



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.

November 18, 2020

Dear Colleague,

A working paper released in October by Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform reveals that local politics – not the severity of COVID-19 – is the most important factor in determining whether k-12 public school districts opened for in-person learning in the fall. Political science professors Michael Hartney and Leslie Finger looked at about 75 percent of the nation's 10,000 school districts and found that counties that voted 60 percent for Hillary Clinton in 2016 “were nearly 20 percentage points less likely to hold in-person classes than counties that backed Donald Trump by the same margin.” They also report that districts with strong teachers unions were far less likely to bring students back to the classroom. Very interestingly, the professors note that districts “located in counties with a [larger number of Catholic schools](#) were less likely to shut down and more likely to return to in-person learning.”

The study's results are similar to others on the lockdown issue. In July, Jon Valant, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, tracked the reopening plans of over 250 school districts across the country and reported that there was no “no relationship” between each locality's decision and its number of COVID-19 cases. Valant said that education policy “[is just one consideration among many](#) that have been ‘distorted’ by the encroachment of national politics.”

To see the Brown study, go [here](#). To get Valant's take, go [here](#).

Whatever the reason for the shutdowns, *LA School Report's* Linda Jacobson writes that “up to 500,000 students across California – and 1 to 3 million kids nationwide – have been missing from schools since March” according to a recent report released by Bellwether Education Partners.

Pulling from news reports and federal data sources, the team of researchers predict that between 10 and 25 percent of students in the most marginalized populations have completely missed out on learning for the past seven months.

“We did this because we know that just 1 percent of our most marginalized kids not coming to school might not seem like a lot in any one district, and many districts might not even be keeping

careful count, but that's more than 230 schools' worth of children across the country — and we think that's a big deal," said Hailly T.N. Korman, a senior associate partner at the Washington-based non-profit who conducted the project with co-authors Bonnie O'Keefe and Matt Repka.

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

While many parents of public school families are upset that their schools are closed, Governor Gavin Newsom doesn't have that problem. His four kids are back in the private school they attend, even as public schools in Sacramento County remain closed. In a *Politico* piece posted on Oct. 30, Mackenzie Mays wrote,

Newsom's children attend a private school in Sacramento County that has a hybrid schedule that alternates remote and in-person education before it will return full-time next month, according to a source. POLITICO is not naming the school for privacy reasons.

"They're phasing back into school and we are phasing out of our very challenging distance learning that we've been doing, so many parents are doing up and down the state," Newsom said Friday when asked about his own children's education.

Sacramento County schools are allowed to open classrooms under Newsom's reopening system. But the county's large public school districts — including San Juan Unified, which serves Newsom's neighborhood — have yet to do so.

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

But according to several sources, Newsom has left his Sacramento home, and moved to nearby El Dorado County which is not on any COVID-19 watch list.

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

As we have mentioned in previous newsletters, many parents are unhappy with the distance learning program offered by their school district and are opting for “pandemic pods,” a form of microschooing. Families work together to educate their own kids, and sometimes recruit professional teachers to help with the process. It's a way for clusters of students to receive professional instruction for several hours each day. But now the education establishment is fighting back.

The National Education Association has issued an “[opposition report](#)” attacking Prenda, a microschooing provider in Arizona. Among other things, while Prenda policy says that prescription drugs, alcohol and weapons must be locked and secured at a pod location, the union claims that it is unclear whether Prenda conducts any inspections. NEA also says that Prenda should be taken to task for not providing meals or transportation to the students.

And it's not only teachers unions that are [going after pods](#). In [Massachusetts](#), state guidelines affirm, “Entities that provide supervision and care of children during school hours without an EEC license or EEC license exemption will be subject to investigation, closure, and fines by

EEC pursuant to its statutory obligation to investigate unlicensed child care programs.” In [Pennsylvania](#), if a pod has more than six students, it must [develop an evacuation plan](#) in the event of an emergency, and ensure that every space where the pod gathers has a functional fire detection system. In [Oregon](#), the state has asserted that homeschooling pods “need to follow regulations and get the right permits.” A report released last week by Heritage Foundation policy analyst Jonathan Butcher reveals that [19 states](#) have either imposed new regulations or expanded existing ones that can interfere with families’ attempts to gain access to pods.

