



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.

March 17, 2021

Dear Colleague,

I recently took part in a townhall which centered on the current lockdown situation in California. One of the participants, Dr. Mark McDonald, a psychiatrist, spoke eloquently about the tragic consequences of social isolation for many children. Here are a few transcribed notes:

I've never in 10 years in my practice seen this level of rapid degeneration of an entire population. And sadly, it's also been since March, the first time in my career that I've lost a patient due to unnatural causes – two in fact – one in March right after the schools closed and then a second one just two weeks ago, the child of a prominent public figure, Dr. Laura Berman, who's on radio and television as a psychologist, lost her 15 year old son who was one of my patients after he had drugs delivered to his home via an app on Snapchat in Santa Monica while his parents were cooking hamburgers down below, he popped what he thought was a Xanax, but was laced with fentanyl. When his mother went up to check on him, she found him lying face down on the floor in his own vomit.

...This boy was not even depressed or anxious. He was a garden variety ADHD kid who was bored because he was sheltering at home, so that he could be safer at home, and it was while he was safer at home that they lost their child.

...I know for a fact that this is happening all over the country, and a lot of it isn't even being reported. In Las Vegas, the suicide rate for kids doubled this academic year from nine to 18.

...I've heard reports from pediatricians on the east coast, the midwest and Texas that they're losing patients right and left as well. So, both empirically and anecdotally, and also from my own clinical experience, we're losing children, and we're losing them due to school closures.

...Well, mathematically and statistically speaking it's fairly complex and I won't go into the details here. If anyone is nerdy enough to want to look into it, they can read the data tables. But essentially, for the layman this publication that came out in November of 2020 from JAMA, the Journal of American Medical Association, which is one of the three or four key academic medical journals in the country; this is not a sideshow This is like a Lancet in terms of its

veracity and respectability in the community, found that specifically with primary school aged children, keeping kids at home, meaning keeping kids away from school by closing them actually shortens their lifespan.

To see Dr. McDonald's entire talk, go [here](#).

Regarding reopening schools, there are a few rays of hope here in California. California public schools will receive financial incentives to reopen campuses by April 1st for their youngest and most vulnerable students under a deal Gov. Gavin Newsom and legislative leaders announced on March 1st. Not everyone is happy about the move, however.

Under the plan, schools are not required to reopen. Decisions [still rest](#) with school boards, administrators and labor unions, so it is unclear whether the deal will actually result in widespread campus reopenings.

Prompted by parents who have been protesting school closures, Newsom and Democrats who control the Legislature said they hope that the [\\$6.6 billion compromise](#) will prod public schools to reopen after most campuses have been closed for nearly a year.

"We expect that all of our (transitional kindergarten) to (grade) two classrooms will open, and then the next month, we want to see more happen beyond that," Newsom said during a press conference at an elementary school in Elk Grove. "We're now accelerating the pace of reopening."

But parent activists blasted the plan, saying they fear it will not compel enough schools to reopen.

"This isn't a breakthrough, it's a failure," said a statement from Pat Reilly, a parent advocate with the Open Schools California group who has children that attend Berkeley schools.

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

The United Teachers of Los Angeles was also not happy with the decision.

The United Teachers of Los Angeles' strong condemnation is a bad sign for Newsom and Democrats who spent months working to strike a deal on legislation they believe will spur districts to reopen. Los Angeles Unified is the second largest district in the nation with about 600,000 students — and by far the largest in the state with roughly 10 percent of California's public schoolchildren.

"We are being unfairly targeted by people who are not experiencing this disease in the same ways as students and families are in our communities. If this was a rich person's disease, we would've seen a very different response. We would not have the high rates of infections and deaths," UTLA President Cecily Myart-Cruz said at a news conference Monday. "Now educators are asked instead to sacrifice ourselves, the safety of our students and the safety of our schools."

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

On the school choice front, district lockdowns have led legislators across the country to pass parental choice legislation. Per the [Educational Freedom Institute](#), there are currently 29 states that have active legislation, the aim of which is to fund students instead of school systems. It is interesting to note that, while red states with weaker teachers unions are over-represented on the list, there certainly is a blue state presence. Massachusetts, Oregon, Minnesota, Maryland and Washington have Educational Savings Account legislation in the hopper, and lawmakers are considering a tax credit scholarship proposal in Connecticut.

