

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

AS SCHOOL YEAR BEGINS, TEACHER POSITIONS GO UNFILLED

The return to school is in full swing for America's students. But not for America's teachers.

The media landscape is filled with reports of teacher shortages, preceded by adjectives like massive, dire and catastrophic. It seems to be a coast-to-coast problem.

In Florida, there are about 8,000 teacher vacancies, up from 5,000 at the start of school last year. In Illinois, 88 percent of school districts have reported teacher shortages, with a total of 2,040 openings (including positions filled with a "less than qualified" hire).

In Nevada, an estimated 3,000 positions (teachers and staff) remain unfilled across all 17 of the state's school districts.

Here in California, some schools are struggling to staff up. The gap has been filled in part by teachers who aren't credentialed in the particular subject matter they're teaching. EdSource, an education news organization, estimated that in the 2020-21 school year, this was true in nearly one in five California classrooms.

Teacher shortages have been reported in nearly all subjects,

including language arts, mathematics and science. A friend whose son attends a local high school told me that his English class this year is being taught by the baseball coach.

In The Atlantic, staff writer Derek Thompson recently took issue with the national teacher shortage narrative, saying it doesn't really match the numbers — and that the data are unreliable and confusing. Yes, teacher vacancies exist — especially in rural and high-poverty school districts — but that's been going on for decades.

As Thompson explained, "In some districts, there are too many students for the staff. In other districts, there aren't enough students for the budget. One district might be struggling to find English teachers, while another district might only be struggling to find substitute ESL teachers.

Thinking about these as equivalent phenomena is nonsensical."

Still, Thompson acknowledged that American teachers have real problems that deserve our attention. I agree.

There are three equally impor-

tant realities at play: in families, in workplaces and in the broader market. Each must be addressed, if we're to find a path forward.

Family realities: For teachers whose children aren't yet school age, the return to in-person instruction has meant a frantic search for quality, convenient and affordable childcare.

A report released earlier this year by the San Diego Foundation found that the annual cost of care for one infant at a licensed facility is \$19,000 on average, rising to more than \$33,000 for two children.

For the median household here, that's 40 percent of their income.

So, for some teachers — like other parents — staying home is an economic decision. But it's a quality decision, too, considering that 90 percent of providers in the study reported difficulty in hiring and retaining qualified staff.

Workplace realities: About 75 percent of pre-K to grade 12 teachers who participated in the latest American Federation of Teachers survey reported that conditions have changed for the worse over the past five years.

It's not just the usual stressors

— like workload, for example. It's also about a loss of autonomy, as parents seek to control what is taught and even read in classrooms. And what teacher could ignore the very real threat of gun violence in their workplace?

In addition, many of the nation's schools are ill-equipped for 21st century learning — and even, unsafe.

In Columbus, Ohio, a conceptual agreement was just reached to end a teacher's strike.

Among their grievances, teachers were seeking commitments to improve heating and air conditioning in dilapidated buildings.

Marketplace realities: A new study from the Economic Policy Institute, an independent nonprofit think tank, found that teachers are paid less (in weekly wages and total compensation) than their nonteacher college-educated counterparts — a situation that has worsened considerably over the last two decades.

The so-called "teacher pay penalty" discourages college students from entering the teaching profession and makes it difficult for school districts to keep current teachers in the classroom

— especially when there's an abundance of well-paying jobs that are unfilled.

States and school districts are responding to these realities in innovative (and in some cases, questionable) ways.

Florida is recruiting uncredentialed and unlicensed military veterans to teach in its schools. Georgia and other states are courting retired teachers.

Rural school districts in Texas are moving to a four-day work week. And across the country, there is a movement to improve compensation by paying bonuses to teachers for taking a job and staying on it.

These well-intentioned measures will likely meet with varying degrees of success. But they don't address the biggest gap in American education today: our loss of respect for the teaching profession. Restoring that respect is an assignment we can't afford to ignore.

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 NCRC's programming, visit ncrconline.com

MOVE • Mobile clinic can provide veterinary care at more affordable prices

FROM B1 the community, rather than shelter animals.

At its San Diego campus on Thursdays and Fridays as well as the mobile unit that travels to various neighborhoods on Wednesdays and Saturdays, clinic staff provide pet exams, vaccinations, flea medications and other basic sick care for conditions ranging from ear infections to dermatitis.

Thus far, they've done everything from giving months-old puppies and kittens their first shots to caring for a 15-year-old cat diagnosed with cancer years earlier.



