



TSTA NEWS

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TSTA members report hundreds of violations of COVID safety guidelines in schools

During the two weeks since many school districts began reopening campuses to students, members of the Texas State Teachers Association have reported hundreds of violations of COVID-19 safety guidelines, reinforcing TSTA's concerns about the safety of school employees, students and their families.

In an online survey, 664 TSTA members from 135 districts around the state reported a variety of district practices and deficiencies, including personnel policies, which violate recommended guidelines or best practices for school safety during this health emergency.

"The biggest issue our members are raising involves inadequate accommodations for high-risk employees or those with high-risk dependents at home. These teachers with underlying health conditions should be allowed to teach remotely from home, but in many cases they are being required to teach from their classrooms or risk losing their jobs," TSTA President Ovidia Molina said.

"Other major concerns are inadequate staffing to carry out the new safety measures and inadequate, short-sighted sick leave policies that discourage anyone from staying home. Consider these problems together, and we can see that some districts are not committed to keeping potentially sick employees from coming to work, where they could infect other employees and students," she added.

"Districts are telling employees to self-screen for COVID symptoms but then establishing personnel policies and practices that discourage employees from being rigorous about it. This is very bad policy that ignores the reality of this health crisis."

Among physical conditions in schools, the most common issues cited by TSTA members were problems with ventilation and social distancing in classrooms. Many buildings have inadequate HVAC systems, and some have sealed windows, preventing the fresh-air ventilation that health experts recommend as a preventive against this air-borne disease.

Many districts have classrooms that are too small to keep the recommended safe distances among students and are making little effort to comply with social distancing guidelines.

TSTA also has received large numbers of reports from its members about violations of the governor's mask order in schools and inadequate personal protective equipment and sanitation supplies.

"The state can issue all the safety guidelines and protocols it wants, but if they are not enforced, they aren't worth much," Molina said. "In some cases, inadequate funding may be an issue, particularly relating to the deficiencies in physical facilities."

She added: "All these issues reinforce TSTA's warnings. The state of Texas has been in too big a hurry to reopen school buildings. Texas isn't back to normal yet, and no amount of premature school openings is going to change that. We hope we haven't prolonged the day when we can think about being normal again."

Here are the numbers of violations of safety issues reported by TSTA members:

Non-compliance with mask mandate: 246

Inadequate classroom social distancing: 385

Inadequate ventilation or ventilation equipment: 401

Inadequate protective supplies (masks, etc.): 357

Inadequate access to cleaning/sanitation supplies: 243

Insufficient accommodations for high-risk school employees or family members: 435

Lack of school quarantine space or process: 247

Inadequate or inequitable availability of distance-learning resources for students: 238

Inadequate district sick leave policies: 337

Inadequate mitigation policies for lunch or transportation: 255

Lack of health/safety policy enforcement: 268

Insufficient staffing for new measures and protocols: 370