

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

PARENTS VS. TEACHERS: STUDENTS WILL END UP LOSING

What began as a schoolyard squabble is now a full-fledged fistfight.

I'm speaking, of course, of the conflict between parents and teachers as we enter the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic and economic lockdown.

On one side, frustrated parents watch helplessly, seeing firsthand the high cost of remote learning over a prolonged period of time — from rising rates of depression to increased anxiety to lost learning, as their students fall behind.

A December 2020 report by McKinsey & Company says the parents' concerns are well-founded.

The study projects that students, on average, could lose five to nine months of learning by the end of June 2021. Students of color could be six to 12 months behind, compared with four to eight months for White students. And these learning losses are likely to be compounded over time.

Only about half of students nationwide are now attending public schools that offer traditional, full-time schedules. One quarter of schools are still virtual only. And, in some households,

this situation has led to rebellion, with parents deciding to take matters into their own hands.

Worried about the ineffectiveness of online instruction and the negative effects of continued isolation, families are increasingly turning to private schools, home-schooling, and pandemic pods — small groups of students who study and socialize together. Rather than wait and see what happens in the fall, some families are relocating to states where schools are open.

If families abandon public education, it will devastate school budgets, which are tied to the number of children enrolled. Dips in funding could force districts to cut extracurricular activities or auxiliary services like tutoring.

But the reality is this: Packing up and leaving — whether that means sending your child to a local private school or moving out of state — is only a viable option for families with financial means.

Dr. Rudy Castruita is a professor of clinical education and the Irving R. and Virginia Archer Melbo Chair in Education Administration at the USC Rossier School of Education. Castruita, a

member of the National Conflict Resolution Center board of directors, once served as the San Diego County superintendent of schools. Castruita said that the pandemic is amplifying the crisis of “haves” and “have nots” in public education, exacerbating what has been a well-documented learning gap.

In some areas of the country, Castruita observed, students are without reliable Internet connectivity — even if they have a laptop to use. Their parents may be unavailable or unable to help with their schooling, due to work schedules or language barriers or both. Yet many of these same parents are reluctant to send their children back to school — especially in communities of color, where rates of coronavirus are higher.

On the other side of this conflict — and equally entrenched — are worried teachers, who wonder whether and when to open schools, and what measures can be put in place to ensure their safety.

Randi Weingarten is president of the American Federation of Teachers.

During a recent appearance on

NBC's “Meet the Press,” she outlined a return-to-school road map that includes regular and rapid COVID-19 testing as a “way of life” in schools; safety protocols like masks, physical distancing and ventilation upgrades; and vaccine prioritization for teachers and staff.

According to Weingarten, 85 percent of teachers say they would feel comfortable returning to their classrooms if these recommendations were followed.

It all sounds good — in theory. As Castruita noted, school districts face logistical challenges. Maintaining 6 feet of distance between desks could make it hard to serve all students five days per week. In the average classroom, this distancing requirement translates to 16 students per class, half the norm. Some districts may use outside facilities, but that comes with added expense — both for the facilities and the teachers to staff them.

Then there is air quality. Many schools have inefficient heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems. Opening classroom windows to increase air circulation isn't a practical year-round solu-

tion, especially in colder climates.

Castruita believes that COVID will continue to be a factor in schools, well into 2023 and beyond. And the new normal may look very different from the old normal, as long-standing assumptions about the delivery of instruction continue to shift.

Ultimately then, this massive disruption could lead to even better outcomes for students as we adopt new and more effective approaches to education. In the meantime, however, parents and teachers should keep in mind their common interest: inspiring students to want to learn.

That's just what we do in successful mediations, as it turns out. Even when adversaries are dug in to their respective positions, often we can break the deadlock by identifying a shared goal.

It's a practical lesson worth remembering, by everyone — especially now.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCR's programming, visit nrcrcenter.com

SMOLENS Third of state electricity renewable

FROM B1
According to The Mercury
News.

Beyond the carbon-reducing benefits, Chiu said his Assembly Bill 525 would create 14,000 jobs. The measure has been endorsed by the State Building and Construction Trades Council of California, which represents 500,000 construction workers.

