

# Nearly half of U.S. schools now offer in-person learning

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Nearly half of the public schools in America are now holding in-person

classes, with white children far more likely to be in those classrooms than Black, Hispanic or Asian students, the first federal data on the state of education during the pandemic shows.

The survey, released early Wednesday, suggests the nation is moving toward a goal set by President Joe Biden for a reopening of schools, but the country is still a fair distance from a full return to normalcy.

Polling from a representative sample of more than 3,500 schools serving fourth- and eighth-graders in 42 states, the report offers the first demographic and regional breakdown of in-person learning.

Biden has said he wants a majority of K-8 schools open for full-time, in-person classes by his 100th day in office, at the end of April. The survey, which mostly covered January, suggests he could hit that target. It found 47 percent of schools serving fourth-graders and 46 percent of those serving eighth-graders were open for full in-person instruction, the *Washington Post* reported.

Nevertheless, the survey also found millions of students still don't have full-time school available, while many other families have opted for remote education.

Overall, 60 percent of fourth-graders and 68 percent of eighth-graders were still learning at home for at least part of the school week.

"We're a long way from normal," Dennis Roche of Burbio, a data firm that has been tracking school reopenings through its own surveys, told the *Post*. "Offering in-person education is not the only step. It's a major step, but it's not the end. You've got to get students in the classroom taking advantage of it."

The prolonged period of remote schooling has taken a significant toll on

students' academic and emotional well-being, experts and parents alike fear. Some school districts have been open since last August, but others have struggled for months to craft plans that teachers and parents will accept, the *Post* said.

Perhaps most troubling is the racial divide seen in the results. About half of all White students were attending school in person full-time in January, the survey found. But that was true for just 28 percent of Black students and 33 percent of Hispanic students. Rates were lowest among Asian American students, at just 15 percent.

Asian American families have said they worry about elderly parents in cramped, multigenerational households, distrust promises of safety measures and fear their children will face racial harassment at school, the *Post* reported. Some are also pleased with the online learning. And many live on the coasts, where their districts are less likely to offer full-time options.

Black and Hispanic families, who have seen their communities ravaged by the pandemic, have also been more reluctant to return their children to classrooms.

"The world told Black and Brown people they were three times more likely to die from coronavirus ... [that] Black and Brown people needed to be more afraid of coronavirus than other people," Krystal Barnett, executive director of Bridge 2 Hope in St. Louis, a parent advocacy group, told the *Post*. She said many parents concluded, "Of course I'm not bringing my child back, because in my mind, they're still three times more likely to die than their counterparts."

Rates of in-person enrollment also varied dramatically by location: More than half of fourth-graders living in rural areas or towns were enrolled in [full-time](#), in-person programs. In the suburbs, it dropped to 36 percent,

and in cities, it was just 25 percent, the *Post* reported.

## **U.S. health officials question AstraZeneca's COVID vaccine data**

An independent oversight board has accused pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca of using potentially misleading information to determine the effectiveness of the company's coronavirus vaccine.

In a two-page letter to AstraZeneca and federal health authorities on Monday, an independent panel of medical experts that was helping oversee the vaccine's U.S. clinical trial in the United States said the company had essentially cherry-picked data that was "most favorable for the study, as opposed to the most recent and most complete," *The New York Times* reported.

Hours earlier, AstraZeneca had issued a news release touting the power of its vaccine, whose low price has made it the leading candidate to vaccinate people worldwide. The company said that, based on its U.S. trial, the vaccine appeared to be 79 percent effective at preventing COVID-19.

But the independent oversight board said in its letter that the vaccine's efficacy may have been between 69 percent and 74 percent, the *Times* reported. The board even reprimanded AstraZeneca for painting too optimistic a picture of the vaccine's efficacy.

In a statement released shortly after midnight on Monday, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) urged AstraZeneca to work with the oversight board "to review the efficacy data and ensure the most accurate, up-to-date efficacy data be made public as quickly as possible."

On Tuesday, AstraZeneca defended the data it released on Monday, saying that the interim results appeared to be "consistent" with more recent data. The company said it would immediately share its latest efficacy data with the monitoring board and reissue fuller results shortly, the *Times* reported.

Dr. Eric Topol, a clinical trials expert at Scripps Research in San Diego, said it was "highly irregular" to see such a public display of friction between an oversight board and a study sponsor.

"I've never seen anything like this," he told the *Times* after the institute's statement was released. "It's so, so troubling."

The results announced Monday seemed to boost global confidence in the vaccine, which was shaken earlier this month when more than a dozen countries, mostly in Europe, temporarily suspended the shot's use over worrying reports of rare cases of blood clots. Most of those countries returned to using the AstraZeneca vaccine late last week, after the European Medicines Agency, which regulates drugs in the European Union, analyzed the data and pronounced the vaccine safe and effective.

AstraZeneca's relationship with U.S. authorities has been tense since last year, when senior health officials believed the company was not being forthright about the design of its [clinical trials](#), its results and safety issues, the *Times* reported.

That U.S. trial, which involved more than 32,000 participants, was the largest test of its kind for the shot.

The company's efforts might not make much difference in the United States, where the vaccine is not yet authorized and is unlikely to become available before May, the *Times* said. By then, there will be enough vaccine doses for all of the nation's adults from the three vaccines that

have already been authorized: Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson.

Already approved in more than 70 countries, the AstraZeneca vaccine has been given to millions of people worldwide, including more than 17 million in Britain and the European Union, the *Times* reported.

"It's clear more questions have been raised about the AstraZeneca [vaccine](#) than about any of the other vaccines which are now authorized in the U.S.," Dr. Arnold Monto, acting chair of the FDA's Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee, which authorizes all vaccines in the United States, told *CNN* on Monday.

"It does feel different, and it felt different even before the whole blood clot kerfuffle," Dr. William Schaffner, a liaison member of the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, told *CNN*.

As for reports on rare clotting issues, "It's hard to unring that bell," Dr. Paul Offit, a member of the FDA advisory committee, told *CNN*. "Once people are scared, it's hard to unscare them."

## **A global scourge**

By Wednesday, the U.S. coronavirus case count passed 29.9 million while the death toll passed 543,000, according to a *Times* tally. On Wednesday, the top five states for coronavirus infections were: California with over 3.6 million cases; Texas with more than 2.7 million cases; Florida with over 2 million cases; New York with nearly 1.8 million cases; and Illinois with over 1.2 million cases.

Curbing the spread of the coronavirus in the rest of the world remains challenging.

In Brazil, the coronavirus case count was over 12.1 million by

Wednesday, with more than 298,000 deaths, a Johns Hopkins University tally showed. India had over 11.7 million cases and Over 160,400 deaths as of Wednesday, the Hopkins tally showed.

Worldwide, the number of reported infections passed 124.3 million on Wednesday, with over 2.7 million deaths recorded, according to the Hopkins tally.

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on the [new coronavirus](#).

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