



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.

December 16, 2020

Dear Colleague,

As we mentioned last month, it has been shown that school districts with strong teachers unions – especially in the larger districts – are far less likely to bring students back to the classroom for in-person learning during the pandemic. But there is an emerging consensus from the scientific community that schools should be reopening. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director [Dr. Robert Redfield](#) asserts that “school is one of the safest places” for children. Also, drawing on an assessment of data from 31 countries, [UNICEF](#) maintains that “there is strong evidence that, with basic safety measures in place, the net benefits of keeping schools open outweigh the costs of closing them.” Moreover, the findings of a major British study reveal that it was a [mistake to close schools](#). “The results demonstrate no evidence of serious harms from COVID-19 to adults in close contact with children, compared to those living in households without children. This has implications for determining the benefit-harm balance of children attending school in the COVID-19 pandemic.” In October’s Great Barrington Declaration, world renowned scientists noted that keeping children out of school is a “[grave injustice](#).”

Also, there are parents who feel left out of the decision making process.

“Educators and teachers’ unions are not infectious disease experts or public health officials, and frankly, that’s who parents trust in making these decisions,” said Keri Rodrigues, the founding president of the National Parents Union, an advocacy organization with hundreds of parent groups across the country.

Often, teachers’ unions are the loudest voices at the decision-making table, Rodrigues said.

“The balance of power is off,” she said. “It’s very striking to us as parents and families—we have a group of elected officials who make deals with labor unions and decide what policies we’re going to do, and we’re just supposed to take it and be on the roller coaster ride.”

For more information, go [here](#) and [here](#).

Recently, there was an unsettling piece in *The 74*. “As COVID Creeps into Schools, Surveillance Tech Follows” reports what happened when several children tested positive for Covid-19 in an Ohio school district in October,

Twelve children who came in close contact with the student were instructed to quarantine, and the entire seventh-grade class was pushed back into remote learning.

The disruptions had just begun. By mid-November, almost every student at the Wickliffe City School District was sent back to learning from computer screens in their living rooms. Because of “a significant increase in exposures and confirmed COVID-19 cases among our students and employees” that prompted widespread quarantines, the district’s “ability to appropriately staff classrooms is no longer possible,” Superintendent Joseph Spiccia [wrote in a letter to parents](#).

But future virus outbreaks at the Wickliffe district, which educates about 1,500 students, could look a whole lot different. As part of a pilot project that the district began to roll out before Thanksgiving, officials distributed roughly 100 badges to high school students and staff that allow administrators to track their every move as they travel throughout the day between the schools’ hallways and classrooms. Implemented in the name of contact tracing, the bluetooth badges allow administrators to track students for up to a month and identify children who came into close contact with infected classmates. The district plans to give badges to all 430 high school students when they return to in-person learning early next year.

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

In California, at the beginning of December, a group of Los Angeles and Alameda County families sued the California Board of Education, the Department of Education, and state Superintendent for Public Instruction Tony Thurmond. They accused the powers that be of not giving students in the state an adequate education due to the long-term remote learning measures taken by schools since the shutdown in March.

According to the lawsuit, remote learning has [put an undue burden on parents and guardians, especially on low-income families who have poor internet service or don’t have a reliable computer to use](#). The lawsuit also charges that parents have had to take up the slack from the schools shortfalls, acting as educators for their children and having to pay for all of the associated extra costs usually provided by schools. The suit argued further that these shortfalls had effected minority students, in particular black and Hispanic students, the most.

“Because of the State’s inadequate response, parents and grandparents have had to become tutors, counselors, childminders, and computer technicians, and they have had to find a way to pay for what are now basic school supplies — laptop/tablets, paper, printing, and internet access,” noted the [lawsuit that was filed Monday](#). “California has offered families no training, support, or opportunity to provide input into plans for remote learning, the eventual return to in-person instruction, or the delivery of compensatory education.

