

Hazelwood, other St. Louis area districts have hundreds of students in COVID quarantine

In Hazelwood, more than 80 children were diagnosed with COVID in the past two weeks

HAZELWOOD, Mo. — A school district in St. Louis County is dealing with a spike in COVID cases.

Missouri Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education data shows the Hazelwood community is near the top, with more than 80 children being diagnosed with COVID in the past two weeks.

The Hazelwood School District tracks COVID cases and quarantines on their website dashboard. Tuesday, out of nearly 17,000 students, the district has more than 800 children who are actively quarantined.

Dan Short's daughter just got out of COVID quarantine.

"She was exposed," said Short. "It was one of her classmates, so they kicked her out of school for 10 days. She goes back tomorrow."

Short's daughter is one of the hundreds of Hazelwood students who have been impacted so far this school year.

Charise Dunn has one child at Hazelwood East High School. She believes the district is communicating well.

"I think Hazelwood is doing a very good job of keeping everyone safe," said Dunn, "because their response time is really great, and they were on it."

Hazelwood School District officials declined an on-camera interview on the subject. However, in response to an email, communications director Anthony Kiekow said the district is doing its own contact tracing in accordance with St. Louis County Health Department guidelines. He also said while many employees are vaccinated, it is not required. All students and staff are required to wear masks, though.

That mask mandate has been in place since March, when Hazelwood became the last district in our region to resume in-person classes. The district said it will continue to be proactive when it comes to minimizing the risk to students, workers and families.

There are several other districts in the St. Louis area where hundreds of students are currently quarantined. More than 340 kids are quarantined in Fort Zumwalt, and more than 270 are quarantined in Wentzville.

Unlike Hazelwood, those districts do not have mask mandates.



SPLC Seeking Advocacy and Organizing Associate

The Student Press Law Center (“SPLC”) is an independent, nonpartisan 501c(3) based in Washington, D.C. which works at the intersection of law, journalism and education to promote, support and defend the First Amendment rights of student journalists at the high school and college level. Founded in 1974, the Student Press Law Center has a legal hotline which serves thousands of student journalists and advisers across the United States. Thanks to a solid endowment, growing foundation support and generous individual donors, we also engage in training, advocacy and outreach to empower student journalists, promote the value of journalism education and spotlight the need to ensure legal protections for student press freedom through the New Voices movement.

About the New Voices Movement:

Due to the *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* Supreme Court decision in 1988, student journalists in public schools in 36 states can currently be censored by school administrators for nearly any reason “reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns.” This leads to censorship of important and well-reported stories which may make the school look bad (e.g., sexual misconduct by a teacher, health code violations in the cafeteria, financial mismanagement in the district) or which may deal with controversial topics which make school administrators uncomfortable (e.g., LGBTQ+ issues, teen pregnancy, drug or alcohol use). As a result, newspapers have been confiscated, papers have been defunded, and journalism advisers have lost their jobs for standing up for the First Amendment rights of their students. The New Voices movement seeks to change that.

New Voices is a non-partisan, student-powered grassroots movement for student press freedom. New Voices seeks to pass state-based legislation which restores and protects the rights of student journalists to publish without censorship or prior review, and protects their advisers against retaliation from school officials who are unhappy with student press coverage. As of August 2021 we have already succeeded in 14 states – only 36 (plus territories) to go!! New Voices is a project of the Student Press Law Center and works in partnership with a wide variety of national and state-based partners. To learn more about New Voices, go to www.splc.org/new-voices.