To read the NEA’s opposition report, go [here](#). To see Butcher’s analysis, go [here](#).

Before the recent election, Mike Antonucci reported on the campaign priorities of the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, using the Center for Responsive Politics and its [OpenSecrets.org](#) website as his source.

While much of the focus over the years has been on traditional political action committee spending, this is becoming a smaller and smaller percentage of total campaign expenditures. Open Secrets gives a comprehensive view of all types of spending, including that made by super PACs and other outside groups not directly affiliated with a particular candidate’s campaign.

We still have a couple of weeks before the election, with a lot more spending to come, but the most recent reports show that NEA raised almost \$23 million, almost all of which it passed on to its own super PAC, the NEA Advocacy Fund. Contributions to candidates from its traditional PAC, the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education, are approaching all-time. These include donations from individual NEA employees or members who identified themselves as such. Of those, \$99,077 went to Democrats. Joe Biden got almost \$28,000, and his rivals in the presidential primary received funds as well. Only \$3,573 went to Republican candidates. President Donald Trump received \$40.

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

The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was administered to high school seniors in early 2019, a full year before the COVID-19 lockdowns. The so-called “Nation’s Report Card” reveals that just 37 percent of 12th-graders are proficient in reading and a pitiful 24 percent in math. In fact, the average reading score for grade 12 students was [lower than in 1992](#).

Not surprisingly, many blame the seniors’ abysmal performance on the fact that the U.S. has defunded education. American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten groused in a press release about “two decades of austerity.”

But, adjusting for inflation, [per-pupil public spending grew 39 percent](#) between 1991-1992 and 2016-2017. And as Cato Institute scholar Neal McCluskey points out, “...spending between 2016–17 and the 2019 NAEP administration probably [continued to grow](#) as the economy improved.”

To learn more about the recent NAEP, go [here](#). To see Weingarten’s claims, go [here](#).

On the subject of funding, Will Flanders, research director at the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty, has an interesting take. He writes that if education is changing, so should the funding. He writes,

...the largest source of declines came from the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten cohort. Pre-K declined by 15% while kindergarten declined by 5%. Families may simply be delaying the start of school by a year rather than navigate the uncertain value of virtual education. But some parents will assuredly come to like the alternatives, and may not return to the public school system they had planned on attending pre-pandemic.

The predicted result of this disruption will be a pinch in school district budgets. [States](#) like California and North Carolina have already implemented so-called “hold harmless” provisions, and superintendents all over the country are asking for similar measures. However, it would be a mistake to exempt public school districts from the sort of tough decisions this enrollment decline may require.

The bottom line is that it’s far from clear what the long-term impact of COVID-19 will be on parental decision-making regarding their kids’ education. It could be that we are on the precipice of long-term seismic changes in education. It may also be the case that many parents choose to send their kids back to school after the pandemic. But if reality is closer to the former, it will be important for schools to make longterm adjustments to their budgets to account for reductions in state aid and property taxes. If the latter proves correct, districts would see a bump in funding in future years, making COVID-related reductions a minor blip. Giving districts a break now will just delay the inevitable.

To read more of Flanders’ analysis, go [here](#).

If you have other valuable resources that you would like to share, or you’d like to report on what your school district is doing – good, bad or indifferent – to deal with the “new normal,” please do so by emailing cteninfo@ctenhome.org or, if you prefer, posting on Facebook. The CTEN page can be accessed [here](#), and the CTEN group can be found [here](#).

Also, anyone wishing to donate to CTEN can do so very simply through check, money order or PayPal - <http://www.ctenhome.org/donate.html> As a non-profit, we exist only through the generosity of others. Thanks, as always, and good luck with all the new challenges we are facing!

Sincerely,
Larry Sand
CTEN President