

# WILL: Unions, politics appear to drive fall school reopening decisions in Wisconsin

Posted on Monday, Nov 16, 2020

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## Local presence of COVID-19 not predictive of district decisions

The News: A [new study](#) from the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty (WILL) found that the presence of a teachers union and the politics of a particular region, not necessarily the local presence of the COVID-19 virus, appears to have driven district-level decisions to start the school year with in-person learning versus starting the school year with virtual learning. The new study examined the decisions of more than 400 Wisconsin school districts to determine which factors were predictive of how schools made their reopening decisions to start the school year.

Diving Deeper: As the new school year approached in 2020, individual school districts in Wisconsin had to make important decisions about in-person learning or using virtual options. But how much did the local presence of the COVID-19 virus factor into these decisions? Research Director Will Flanders, author of [Politics in the Pandemic: The Role of Unions in School Reopening Decisions](#), finds that factors other than the local presence of the virus appear to have played a much larger role.

- Union presence predicts a school going virtual. Districts with a teachers union were more likely to go virtual than districts without a teachers union.
- Political ideology predicts a school going virtual. Districts with a higher percentage of votes for President Trump in 2016 and 2020 were more likely to open, while those with a higher percentage for Hillary Clinton were more likely to remain shuttered.
- COVID-19 cases in an area were not predictive. The per-capita rate of COVID-19 cases in an area was not significantly predictive of whether a school district would reopen or not.
- Districts with more low-income children are more likely to go virtual. As the percentage of students in a district who are low-income increases, so does the likelihood that the district will have chosen virtual education for the fall.

The Quote: WILL Research Director Will Flanders said, "With more and more evidence accruing that in-person learning has not been a key driver of the spread of COVID-19, the decision-making by Wisconsin school districts deserve more scrutiny and accountability. Doing what's best for students needs to remain a top priority."

Read More:

- "[Politics in the Pandemic: The Role of Unions in School Reopening Decisions](#)," November 2020
- "[WILL study: Unions, political affiliation more predictive of virtual learning decision than COVID cases](#)," The Cap Times, November 16, 2020