

At least 8,000 deaths among active and retired educators

Investigative report into US state teacher retirement system data exposes mass coverup of teacher COVID-19 deaths

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21 August 2022

Are you an educator or school worker in the US? Contact us today to share your experience with the COVID-19 coverup in the schools and to join a rank-and-file committee in your area. The Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee is holding an important upcoming public meeting to lay out a way forward for educators to wage a unified struggle against another school year of mass infection, death and austerity. Register here.

School districts across the United States have opened or are opening in the coming weeks even as the pandemic continues to kill hundreds and sickens tens of thousands each day.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of teachers and school personnel have died in the US from the virus. An initial investigative analysis by the *World Socialist Web Site* into state retirement data among teachers and school employees in just eight US states indicates a massive coverup of COVID-19 deaths and excess deaths among the teaching and school employee workforce in the country.

Among the findings, retirement data from just three states—California, Illinois and Ohio—include a total of 1,632 officially reported COVID-19 deaths among active and retired teachers and support staff in 2020-2021. Given the overall lack of data accessible to the public across the US among various retirement systems, the WSWs had to extrapolate from these three states. California, Illinois and Ohio account for one-fifth of the population, meaning an estimated 8,000 COVID-19 deaths among active and retired educators and school employees have occurred across the country during the first two years of the pandemic.

These figures are undoubtedly far higher as we are well into the latter portion of 2022, and schools are beginning to open for the new academic year.

Additional findings from Texas teacher retirement data show a significant uptick in excess deaths among its members, reporting 2,080 excess deaths in 2020-2021. Other states included in the findings, North Carolina, Georgia, and New Mexico, show explicit efforts by state retirement plans to conceal COVID-related deaths among its members.

This horrific toll illustrates the result of the homicidal bipartisan school and workplace reopening policy and the blatant conspiracy by the state and federal governments, the corporate media and trade unions to cover up the dangers of COVID-19. This has been done to keep schools open and parents at work for the sake of profits. Mass infections, long-term illness and deaths will only continue under the current conditions as schools open with even less mitigations than years prior.

Despite the fact that the data exists, there has been no official, systematic national tally made available to the public of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations or mortality data among teachers and school personnel in the US to date.

Among teachers and school staff, the most complete unofficial national count is compiled by the Twitter user @LostToCovid, who has recorded 2,403 teacher deaths to date. These figures have been corroborated by official and news media reports but are an incomplete tally of the total human cost. The education news outlet, *EdWeek*, which recorded deaths up until July 2022, notes that at least 1,306 active and retired K-12 educators and personnel have died of COVID-19. Of those, 449 were active teachers.

To note the ongoing character of the devastating human toll of the virus well into 2022, here are just two of the many deaths that have taken place among teachers and staff this year: **Jimbo Jackson**, 55, principal at Fort Braden School in Leon County, Florida, died in May 2022. Jackson had opposed Governor Ron DeSantis' July 2020 push to reopen schools after two employees died in the district that year. **Casey Nichols**, 68, a longtime yearbook and journalism teacher at Rocklin High School in California, died in January. Nichols, formerly retired, had returned to teach photography part-time in the district. Despite mass opposition among staff in the Rocklin district, nothing was done to increase mitigations in the schools.

As for the national teacher unions, neither the National Education Association (NEA) nor the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has made any effort to keep an updated full account of COVID-related deaths among its membership let alone wage any fight for the safety of its members against COVID-19. On the contrary, they have collaborated with Trump and then Biden in the criminal reopening of the schools and the concealment of the deadly results.

In 2020, the NEA fought over the efforts of a Kansas teacher, Alisha Morris, who had been courageously aggregating the spread of COVID-19 cases in schools across the US. The NEA COVID-19 Dashboard based on Morris' initial data has since been taken down. As for the AFT, its latest report on teacher deaths among its membership was back in January 2021, which cited 530 teacher deaths.

The corporate media has maintained radio silence with few exceptions on the continuing deaths. In this, the media is following the lead of the Biden administration, which has continued to push the lie that the pandemic is over even as Biden himself contracted COVID-19, and deaths soared past 1 million under the Democratic president. The Biden administration deliberately sabotaged the tracking of COVID-19 cases, ending the requirement for hospitals to submit daily death reports in early February, further obscuring the impact of the virus.

Parallel to the large number of deaths is a large coverup by the state governments, Democrat and Republican alike. Many state retirement agencies, despite having obvious knowledge of the scale of deaths, do not

make these numbers public. Nor is there any attempt by the corporate media or political establishment, either Democrat or Republican, to make the public aware of these numbers. To date, the WWSWS is the only publication to cover the deaths recorded by state retirement systems.

The following is not a complete list due to the inaccessibility of data pulled from state retirement systems, as well as other limitations since some data was only presented in physical or non-recorded board meetings. Data from other sources is deliberately omitted to prevent double counts.

