

Half of K-12 Schools Surveyed Aren't Giving Employees Extra Paid Time Off for COVID



Many teachers and other school staff members who missed work because of COVID-19 this winter had to drain their regular allotted sick days, or worse, forgo getting paid altogether while they were stuck at home. Some had to miss 10 or more days if they were seriously ill or required by public health guidelines to quarantine.

But slightly more than half of school district leaders and principals who answered a nationally representative EdWeek Research Center survey in early February said they aren't offering workers sick time beyond what they're typically allotted.

Another 12 percent said their school or district is offering between one and five extra days. Most people affected by the virus experience health or child-care challenges for longer.

On the more-generous end, roughly 1 in 10 school district leaders and principals said they're offering employees more than 10 days of COVID-19 leave on top of their regular allotment.

COVID-19 has killed 921,000 people in America, including **more than 1,250 educators**

and **560 children**

, and sickened millions more.

In 2020, Congress approved the country's first-ever paid leave mandate, requiring many employers including school districts to offer employees time off to deal with COVID-19. That mandate expired, though, as did a voluntary tax incentive policy Congress implemented in its place for part of 2021 to entice employers to extend paid leave offerings.

Now it's up to individual employers, including local school boards and district administrators, to decide whether employees should get paid if they have to stay home because of COVID-19.

Restrictive policies on extra COVID-19 days off particularly affect younger or newer employees who haven't accrued enough leave; new parents who already used all of their allotted time off; and full- or part-time school workers who don't typically get robust sick leave benefits.

A majority of school district leaders and principals responding to the EdWeek survey—roughly 57 percent—said their COVID-19 leave policy applies equally to all school employees. But some reported more specific restrictions:

- Twenty-five percent said employees can only use COVID-specific leave if they test positive for the virus. That means they couldn't use it if they had to quarantine for exposure, or for taking care of a sick or quarantining family member.
- Eight percent said only vaccinated employees can take advantage of COVID-specific leave. Unvaccinated employees would have to use their regular sick leave.
- Seven percent said only people exposed to COVID-19 at work can use COVID-specific leave.

Education Week [wrote last month](#) about teachers who have lost pay due to COVID-19 or felt pressured to return to the classroom before their quarantine or isolation period ended. Advocates for [expanding paid leave for](#)

[COVID-related absences](#) argue that it's beneficial for public health when teachers don't have to choose between earning an essential paycheck and spreading a deadly disease to colleagues or students.

Some district leaders say they're worried about encouraging people to miss work or remain unvaccinated by allowing them too many days to stay home and get paid. Others are concerned about exacerbating staffing shortages that have plagued school buildings all year.