Dr. Geoffrey Ball examines a cat named Ruby and gave her vaccinations recently. Ruby's owner Gabriel Galbraith took a taxi to the Valencia Park mobile clinic from San Ysidro.

The program also provides low-cost spay or neuter services, along with vouchers to help owners defray the cost of veterinary care at partner clinics.

Services are intended to be affordable to pet owners in need of support, but to reduce barriers to access, proof of need isn't required.

"It's very convenient, especially for people that can't afford care because it's expensive," said North Park resident Michael Felley, who brought his two dogs to the clinic for shots and wellness exams. He said he had called numerous private clinics to inquire about pricing but found no other affordable options.

With the program, the organization is targeting lower-income neighborhoods, as well as areas where its intake data show many of the animals in its shelters are coming from.

"The two biggest reasons people don't get veterinary care are, No. 1, finances and,

No. 2, accessibility," Ball said. "A lot of the neighborhoods that are under-resourced — with food, with medical care, with anything — are also under-resourced with veterinary care. When you go outside, just look around and see where the next veterinary clinic is. The short answer is there is none."

In the program's initial rollout, the mobile clinic will primarily travel to neighbor-

hoods in and around southeastern San Diego, such as Barrio Logan, Lincoln Park and Valencia Park, twice a week, as well as to nearby communities in Mexico once per month.

The program will gradually expand to other areas where the Humane Society identifies a need, including to San Ysidro next month, Hedge says.

Gabriel Galbraith took a

taxi to the Valencia Park mobile clinic from San Ysidro to bring his 4-month-old kitten, Ruby, to get her vaccinations.

"I think it's wonderful," he said of the program. "To get a discount as a low-income senior is really quite appreciated."

Galbraith said it's extremely important to him to ensure Ruby is cared for properly. "I'm very attached

to her," he added. "She's quite special."

A model for community care

Already, the Humane Society expects the program, started with the help of a \$100,000 grant from PetSmart Charities, to help 10,000 pets and owners.

But Ball said that's just the beginning. He aspires to add two or three veterinarians so they can expand the

program to more areas.

He also hopes it will serve as a model for how shelters nationwide can create a more humane world by providing low-cost veterinary services directly to those who need them most.

With all the essential supplies needed to care for animals and relatively low overhead costs, the mobile clinic can provide treatment at a much more affordable rate than traditional veterinary clinics, Ball explained. He also wants to provide care that relies on experienced veterinarians' judgment before jumping to more expensive diagnostic tools.

But like a brick-and-mortar clinic, his staff is committed to the communities it serves, building trust and relationships between pets, owners and vets. His goal: to become people's regular veterinarian.

"We're going to the same communities over and over, so when people need to find us, they know where to go," Ball said. "It's not just one-time care — we want to be here for people all the time."

Meanwhile, the Humane Society is reducing adoption fees this month for dogs, cats, kittens and small pets during a nationwide campaign to "Clear the Shelters." Now through Aug. 31, dog, cat or kitten adoptions are \$20, and small pets are \$5.

To learn more about the Humane Society's new community veterinary program or make an appointment, visit sdhumane.org/cvp or call (619) 299-7012.

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SMOLENS

FROM B1 defining dynamic in the handful of swing congressional districts in California that Republicans are hoping to capture as they seek to regain the majority in the House of Representatives.

The Berkeley IGS poll says 71 percent of those surveyed would vote yes on Proposition 1, the constitutional amendment that says "The state shall not deny or interfere with an individual's reproductive freedom in their most intimate decisions, which includes their fundamental right to choose to have an abortion and their fundamental right to choose or refuse contraceptives."

Huge majorities of Democrats and independents support the measure — 89 percent and 74 percent, respectively — but only 35 percent of Republicans.

GOP critics argued that California already has some of the strongest abortion rights protections of any state in the nation and the amendment was superfluous. But a constitutional amendment has stronger legal standing than a statute and can only be changed by

another public vote.

"Here in California nothing will change, certainly no time soon," said Republican Brian Maryott after the court decision overturning Roe. The former San Juan Capistrano mayor, who opposes abortion, is running against Democratic Rep. Mike Levin in the competitive 49th Congressional District, which straddles the San Diego-Orange County line.

Maryott's probably right about that, given the Democrats' dominance. But political trends can shift over time, as the decades-long Republican slide in California shows.

