



California Teachers Empowerment Network

Standing out from the crowd, fully informed on the issues

Please note that in addition to the traditional emailing of the CTEN monthly newsletter, we will once again post it on the CTEN blog - <http://www.ctenteachers.blogspot.com/> As usual, there are several controversial issues covered in this letter and we urge you to share your opinions with other teachers.

May 20, 2020

Dear Colleague,

At the risk of mentioning the obvious, Covid-19 – the disease, the people’s response to it, and its politics – still dominates the news. Just about every teacher in the country’s life has been affected by the pandemic. Things will get back to normal at some point, but it’s anyone’s guess as to when and what “normal” will look like.

The Huffington Post warns us that “School Districts Are Preparing To Lay Off Thousands Amid Coronavirus-Related Budget Shortfalls.”

Individual school districts are primarily funded through a combination of state and local revenue, with a small portion of funding from the federal government. At the local level, school districts are often reliant on dollars generated through property taxes, which can be a disadvantage for poorer areas, inextricably tying districts’ fate to that of their communities’ success. At the state level, education represents one of the biggest items on a budget, often funded through a combination of income taxes and sales taxes.

As states work to revise their budgets amid unanticipated deep revenue losses, school districts have been told to prepare for draconian cuts.

To continue reading, go [here](#).

David Osborne writes that the “COVID slide is going to make the usual summer slide even worse. Time to move to year-round school schedules.”

Districts and charter organizations could switch to year-round schedules, which have developed in some places to combat summer slide. Typically, these schools close for only a month or so at the height of summer. They reopen in early August, then have two-week breaks in the fall, at Christmas, in February and in April. Some charter schools bring kids who are behind grade level in for intensive catch-up work during at least one of the two weeks off each quarter.

Thousands of schools have adopted schedules such as this over the past three or four decades. A report from the Congressional Research Service documented 3,700 schools with year-round schedules in 2012 (out of close to 100,000 total), up from 450 in 1985.

To read more, go [here](#).

The American Enterprise Institute has come up with “A Blueprint for Back to School.”

State policymakers, school leaders, and community leaders should develop plans based on the following assumptions.

- *Schools will remain closed for the rest of the 2019–20 academic year but will reopen in the 2020–21 academic year (albeit with the potential of localized rolling closures for 14–28 days triggered by additional waves of infections).*
- *Reopened schools will need modifications based on guidance from national and state health officials, which could include physical distancing, temperature screenings, and frequent disinfecting of classrooms.*
- *Accommodations will be needed for the one in five teachers, one in four school principals, and other school staff who are over age 55 (and thus in a high-risk COVID-19 category), as well as for those at risk due to other health factors.*
- *A vaccine might not be available for 18 months or more, meaning that plans should take into account both the 2020–21 and 2021–22 school years.*

To learn more, go [here](#).

USA Today writer Erin Richards looks at what the new education normal might be.

The school week looks vastly different, with most students attending school two or three days a week and doing the rest of their learning at home. At school, desks are spaced apart to discourage touching. Some classrooms extend into unused gymnasiums, libraries or art rooms – left vacant while schools put on hold activities that cram lots of children together.

Arrival, dismissal and recess happen on staggered schedules and through specific doors to promote physical distancing. Students eat lunch at their desks. Those old enough to switch classes move with the same cohort every day – or teachers move around while students stay put – to discourage mingling with new groups.

Teachers and other education staff at higher risk of contracting the virus continue to teach from home, while younger or healthier educators teach in-person.

Everyone washes their hands. A lot.

Frequently touched school surfaces get wiped down. A lot.

To read on, go [here](#).

Additionally, it just may be the time to reexamine Benjamin Scafidi’s study on the “staffing surge” in public education. This researcher and economics professor found that between 1950 and 2015, the number of teachers increased about 2.5 times faster than the uptick in students. Even more outrageous is the fact that the hiring of other education employees – administrators, teacher aides, counselors, social workers, etc. – rose more than 7 times the increase in students. Scafidi writes, “If the increase in ‘all other staff’ alone had matched student enrollment growth between FY 1992 and FY 2015—the most recent staffing data available—then a cautious estimate finds American public schools would have saved almost \$35 billion in annual recurring savings. That is \$35 billion every single year from 1992 to 2015, for a cumulative total of \$805 billion over this time period.”

To read on, go [here](#).

One interesting thought on the future involves school choice. Ginny Gentles, founder of School Choice Solutions, LLC., writes that governors should be able choose to allocate federal funds in a student-centered way by establishing K-12 education savings accounts (ESA) to cover families’ remote education expenses.

In the five states with existing ESA programs, the governors could expand the existing programs. In other states, the governor could either provide funds to existing state-funded scholarship programs or create a GEER-funded ESA or scholarship for the next year. Parents could use the funds for technology, curriculum, online resources, tutoring, private school tuition, or summer courses to compensate for the early end to the school year. In areas where school districts are not providing online instruction or therapies for special needs students, parents can use the GEER-funded accounts to meet the needs of their children.

To learn more, go [here](#).

Not surprisingly, the unions have their own ideas about next steps. The California Teachers Association is demanding a lot more money from the Feds.

There is no solution that does not involve aid from the federal government combined with generating more state revenues. We are calling on the federal government to authorize \$1 trillion in the next CARES Act and provide \$175 billion for the Education Stabilization Fund to distribute to states.

The American Federation of Teachers has cooked up a 20-page plan to “Safely Reopen America’s Schools and Communities.”

The American Federation of Teachers has released a detailed road map that, in the absence of a COVID-19 vaccine, charts a path to safely and responsibly reopen school buildings and other institutions crucial to the well-being and economic vitality of our communities.

The 20-page, science-based “Plan to Safely Reopen America’s Schools and Communities” sprung from an intense collaboration of public health professionals, union leaders and frontline

workers to prepare for what happens next in the period between flattening the curve and truly eradicating the virus.

It features five core pillars that inform our decision to reopen the country based on the science as well as educator and healthcare expertise—not on politics or wishful thinking.

To read more about CTA's and AFT's plans, go [here](#) and [here](#).

In other news, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results of the 2018 history, geography and civics test for 8th graders were released. Not pretty. The level of proficiency for our students is scandalous. Less than a quarter are at or above the proficient level in the three subject areas, and only 15 percent are in U.S. history. (The assessment is given predominantly to traditional public schoolers, but some private and charter school students are tested.)

The overall findings were distinctly subpar. In history, students scored lower on all four areas measured by the test—the evolution of American democracy; culture; economic and technical changes; and America's changing role in the world. The poor results were consistent across all racial and ethnic categories too, with the exception of students identifying as Asian or Pacific Islander.

Across the three subjects, a quarter or more of students fell below the "basic" performance category, meaning they didn't have even the fundamental prerequisite skills to master the content. Thirty-four percent of students fell below the "basic" performance category in history, compared to 29 percent in 2014. In geography, 29 percent fell below that mark compared to 25 percent in 2014. There was no significant change in civics.

To learn more, go [here](#).

And finally, our friends at the Association of American Educators have come up with a list of coronavirus resources for teachers, including training webinars, virtual educator resource sharing, a grant program for teachers and a lot more.

To see what AAE is offering, go [here](#).

Additionally, if you have any valuable resources that you would like to share, please do so by emailing cteninfo@ctenhome.org or posting them on Facebook if you prefer. The CTEN page can be accessed [here](#), and the CTEN group can be found [here](#).

Best of luck to all of you, your families and your students during these very trying times.

Sincerely,
Larry Sand
CTEN President