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More than 4,500 students and staff in Texas schools have tested positive for COVID-19 since the start of the school year

New data from the Texas Education Agency and the Department of State Health Services shows that around 0.2% of students and staff who have participated in on-campus activities have been affected.



A staff member holds the door open for kids on the first day of school at Goodwin Frazier Elementary School in New Braunfels, Texas on Tuesday, Aug. 25, 2020. The number of Americans newly diagnosed with the coronavirus is falling — a development experts credit at least partly to increased wearing of masks — even as

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the outbreak continues to claim nearly 1,000 lives in the U.S. each day. (Mikala Compton/Herald-Zeitung via AP) (Mikala Compton)



By [Corbett Smith](#)

3:45 PM on Sep 17, 2020 CDT



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There have been 4,519 documented cases of COVID-19 in Texas public schools since the start of the 2020-21 school year, according to new state data released by the Texas Education Agency and the Department of State Health Services.

Thursday's announcement, which only included a statewide aggregate, is the first attempt to track novel coronavirus cases in Texas schools. A district-level breakdown will be available next week, TEA spokesperson Jake Kobersky said.

The new dashboard is [available on the DSHS website](#).

The total represents around 0.2% of the estimated number of staff and

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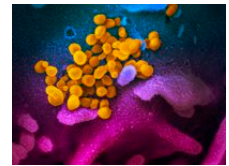
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students currently on Texas campuses, according to the agency. For students, there are 2,344 cases from an estimated 1.1 million students who took part in on-campus instruction or activities since the start of August. Last week, 990 students tested positive, an increase of 48% from the previous week as more schools returned to in-person instruction.

But 1.1 million students is only a fifth of the state's 5.5 million public school students.

School districts are required to offer virtual learning, and several of the state's largest school districts — including Houston, Dallas, Fort Worth and Arlington — haven't resumed in-person classes yet.



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BY CORBETT SMITH

For staff members, there are 2,175 cases over the same time period, from an estimated 800,000 employees. Last week, 791 staff members tested positive, showing a similar 48% increase from the previous week.

In early August, the state agencies told *The Dallas Morning News* that they were **uncertain how, or even if, they would track COVID-19.**

Two weeks later, the agencies **announced their plans to do so,** and started a pilot program involving several school districts.

State law already requires schools report “notifiable” conditions, including communicable diseases and infections to local health authorities, asking them to “provide all information known to them concerning the illness and physical condition of such person(s).”

Failing to doing so is a Class B misdemeanor. But Thursday’s report was not based on that data from local health authorities.

Instead, the TEA is requiring schools to fill out their weekly totals of COVID-19 cases via an online web form.

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who participates in any campus activity has a “test-confirmed” positive result, according to state guidelines. Antibody tests, which indicate that someone had a past infection of the novel coronavirus, are not required to be reported.

“The data will provide an overview of the burden of disease in Texas schools over time and inform public policy decisions about COVID-19,” a TEA press release stated. “School districts and other local authorities will continue to be the best source of the most current and specific information about cases in their schools.”

While schools are required to inform parents if a positive case has been found on campus, the level of specificity and transparency varies from district to district. Many school systems have developed dashboards indicating the level of positive cases from campus to campus, while others have limited their communications to state-mandated notices.



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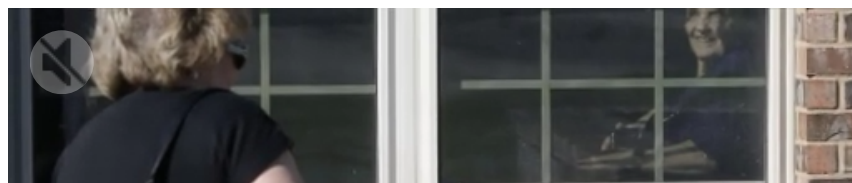
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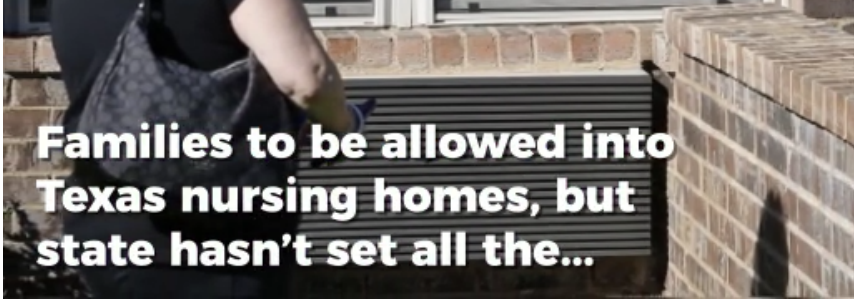
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