The group Environment California also has endorsed the bill. Other environmental organizations, while generally supportive of wind power, say more needs to be understood about how the proposed projects would affect marine life before they take a position. Still others have expressed outright opposition.

Commercial fishing organizations also have expressed concerns about whether the wind farms would put fishing areas off limits.

According to one report, the Navy has expressed a willingness to make the wind farms happen. The Department of Defense raised concerns about initial proposals to place wind turbines off Morro Bay and Diablo Canyon on the Central Coast because they could interfere with opera-



Windmills at a utility plant in Atlantic City, N.J. New Jersey committed itself in November to building a transmission system capable of handling enough offshore wind energy to power 3.2 million homes.

tions. That was not considered an issue with a third location off Humboldt County.

But after discussions, those sites were refined last year and appeared to be more acceptable to the Navy.

In an interview with Greentech Media, Steve Chung, the Navy's encroachment program director for the Southwest region, said wind farms in the zones identified in the new map could still affect operations, but added that those conflicts could be managed “with long-term protective measures and additional collaboration with some of our partners.”

“DOD is committed to

moving forward with the dialogue, committed to being part of the solution toward helping California and our agency partners achieve their goals,” Chung said.

However, Greentech also reported that potential wind farm developers said there wouldn't be enough space at the Central Coast sites to create a viable market.

The Humboldt location raises different questions. Once energy is sent ashore via cable, how will it be transmitted far away? The entire county has a population of about 135,000 people and nearby counties also are sparsely populated. The region doesn't need a lot

more power and the grid up there can't handle much, but it doesn't need to. The idea would be to send the wind-generated electricity south to the San Francisco Bay Area.

But building heavy transmission lines over the rugged terrain there would be a logistical challenge and run into environmental concerns. There has been some discussion about laying an undersea cable south where it can connect with more substantial electricity infrastructure. Central Coast operations could hook up to infrastructure created for decommissioned power plants.

The three locations, some 20 to 30 miles off the

coast, come with another logistical challenge: deep water. Most wind farm structures around the world are sunk into the ocean floor. But that's not feasible with the depths at the California sites. Instead, the operations would use floating windmills anchored at the bottom of the sea.

The first operational floating wind farm launched in 2017 off the coast of Scotland, with turbines more than 570 feet above the surface of the water, according to Rob Nikolewski of The San Diego Union-Tribune.

The waters off the Central and Northern California coast are deemed most ideal for wind power for a variety of reasons. One is that the

Department of Defense has essentially ruled out Southern California because of extensive military installations and ocean activity.

Further, the targeted areas are known for consistent, strong winds that blow fairly steadily at night, according to Nikolewski. That, of course, is when solar energy production stops.

He added that if energy storage technology does not develop as quickly as anticipated, the state may rely more on offshore wind production when other emissions-free resources are not available.

California has been aggressive in addressing climate change and setting goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

About a third of California's electricity is generated from renewable sources, according to the California Energy Commission. The state has set targets of 60 percent by 2030 and 100 percent by 2045.

Advocates believe distant ocean wind can be a big part of getting California there.

Tweet of the Week

Goes to Kyle Griffin (@kylegriffin1), a senior producer at MSNBC.

“West Virginia Republican Gov. Jim Justice on CNN: I don't know really what the big rush to get rid of the mask is, because these masks have saved a lot, a lot of lives.”

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HOMELESS Official taking proposal to City Council

FROM B1
ple sleeping outdoors cannot be cited since they have no other place to sleep.

Rodriguez said his plan would create an opportunity for police to again enforce the law against sleeping outdoors. In some cases, a homeless person would have a choice between taking the voucher or being cited or arrested, he said.

“Our cops are not out there trying to arrest someone for being homeless, but there are individuals who are constantly causing issues,” he said about how the enforcement power could be used against people known to destroy public property, break into buildings and cause other problems.

Rodriguez also said the city's municipal code should prohibit putting tents on public property.

“We have a large population of homeless who are now setting up camps and tents in public spaces,” he said. “It's a lot more visible. The calls I'm getting from constituents about it (have)

increased.”