California

California's State Teachers' Retirement System (CalSTRS), which counts its COVID-19 deaths among current and former staff, recorded 787 total deaths among current and former staff through December 2, 2021, according to the January 2022 CalSTRS CEO report. As the map in the report shows, most of the COVID-19 deaths among retirees happened in California (81 percent). However, there were many deaths among retirees who left the state. The report also notes 90 percent of CalSTRS member deaths, or 706, were among retirees, while there have been 81 recorded COVID-19 deaths among active members.

CalSTRS records a total of 448,419 active members, 214,056 inactive members and 276,070 in retirement. Taking the most conservative estimates, for retired teachers, the fatality rate would be 128 per 100,000 retirees. The death rate for active teachers by the same method stands at 13 per 100,000.

Texas

Numerous state retirement systems have not recorded actual COVID-19 deaths in their reports but have recorded excess deaths. A December 2021 board meeting book of the Teacher Retirement System of Texas included a presentation slide titled "Mortality Experience from COVID-19" with a table of deaths among retirees. This indicated that between 2020 and 2021 there were "approximately 2,080 more deaths than projected."

Comparing Texas excess death rates to that of current teacher retirees would translate to a fatality rate of 272 per 100,000 for retirees.

Illinois

In Illinois, according to a Spring 2021 Illinois TRS newsletter, "402 TRS members have succumbed [to COVID-19]" as of Spring 2021. It is not clear how many of these were active or retired members. The winter newsletter of the same year stated, "Since March, 177 TRS members have died from COVID-19 or complications related to the virus." That is, 579 school staff are officially recognized as having died from COVID-19. After that, no further reference to the number of TRS deaths could be found in Illinois TRS reports.

In Illinois, there were 159,027 active members in the retirement system, and 114,252 retirees as of June 30, 2021, according to the Teachers' Retirement System of the State of Illinois's FY2021 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report. The aggregated death rate stands at 106 deaths per 100,000.

Ohio

The Ohio School Employee Retirement System (SERS) Board reported that as of July 2021, 2,995 COVID-19 cases have been reported in SERS' Medicare plan, with 266 [COVID-19] deaths.

No further mention of COVID-19 numbers or deaths have been made since. In its December 2021 school board report, OHSEERS Executive Board Director Richard Stensrud projected a lowering of future COVID-19 deaths among its members and thus chose to stop reporting the figures on COVID-related deaths. No doubt the OHSEERS board knows which members die, as it is its job to know when a member dies and what they died from in order to disburse death benefits and stop retirement payments, among other things.

Ohio had 133,532 educators in service retirement, and 4,789 on disability retirement as of FY 2021, according to its Annual Comprehensive Financial Report. The corresponding COVID-19 death rate would stand at 144 per 100,000.

Georgia

According to the minutes of the Teacher Retirement System of Georgia (TRSGA) Board of Trustees in March 2022, Director Cory Buice "presented an overview of member mortality rates and COVID's impact on our nation, state and TRS." This indicates that the TRSGA is aware of and discussed retiree deaths, yet no recording of the meeting could be found either on the TRSGA's website nor online despite the obvious its life-and-death importance to members.

According to a WSB-TV2 news report from January 2022, 64 Georgia teacher deaths were reported to have occurred before July 2021.

North Carolina

At a January 27, 2022 board meeting of the Teachers' and State Employees' Retirement System, a board member noted, while detailing the lag in processing death notifications and the onboarding of a new employee for that purpose, that "we are currently working overtime. ... A lot of deaths, a lot of death increase." No count of the deaths attributable to COVID-19 or above the "normal" number of deaths could be found.

New Mexico

The minutes of a New Mexico Educational Retirement Board (NMERB) meeting referenced the large number of deaths in 2020. "Ms. [Karla] Leyba [Member Services Bureau Chief] stated that Dr. Duszynski [Board member] had asked at the December meeting how many deaths among frontline workers, i.e., teacher and staff, were COVID-related. While the NMERB does not include the cause of death in its reporting, she did a manual audit from March through December 2020 and found that a large number of people died because of COVID-19 with a significant number of them being Native American." No recording of the meeting, record of the large number of deaths found by Leyba, nor any further mentions of deaths could be found on NMERB's website.

Conclusion

Despite the fragmentary and incomplete nature of this count, it clearly indicates the extent to which deaths have been actively covered up by the government, unions and political establishment. The ongoing obscuring of the number of deaths serves to keep workers on the job no matter how many die so that the financial oligarchy can continue reaping profits. It is also an indication of the degree to which the political establishment, trade unions and government are irreversibly subordinated to the interests of the very same financial oligarchy and irreconcilably hostile to workers' interests as a result.

Educators and school employees must demand an end to the COVID-19 coverup! All workers deserve complete, up-to-date reports and public counts made available as to how many of their coworkers have contracted and perished from the virus, so that workers are made aware of the horrific toll exacted by the pandemic. To this must be added the demand for a three-month lockdown, with full compensation for lost income, paired with all necessary public health measures to put an end to this dire threat to their lives and the lives of their coworkers, friends, family and society as a whole.



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