



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.

January 20, 2021

Dear Colleague,

As the pandemic and the lockdowns continue, teachers' mental health is suffering in ways they've never experienced according to *The 19th*, an online news source.

Because of the pandemic, about three-fourths of the 100 largest school districts opted for complete remote learning, [an October study found](#), and a little over a quarter of all districts began the year with a hybrid approach. But as COVID-19 case counts climb, districts across the country have ricocheted from remote to in-person to hybrid models, and many that started with [even a semblance](#) of in-person learning have fallen back to remote education.

Between the unpredictability, the isolation and the newfound challenges in reaching their students — who [mental health experts](#) worry are also [struggling](#) — what little mental health support is extended to teachers feels like nowhere near enough.

“I spend all day staring at a screen and kind of generating enthusiasm into the void that Zoom is, and I end the day so tired, and so done, and so frustrated,” said Emma Wohl, a middle school teacher in Washington state whose district has been completely remote this year. “The moments of joy I used to have are so much more rare.”

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

Also, regarding the coronavirus, *Education Week* reports that, “Fall School Reopenings Didn't Dramatically Increase COVID-19 Hospitalizations.”

For the most part, school reopenings in the fall did not appear to contribute to increased hospitalization rates due to COVID-19, according to research released on Monday.

The finding adds to a growing body of evidence suggesting that schools did not play much of a role in fueling infections when community transmission rates remained relatively low. It is the first study to use hospitalization as its key health measure, a research advance that avoids some of the problems with using test-positivity counts as a proxy for COVID-19 spread.

But in places where community spread was higher, the researchers found that the link between schooling and health effects grew murkier, with no clear pattern in the results, a red flag of sorts as schools consider expanding in-person learning options in the midst of a third surge of record-breaking rates of COVID-19 from coast to coast.

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

Here in California, Governor Gavin Newsom has announced a \$2 billion package of incentives to encourage a return to in-person classes for California elementary school students as early as mid-February, an effort that could require coronavirus testing for students, teachers and staff.

But given the bleak public health conditions across most of the state as coronavirus cases surge at alarming rates, it is unclear how quickly districts in hard-hit counties will qualify to reopen, especially those in large urban areas in Southern California and the San Francisco Bay Area.

Newsom's decision, in essence, eases the strict criteria for county health conditions under which schools can be eligible to reopen. His plan comes amid California's most deadly spell in the pandemic and increases pressure on local school officials to reinstate in-classroom learning.

In his announcement, Newsom cited growing evidence that young students faced "decreased risks" associated with the coronavirus and benefited more from in-person instruction compared to at-home learning. In-classroom learning provides a better opportunity to identify children suffering from depression, anxiety or abuse at home, he said.

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

There is hope that schools will open sooner rather than later with the greater availability of the Covid vaccine. But that notion is not as simple as it sounds. Earlier this month in Ohio, Gov. Mike DeWine announced a goal of resuming "in-person school by March 1" by soon offering Ohio's school employees COVID-19 vaccines. But the president of the Ohio Education Association says that it's unlikely that many schools will be able to resume completely normal operations by then, even with vaccines.

"We're not out of the woods yet by any stretch of the imagination. Even after the vaccine has been widely distributed, it's not a panacea," said Scott DiMauro, president of the Ohio Education Association, the state's largest teacher's union. "All the things the CDC is saying are important to keep schools safe are still going to be necessary, and I expect that through at least the end of the school year."

During a press briefing last week, DeWine suggested that only schools that are operating in-person, or that indicate they're willing to shift to fully in-person classes, might be offered the shots, possibly as early as mid-January. As of last week, 45% of Ohio's students were learning completely online, 29% were in-person and 26% were a mix of both, he said.

DiMauro said such stipulations might be counterproductive.

"We need to really pay attention to equity and vaccinate communities hit hardest by the pandemic first," DiMauro said. "That would mean in districts like Columbus, that haven't been able to open, because there hasn't been a safe way to do that yet."

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

President-elect Joe Biden has picked Connecticut Education Commissioner Miguel Cardona to be the new Secretary of Education.

"He understands the deep roots of inequity as the sources of our persistent opportunity gaps," Biden said as he formally announced Cardona Wednesday. "And he understands the transformative power that comes from investing in public education."

Biden said Cardona would help him execute his education platform: tripling federal funding for disadvantaged students, "fully funding" the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and helping schools to create universal prekindergarten programs and raise teacher pay.

He also praised Cardona's approach to reopening schools in Connecticut. While Cardona has stopped short of mandating schools to reopen for in-person learning, he has urged them to do so. His agency has provided supplies, created public service announcement videos, and held online forums to address concerns. That has drawn pushback from some educators.

Apparently, former NEA president Lily Eskelsen García disqualified herself from contention for the post when several inappropriate remarks of hers surfaced. Talking to a progressive political advocacy organization in 2015, she referred to special needs kids as "chronically tarded" and "medically annoying." She also has referred to teacher performance metrics as "[the mark of the devil](#)" and that charter schools are "[very misguided school reforms](#)." And just for good measure, she told a gathering in Michigan in 2014 that some school reformers are like zombies that are "[eating our children's brains](#)."

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

In an important piece which focuses on San Diego, American Enterprise Institute fellow Ian Rowe writes that "The soft bigotry of 'anti-racist' expectations is damaging to Black and White kids alike."

In the first semester of the 2019–20 school year, the San Diego Unified school district board discovered that 20 percent of Black students had received a D or F grade. In comparison, 7 percent of White students earned the same failing marks. School officials decided that the 13 percent racial disparity was a function of systemic racism, requiring an "honest reckoning as a school district."

In October, that "reckoning" led the San Diego board to vote unanimously to "interrupt these discriminatory grading practices." Rather than attempt to replicate the factors empowering the 80 percent of Black students who achieved passing grades, the board's first action to "be an

anti-racist school district” was to dumb down the grading system for all. Under the new protocols, all 106,000 San Diego students are no longer required to hand in their homework on time. Moreover, teachers are now prohibited from factoring a student’s classroom behavior when formulating an academic grade.

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

Just in time for “[National School Choice Week](#),” which begins this Sunday, Diane Ravitch writes about “[The Dark History of School Choice](#)” in the current *New York Review of Books*.

Reviewing several books on the subject, she does correctly cite a few circumstances where the push for the privatization of schools was used to promote racial segregation, but her 3,700-word tirade is very light on facts, and is instead primarily an excuse to bash Betsy DeVos, Christianity and free market policies in education.

As director of policy at EdChoice Jason Bedrick notes, there have been [seven studies examining the effect of private school choice on racial integration](#). Six found positive effects and one showed no significant statistical difference. Another important piece of data absent from Ravitch’s screed is that a recent American Federation for Children poll conducted by Beck Research – a Democratic polling firm – finds that nationally, school choice is very popular with [Latinos – 82 percent support it, while African-Americans are 68 percent in favor](#). It is important to note that this poll was taken in January 2020, before the teacher unions pushed school districts into ditching in-person learning.

To read more on the subject, go [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Due to union “opt-out windows,” which are very possibly illegal, this may be the time to quit if you are planning to do so. If you have any questions about the process, or have experienced any problems because of your decision to leave your union, please let us know and we will do our best to help you – possibly getting you legal assistance, if necessary. We will also be able to share your concerns with other teachers across the state. And talking about sharing, please pass this email along to your colleagues and encourage them to join us.

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.

Sincerely,
Larry Sand
CTEN President