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

While the unions clamor for a teacher to become the next Secretary of Education, Center for Education Reform president Jeanne Allen doesn't necessarily agree. She writes in *Forbes*,

Having been a teacher is not a prerequisite for success as Secretary of Education. The emphasis is wrong. Education is primarily about learning, not teaching, just as having dinner is primarily about eating, not cooking. The process is important, as it can help achieve, and alter, the outcome. But teaching is not the goal of education; it is part of the process. While the two are correlated, and while strong teaching is more likely to yield to successful learning, the unions who are pushing the teacher-as-EdSec notion have [argued](#) the opposite holds true—that teaching and learning are not in fact correlated!

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

The latest “National Sex Education Standards: Core Content and Skills, K-12” is a 72-page document that describes a “whole new world” of human evolution. Brenda Lebsack, Santa Ana school teacher and former board member in the Orange Unified School District, thinks this is a bridge way-too-far and picks apart the document.

Gender is described as a “social construct,” therefore students are taught that they can reject or modify their “sex assigned at birth” to something that FEELS truer to oneself. (p. 58) Examples of gender include, but are NOT LIMITED to: male, female, transgender, androgenous, agender, gender expansive, genderqueer, nonbinary, two-spirit, intersex, or questioning. Genderqueer means a person can identify as both genders, neither gender, something in-between or BEYOND genders. (p. 59, 61,67). The document informs readers on page 8 that there is a continual evolution of language related to gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and sexual identity, therefore this document is only a snapshot in the evolutionary process.

Students decide their identities through experiential learning cycles where they learn by doing, reflecting interpreting and exploring questions of how experiences could be different in the future (p.58). These “lived experiences” or collection of events become the student’s firsthand validation of their identities (p. 61). You may ask, “How is unlimited gender ideology based on science or empirical data?” According to the new definition of “Fact” in the Sex Ed glossary (p. 58) empirical data is not required. Hypothesis, opinions, and theories are now considered fact if most experts in the field agree upon it. In other words...it’s not about science or even common sense, it’s about whose opinions in society matter most.

You can see the document in its entirety [here](#). To get Lebsack’s take, go [here](#).

With a new charter law on the books in California, charters were expecting rough going in the new year, but they seem to be getting a reprieve due to the pandemic.

Known as [Assembly Bill 1505](#), the compromise between charters and the teachers union gave local districts the authority to consider whether the opening of a new charter would negatively impact their own schools, and it gave charters a new process to appeal rejected applications.

But with the law going into effect in the middle of a pandemic, districts lack key information needed to decide whether existing charters should continue operating — assessment data from 2020.

As a result, some schools that otherwise would have been shut down are being recommended for renewal.

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

Many in the educational community have been demanding that student testing be halted during our trying times. But Hoover Institution senior fellow Chester Finn insists that this would be a grave error. He writes in *The Washington Post*,

Honestly, pretty much no one likes them. No one much likes check-ups with the doctor or dentist, either, no matter how useful they might be. Yet, after last spring's school shutdowns and the forced — and mostly ill-prepared — transition to online learning, U.S. education may never have had a greater need for reliable information about how students are doing.

What have they learned, and not learned, during these difficult past several months? Which schools and districts moved effectively to virtual education? How did achievement gaps change according to family income or racial group?

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

In Los Angeles-adjacent Burbank, book banning is becoming a reality due to concerns raised by some parents over racism. Until further notice, teachers in the area will not be able to include Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, Theodore Taylor's *The Cay*, and Mildred D. Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* in their curriculum.

Four parents, three of whom are Black, challenged the classic novels for alleged potential harm to the district's roughly 400 Black students.

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

Anyone wishing to make a year-end donation to CTEN can do so very simply through a personal check or PayPal – [here](#). As a non-profit, we exist and operate only through the generosity and support of people like you. (And to those of you who already regularly donate – our heartfelt thanks!)

It has been another exciting year for CTEN, and we look forward to an even more vigorous 2021. We are grateful for your interest and involvement, and wish you and your families the happiest of holidays. See you next year!

Sincerely,
Larry Sand

CTEN President