

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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<https://www.wsj.com/articles/coronavirus-closes-school-for-nearly-30-million-children-in-u-s-11584356400>

## EDUCATION

# Coronavirus Closes School for Nearly 30 Million Children in U.S.

More than half the nation’s schoolchildren are out, with huge economic, academic and social repercussions



Teresa Patton, a night custodial supervisor with the Fort Zumwalt School District, spraying a bleach disinfectant at Progress South Elementary in O’Fallon, Mo., on Thursday.

PHOTO: ROBERT COHEN/ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH/ASSOCIATED PRESS

*By Douglas Belkin*

Updated March 16, 2020 1:32 pm ET

A cascade of announcements by governors across the country to close schools statewide in the last few days means that, as of Monday morning, public and private schools are closed for nearly 30 million children across the U.S.—more than half of the nation’s school enrollment.

The historic closings have taken place across 26 states and the District of Columbia, as well as in most of the nation’s largest school districts including Los Angeles, Chicago and Boston, according to Education Week, which is keeping a running tally.

The country’s largest school district, New York City, which had been the most prominent

The shutting of so many schools across the nation has massive economic, academic and social repercussions. It forces millions of parents to stay home from work to look after their children, handcuffing businesses and local economies. And it shuts down the main access point for food and social services for millions of children who don't otherwise have access to either.

From shuffleboard to spring break, coronavirus isn't deterring many tourists from flocking to Florida despite health concerns. See photos of what people in the Sunshine State are doing instead of isolating. EVE EDELHEIT FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



In outlining the ripple effects of closing schools, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said summer schedules and summer camps could be affected and students might need more time to graduate. Even so, closing schools for eight to 20 weeks may be the best way to slow the spread of the coronavirus, it said.

Because schools are responsible for teaching and learning—even if schools are closed—the Education Department on Friday eased a host of accountability measures.

Jeffrey Shaman, a professor of environmental health sciences at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, said schools in New York City are pivotal in providing food for students. Among the system's roughly 1 million students, about 500,000 receive subsidized meals.



Sara Black, a teacher at Glen Lea Elementary School in Henrico County near Richmond, Va., hugging a student goodbye on Friday, after the state ordered all schools closed for at least two weeks.

PHOTO: JOE MAHONEY/RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH/ASSOCIATED PRESS

“What do you do for those children when we shut the schools and those services go away?” Dr. C Shaman asked. “That’s going to cause its own health problems and issues. There’s going to be so much disruption associated with this that it’s going to be almost a wartime mentality.”

Children are less prone than adults to get sick from the new coronavirus, but children could be transmitting it as they are known to do with the influenza virus, said William Schaffner, a professor of preventive medicine at Vanderbilt University. “We don’t have really good information,” Dr. Schaffner said.

Closing schools is the most effective non-pharmaceutical intervention to slow the disease, said Nicholas Christakis, a Yale professor who has been studying the spread of the disease. Cities that closed schools earlier and longer during the Spanish influenza pandemic in 1918 had much lower mortality rates, he said.

If a school remains open, it can take intermediate steps, he said, such as extending drop-off time in the morning to avoid clusters of people at the entrance. Students could sit at every other seat in the cafeteria, he said.

On Wednesday, Seattle School Superintendent Denise Juneau said the city’s schools, which educate 52,000 students, would be closed for two weeks because of the coronavirus. The next day Gov. Jay Inslee extended the closure to six weeks.

“This is going to effectively economically cripple the city because of how it will impact people

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The rapid list of school closings came in the course of an anxious week as local school superintendents struggled to decide. Complicating the decisions was the fact that adjoining districts were deciding independently.

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Boston Superintendent Brenda Cassellius was struggling with that problem on Friday afternoon while the schools remained open with no plans in place to close. She said the situation was being reassessed hour by hour. Later that day Boston Mayor Marty Walsh announced the schools would close through April 27.

In Upper Darby, Pa., outside of Philadelphia, Superintendent Daniel McGarry complained that national leadership had been weak on when to close schools. His district oversees the education of 13,000 students, who speak 83 languages; more than half of them depend on the schools for food.

“The guidance as far as shutting down has not been as strong as I would like it to be,” Dr. McGarry said on Thursday. “I feel like this should be made at a much higher level.”

Dr. McGarry opted to close schools for the day on Friday to help his teachers prepare for educating students while they are home. Then on the same day, the CDC updated its advisory and Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolfe announced a statewide closing.

“I’ve been through lots of financial cuts, the Swine Flu, H1N1, & 2K,” Dr. McGarry said. “This is the most complicated.”

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Write to Douglas Belkin at [doug.belkin@wsj.com](mailto:doug.belkin@wsj.com)



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