall’s mother, Heidi, also a teacher, followed her husband only one month later, leaving Marshall orphaned. The Hammonds are among more than 2,000 educators who have died of COVID-19 in the US.

The highly transmissible Omicron variant has impacted the pediatric population at a greater rate than previous variants, making classrooms more dangerous than ever. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), almost 4.2 million pediatric COVID-19 cases were reported in January 2022, with children now accounting for nearly 25 percent of all cases in the United States.

This week's AAP report found that over 630,000 pediatric COVID-19 cases were officially reported on the week ending February 3. While this number marked a decline from the 1,150,000 cases reported at the peak of the Omicron surge in January, pediatric cases doubled those reported at the peak of the Delta surge that claimed the Hammonds' lives.

Nearly 2,000 children were hospitalized with COVID-19 last week, and another 21 tragically succumbed to the virus, according to the AAP report. A separate database from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recorded 104 pediatric COVID-19 deaths in the past two weeks alone, or an average of more than 7 child deaths every day.

The Omicron variant was a known threat by late November 2021, when reports from Botswana and South Africa made it very clear that the virus's new mutations made it both more contagious and harmful to children.

Armed with this knowledge, the Biden administration could have shut down schools and workplaces to stop the spread of COVID-19. Instead, Biden, with help from white-coated charlatans such as Monica Gandhi, falsely claimed that the Omicron variant was milder than past variants and that its heavy mutations heralded the transition to a mild, endemic virus akin to the common cold. Teachers and students were crammed into classrooms as this highly contagious variant surged.

A compilation of the *World Socialist Web Site's* coverage of this global crisis, available in epub and print formats.

The extraordinary spike in pediatric COVID-19 cases means these children have brought the virus, with all its deadly potential, back home to vulnerable caregivers. Teachers, many of whom are parents themselves, are told to risk orphaning their own children in the interest of keeping schools open.

School reopenings have been a homicidal experiment with children's and teachers' lives. The teachers unions have abetted this criminal enterprise, strangling walkouts in Chicago, Oakland and other cities. In January, union officials in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, shamed and denounced teachers who led a sickout, telling them they were abandoning their most vulnerable students.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), has worked closely with the Biden administration and has facilitated its policy of fully in-person instruction. In the fall of 2021, she staged a town hall meeting with prominent COVID-19 denialists and anti-vaccine activists, signaling, under the guise of civil discourse, her complicity with their attacks upon science and public education. Like Biden, she bears enormous responsibility for the massive death toll from COVID-19.

On Saturday, Weingarten tweeted a link to a *New York Times* piece on COVID-19's death toll, saying, "The US COVID death toll has surpassed 900,000. Their memories are blessings." Well aware of the discontent of the teachers she represents, Weingarten disabled comments on her grotesque

and callous tweet.

Amid the mounting death toll from COVID-19, the bipartisan attack upon workers and their families continues. Multiple states controlled by the Democratic Party announced plans to relax masking mandates on Monday, including New Jersey, California, Connecticut, Delaware and Oregon.

This bipartisan attack, not only on workers but also on science, underscores the importance of the Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic that has been initiated by the WSWS to expose the crimes committed over the past two years which continue in the present. Through the Inquest, workers and principled scientists have been given a platform to share their experiences during the pandemic and to counter the falsehoods upon which Biden and others have constructed their criminal herd immunity policies.

In defiance of both school administrators and the unions, teachers have walked out of their classes to demand reasonable safety measures. Independent rank-and-file safety committees have garnered support from increasing numbers of workers. The Global Workers' Inquest is a crucial tool for educating workers, amplifying their voices and preparing them for a worldwide struggle against the bourgeoisie.

There was nothing inevitable about the bereavement of 200,000 American children. As the WSWS has stressed, the pandemic is neither an act of God nor a biological disaster; it is a reprehensible social disaster that could have been prevented. The ruling class has fattened its coffers at the expense of workers and their children.

Workers are in no way helpless. By supporting the Global Workers' Inquest, joining a rank-and-file committee, and understanding their revolutionary role in history, the working class can dismantle capitalism and deny it the right to orphan and terrorize future generations.



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