

The Coronavirus Spring: The Historic Closing of U.S. Schools (A Timeline)

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The coronavirus created mass disruption of schooling in the spring semester of the 2019-20 school year. Acting to try to stop the virus' spread, principals, superintendents, and then governors closed schools across the nation in a wave that began in late February. Eventually, 48 states, four U.S. territories, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense Education Activity ordered or recommended school building closures for the rest of their academic year, affecting at least 50.8 million public school students. **The magnitude and speed of the closures was unprecedented.**

Here is how it happened:

Jan. 29: First U.S. cases emerge

There had only been five confirmed cases of the coronavirus in the U.S. when Education Week first reported on a handful of schools that were beginning to take precautions to limit

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Alarmed by the growing coronavirus threat, the American Federation of Teachers called for more [federal guidance for schools on how to handle the coronavirus](#).

Mid-February: Temporary school closures

Individual schools and districts begin temporary closings of a few days to allow for cleaning of their school buildings. Closings were concentrated in Washington state and New York.

Feb. 25: A CDC warning for schools

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [warns schools that they need to prepare for the coronavirus](#). “You should ask your children’s schools about their plans for school dismissals or school closures,” said Nancy Messonnier, a director at the CDC. “Ask about plans for teleschool.”

Feb. 27: Coronavirus scare prompts a school to shut down

The first school shuts down because of COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus. Bothell High School in Washington state closes for two days for disinfection after an employee’s relative gets sick and is tested for the coronavirus.

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Dr. Anne Schuchat, the principal deputy director at the CDC, tells lawmakers at a Senate committee hearing that while federal agencies provide “guidance” on this issue, ultimately the decisions about things like school closures are made at the local level. “You have this balance between, the earlier you act the more impact it can have in slowing the spread, and the enormous disruption we see with school closures,” she says.

March 5: Shift to distance learning begins

The shift to remote learning begins with the 24,000-student Northshore district in Washington state announcing that it will close and shift to online learning for up to 14 days. It’s the first real test of prolonged distance learning to rise out of the arrival of COVID-19 in American communities. [Many districts won’t be ready.](#)

March 11: Pandemic declared

The World Health Organization [declares COVID-19 a pandemic.](#)

March 11: School district closures compound

By this time, more than 1 million students have been impacted by school closures, a number that would continue to grow. Here’s a look at students impacted:

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March 12: The first state closes schools

Ohio becomes the first state to announce a statewide closing. “We have a responsibility to save lives,” Gov. Mike DeWine says [on Twitter](#). “We could have waited to close schools, but based on advice from health experts, this is the time to do it.” It only takes one day [for 15 other states to follow](#).

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While their schools are shut down, children and families in Anne Arundel County, Md., received food through a special program.

— Susan Walsh/AP Photo

March 16: 27 states and territories close their schools

At this point, 27 states and territories have issued orders or recommendations that all public schools cease in-person instruction and close school buildings. Here's what those school closures looked like over time:

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March 16: Most students impacted

By this time, more than half of all students in the U.S. have been impacted by school closures.

March 17: Kansas: students aren't coming back this year

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March 20: Schools begin to feel the loss

“She was really a bright star. She had this passion.” —Ernest Logan, the president of the American Federation of School Administrators, [describing Dez-Ann Romain](#), a Brooklyn principal who died at the age of 36 from COVID-19.

Dez-Ann Romain was the principal of the Brooklyn Democracy Academy in New York, a school for students who had fallen behind in earning high school credits. She's believed to be one of the first K-12 educators to die from COVID-19, the illness caused by the novel coronavirus.

— Courtesy of Brooklyn Democracy Academy

- **Related Story:** [‘There Was a Better Fate for Her’: 18-Year-Old Dies From Coronavirus](#)

March 25: All U.S. public school buildings are closed

Idaho and The Department of Defense Education Activity are the last to close all their schools.

April 8: Teacher morale plummets

56 percent of teachers in a [nationally representative survey conducted by the EdWeek Research Center](#) say that their morale level is lower than prior to the coronavirus pandemic. By April 8, that number will reach 66 percent.

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SOURCE: EdWeek Research Center Survey, 2020



April 17: More states close schools for the academic year

More than half of all U.S. public school students now are shut out of their buildings by the COVID-19 pandemic for the rest of the 2019-20 school year.

May 6: Nearly all states close schools for the academic year

Maryland becomes the last state to announce that none of its schools would reopen for the 2019-20 school year. Only two states (Wyoming and Montana) did not close their schools

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“Most teachers care about the kids and their learning—this is a huge priority for us, but we’re also individuals and have our own health concerns. We didn’t sign up to be nurses on the front lines.” —Dawn, a math teacher with asthma, on [the dilemma facing teachers who are at higher risk of COVID-19](#).

May 7: Remote learning becomes commonplace

By early May, 80 percent of teachers [report interacting with the majority of their students](#) daily or weekly.

**Results show responses from teachers.*

SOURCE: EdWeek Research Center Survey, 2020

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May 7: Remote teaching is exhausting

“I probably send 500 emails a week right now, and I have a headache every day by 4 p.m. from staring into my computer screen. But I am doing my best—we all are—and that is all anyone can ask.” —Katie Kenahan, a math department coordinator and 8th grade teacher in East Providence, R.I., [describing her remote-teaching experience](#).

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May 19: Students miss school. Yes, really

“I really miss being in school. Which is weird to hear a kid say, who’s in school.” —Kaylie Tonzola, a 7th grader in Summerville, S.C., who participated [in a project to document her feelings about coronavirus-related school closures](#).

“Children are not just grieving death, but the loss of stability, safety, and graduation ... children grieve those other losses as well.” —David Schonfeld, a leading national expert on school crisis management, on [understanding and responding to student grief](#).

“She’s like, it’s silly but I miss the school mashed potatoes.” —Ampy Moreno, a mother from Union, N.J., describing [her daughter’s experience adapting to remote learning](#).



Students in 5th and 7th grades in two states share their journal entries about their experiences during the coronavirus pandemic.

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— Courtesy of the Garcia family

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