

EDUCATION WEEK

More Schools Are Doing Systemic COVID Testing. Will It Work?

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Nearly 70 percent of the 74 big city school systems in [a tracker maintained by Education Week and the Council of the Great City Schools](#) require some form of virus testing for students and staff. But those strategies vary, with some testing only targeted populations, some making tests optional, and some offering them at different durations.

In New York City, for example, schools have tested samples of students on a biweekly basis. Pennsylvania has offered weekly “pooled testing” to schools, using COVID relief aid to test whole classrooms of students with one kit, pulling students out for subsequent individual swabs if their classroom tests positive. Los Angeles Unified has an [ambitious \\$350 million weekly testing effort](#) that involves two plane trips a day to fly samples to a northern California lab.

But many schools have not widely adopted testing strategies, citing concerns about staffing shortages, taking students away from classroom time, and the availability of supplies.

The White House plan may help address the supply issue by using the Defense Production Act to help produce nearly \$2 billion in rapid point-of-care and over-the-counter COVID tests for use in homes, schools, and community settings. Biden’s plan also calls for distribution of free, at-home tests at food banks and community health centers, which provide care to low-income and uninsured families.

Some schools have also [struggled to secure parental consent](#) for regular student testing, as Education Week reported in March. Testing efforts are weakened when fewer students participate, disease experts have said, and some parents are concerned about privacy, comfort, or the inconvenience of quarantines if their child has an asymptomatic case.

Pressure to vaccinate more teachers and school staff

The Biden administration has long linked its teacher vaccination efforts with its push to open schools for in-person learning. It prioritized teachers, child-care workers, and school staff for early doses of COVID-19 vaccines before they were available to the general population in most states, and Biden has encouraged schools to sponsor on-site clinics for employees, eligible students, and community members.

As of Sept. 7, two states and Puerto Rico have [ordered all teachers to get vaccinated](#), according to an Education Week tracker. Another seven states and the District of Columbia have said teachers must get vaccinated or undergo regular testing. Nine states have taken the opposite approach by prohibiting teacher vaccine requirements, the tracker shows.

“We need to do more,” Biden said of vaccination requirements. “This is not about freedom or personal choice. It’s about protecting yourself and those around you.”