The Berkeley IGS survey breaks down voter response to the constitutional amendment by region, but not by specific congressional districts. In San Diego County, 71 percent of voters said they support Proposition 1. In Orange County, 69 percent of voters back the amendment.

Abortion rights supporters are feeling threatened not only by the Supreme Court ruling, but the prospect of a federal abortion ban should Republicans gain control in Washington — not to mention existing bans and restrictions in



Gov. Gavin Newsom and state Sen. Toni Atkins are primary supporters of Proposition 1.

many Republican states. So suggesting Proposition 1 is a mere political ploy is a tough sell.

Democrats are looking to capitalize on the voter motivation depicted in the new poll.

"These numbers are encouraging, but we can't leave anything to chance," Senate President Pro Tempore Atkins said on Twitter Thursday. "More than ever,

we need voters to turn out and vote #YesOnProp1..."

The poll comes at a time when national political coverage that for months depicted a "red wave" as nearly unstoppable now questions whether one really exists.

Various events have triggered this shift in analysis, including Democrat Pat Ryan's victory in a special New York congressional

election last week that was focused on abortion, and the overwhelming voter rejection of a measure in Kansas that would have allowed the legislature to ban the procedure.

The New York Times noted that there have been five special congressional elections since the court's decision, and Democrats have outperformed President Joe Biden's 2020 showing in four of them. In the fifth district, Alaska's at-large House special election, the ranked-choice voting count is not complete, but they appear poised to outperform him there as well.

The threat to abortion rights clearly has boosted Democratic political fortunes, but keep in mind how long the odds were against them holding on to one or both houses of Congress just a short while ago. A lot of fundamentals still work in the GOP's favor, including concern over inflation and crime, distrust of government and unhappiness with the direction of the country.

Then there's the history of the party out of power in Washington picking up seats in midterm elections — and Republicans only need five to win the majority in the

House. It would be remarkable if they don't succeed.

Nevertheless, Republicans are working to build defenses on abortion attacks. They have pointed to polls that show various levels of restrictions have greater public support than banning it under all circumstances.

In Washington state, Democratic Sen. Patty Murray has claimed her Republican opponent Tiffany Smiley would support legislation outlawing abortion nationwide. Smiley recently put out an ad in which she says that while she's opposed to abortion, she does not support a federal ban.

Don't be surprised if we see more of that.

Tweet of the Week

Goes to Benjy Sarlin (@BenjySarlin), policy editor at NBC News.

"Does seem worth noting student loan forgiveness comes after the biggest series of deficit-financed relief measures in history for basically everyone* under the sun."

(*Including members of Congress.)

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EVENT

FROM B1 versity published last year found that in fiscal 2017, ultra-processed foods like frozen pizzas, soda and breakfast cereals made up 57 percent of Americans' diets on average — up from 53.5 percent in fiscal 2001.

"There's a huge opportunity there for change and to be looking at these types of factors, which could be help-

ing reduce risk going forward," Sexton said.

Following Sexton's speech, the audience heard research details from three local scientists whose studies were supported by grant funding from the nonprofit.

UC San Diego's Amy Jak spoke of her research looking at the connections between activity levels and cognition in at-risk adults, and how combining behavioral interventions can impact outcomes for those di-

agnosed with mild cognitive impairment.

Dr. Anne Hiniker, another researcher from UC San Diego, discussed how studying human brain tissue helps map the impact of Alzheimer's compared with progressive supranuclear palsy, which like Alzheimer's, is another neurodegenerative condition also associated with tau protein clumps.

The Salk Institute for Biological Studies' Isabel Salas discussed her research

on rat brain tissue as an initial step into seeing how dementia impacts the brain's astrocytes — large star-shaped cells that hold nerve cells in place.

The speakers during the town hall also reiterated the importance of more people volunteering for research studies, adding that this is especially important for people of color, who are disproportionately affected by dementia, less likely to receive early diagnoses and

often underrepresented in scientific research. People interested in participating in dementia research can connect to studies through the nonprofit's online TrialMatch platform.

Janet Hamada Kelley, the local chapter's executive director, said that events like the town hall are held to show continued support of those living with dementia and their family caregivers, while also giving them some hope for the future.

"While Alzheimer's and other dementias are a devastating disease, it was heartening to see the audience so interested and focused on the presentation," she said.

Video and slides from the Research Town Hall will be made available online this week. For more information about the local Alzheimer's Association chapter, visit alz.org/sandiego or call (619) 678-8322.

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