Unions are fighting back, however. Teachers in Indiana wore black on Feb. 24 to [protest three school choice bills](#) that are being considered in the state legislature. Also, when the pandemic first hit in March 2020, the Oregon Education Association successfully [lobbied](#) to make it illegal for families to switch to virtual charter schools. Here in the Golden State, the California Teachers Association-influenced legislature passed [Senate Bill 98](#) in late June. The trailer bill effectively put a moratorium on new charter school enrollments by capping per-student state funding to last year's funding levels. Had the legislators not done that, charter school enrollments would be surging now.

In a recent survey, Beck Research reports [across-the-board support for school choice policies](#). Released in January, the Democratic polling outfit found that 65 percent of k-12 parents back school choice. Also, 74 percent of African-Americans and 71 percent of Latinos, groups that stand to gain most from choice, are staunch supporters.

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

The ethnic studies battle rages on in California. The *Los Angeles Times* editorial board writes, "California's ethnic studies curriculum is controversial and a little sloppy — but much improved."

Now in its third draft, California's model ethnic studies curriculum for high schools has been stripped of its narrow ideological lens, its divisive victimization narratives and even its impenetrable academic jargon (e.g., "misogynoir" and "cisheteropatriarchy"). Also gone are the phrases equating capitalism with racism and the glowing, one-sided description of the controversial Boycott, Divest and Sanction movement against Israel. It wisely emphasizes more independent research and critical thinking by students.

Of course, various interest groups, including Arab and Jewish associations, have registered objections to the new draft, which state schools Supt. Tony Thurmond requested last year. Several of the original authors, meanwhile, have said they want their names taken off the document, considering it a watered-down version of the more fiery curriculum they had favored. Racial and ethnic issues are bound to ignite passionate disagreement, which is fine. In fact, that's one of the most important reasons why students should be taught this subject in the first place.

But Wenyuan Wu, executive director at Californians for Equal Rights, has a different take.

The current form of ethnic studies in California, the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC), stokes racial divisions and animosity by subjugating our society to a binary, race-based lens and by perverting our nation's complex history with a narrow framework of identity politics. Racial balkanization, the toxic practice of separating individuals into hostile racial boxes, has fueled this paradigm. Marxism is also referenced here, not to inspire collectivization of all ethnicities to serve "proletariat" governance, but to exaggerate disparities for a clear-cut, race-based "oppressor-victim" dichotomy.

Perspectives on Asian-American history, for instance, reek of victimhood mentality and divisiveness. The ESMC sample lesson on "Chinese Railroad Workers" starts with a presupposition that Chinese laborers' contributions to American infrastructure have been overlooked to "exemplify the white supremacy view of US history." Then, it advises students to comprehend the construction and power interplay of the transcontinental railroads project through "systems of power" and "racism and exploitation."

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

There are groups springing up that are fighting against the more radical aspects of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. For example, The Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism (FAIR) is a "nonpartisan organization dedicated to advancing civil rights and liberties for all Americans, and promoting a common culture based on fairness, understanding and humanity." FAIR's core beliefs are as follows:

- *We defend civil liberties and rights guaranteed to each individual, including freedom of speech and expression, equal protection under the law, and the right to personal privacy.*
- *We advocate for individuals who are threatened or persecuted for speech, or who are held to a different set of rules for language or conduct based on their skin color, ancestry, or other immutable characteristics.*
- *We support respectful disagreement. We believe bad ideas are best confronted with good ideas – and never with dehumanization, deplatforming or blacklisting.*
- *We believe that objective truth exists, that it is discoverable, and that scientific research must be untainted by any political agenda.*
- *We are pro-human, and promote compassionate anti-racism rooted in dignity and our common humanity.*

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

Vooks is a kid-safe, ad-free streaming library of read-aloud animated storybooks. There are currently over a million teachers globally who avail themselves of the company's service. The founders are passionate about engaging kids' love of learning and reading, and they developed a tool that keep children on task. If you decide to join, you can get three free months by entering ***aplus*** in the code box.

For more info, go [here](#).

If you have 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.

Sincerely,
Larry Sand
CTEN President