But Rodriguez said his plan isn't just about increased enforcement. He also is calling on the city to work with a nonprofit that will provide services at the shelter when it does open, and he wants the city to work with a variety of nonprofits, including ones that do not follow housing-first guidelines required by agencies funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Under housing-first, homeless people cannot be denied housing if they use drugs or have other issues. Proponents of the approach say providing a stable environment as a first step

makes recovery more likely, while opponents say housing first can perpetuate bad behavior and create unsafe environments for others living nearby.

Rodriguez said he also is open to the city exploring alternative forms of affordable housing, such as converted cargo crates or other small structures, and he wants services attached to them to help people become self-sufficient and healthy.

Rodriguez outlined parts of his plan in a letter that also blasted Mayor Esther Sanchez for comments she made in a San Diego Union-Tribune article about a homeless encampment on South Oceanside

Boulevard.

The article was about Rodney McGough, a homeless man who lives on the site and helps keep it clean while also trying to get mental health services to others in the encampment.

Sanchez said she appreciated the respectful way McGough was behaving and she said the site “looks pretty good.”

In the letter released on social media, Rodriguez said Sanchez's comments show she is out of touch with the situation, and he accused her of “kicking the can of homelessness down the road” without providing solutions.

Sanchez said Rodriguez

misunderstood her comments.

“I don't believe anybody wants homeless camps or shelters in public places,” she said. “I also am against that.”

Rodriguez and Sanchez appear in agreement about the need to increase enforcement. Sanchez said the city can begin enforcing laws about sleeping outside once a shelter opens, and she said staff members are working on a plan to provide temporary shelter until the permanent one opens.

Staff writer Phil Diehl contributed to this report.

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FARMLAND So far, 2,405 county acres preserved

FROM B1
cultural zones.

Zoning changes introduced in 2011 meant that some land was designated at lower density, allowing fewer homes per acre, and some landowners lost the right to subdivide land their property altogether.

The updated rules will remove properties' general plan status as an application criteria, so density and subdivision factors won't be part of the equation for eligibility. Instead, the new rules will prioritize a land's agricultural value, with a secondary emphasis on farmland that can serve as buffers to wildlife conservation areas.

Additional priorities will include a property's potential to reduce greenhouse gases, compatibility with neighboring land use, and voluntary wildlife enhance-



Ranch manager Amie March and her daughter Violet walk among the hop plants at the Star B Ranch and hop farm in Santa Isabel in August 2019.

ments.

The changes approved Wednesday also will add a monitoring process for land in the program, allowing the county to apply for state and federal grants for agricultural land conservation.

Officials hope the changes will increase participation in the program and sustain more agricultural lands in San Diego.

So far, 2,405 acres of farmland have been preserved through the program, with

\$6.5 million paid to land owners, Talleh said.

San Diego County's agricultural production totaled \$1.79 billion in 2019.

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ORDER Hearing set to seek recovery of legal fees

FROM B1
when I never did, nor did I have any intentions to. This is wrong and needs to be acknowledged as wrong. My financial life and personal life have suffered tremendously as a result.”

Bona and Breen filed what's called an anti-SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) motion against Schumacher asking the court to lift the restraining order.

“The public should feel free to use social media to criticize public officials without fear of having their First Amendment rights trampled by thin-skinned politicians,” said Scott Talkov, an attorney representing Breen.

“When you run for elected office, you sign up to be disliked for any reason or no reason, including reasons you'll never understand,”

Talkov said in an email.

Breen posted several commentaries on the decision on Facebook, include a live 15-minute commentary.

“Whatever our individual politics or attitudes toward the councilwoman, the use of the court system in this manner is just another piece of the delegitimization of public commenters, reporters and news outlets,” Breen said by email Friday.

“I could have gladly missed out on the experience, but SLAPP suits are a sad manifestation of broader issues in our country,” he said. “It needs to be discussed every time it occurs.”

The judge scheduled a hearing April 9 for motions expected from Bona and Breen seeking attorneys' fees.

Schumacher was first elected to an at-large council seat in 2016 and ran unsuccessfully for mayor in 2018. In a special March 2020 election, voters chose her to fill the District 1 seat left open by the resignation of former Councilwoman Barbara Hamilton, a term that expires in 2022.

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