



On Target

AFT Local #2569

September 2020



Clarence Teachers Make the Difference

September 21, 2020

Justice Ginsburg left indelible mark on equity, education

Author: Liza Frenette

Source: NYSUT Communications



Caption: Photo illustration via NEA.

In vigils around the country, mourners honored Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg — her life, her 27 years of service on the Supreme Court and the gains she helped achieve for education, women's rights, and desegregation, among many other achievements.

Teachers and students were among those who spoke out sorrowfully and hopefully at some of the New York State vigils, talking about Ginsburg's role as a stalwart vote for sex equity in schools, desegregation, and separation of church and state.

In the North Country, an online candlelit vigil for the Brooklyn-born Supreme Court justice drew educators, students, local and state judges, and U.S. Rep. Paul Tonko, D-Amsterdam, who has spoken of her legacy of justice.

Prior to her appointment to the Supreme Court by President Bill Clinton, Ginsburg had worked as a professor at Columbia University and Rutgers University at a time when no firm in New York City would hire a female lawyer.

National Education Association President Becky Pringle called out Ginsburg's role as an educator.

"As educators, we know that she is now considered, and always will be, a teacher and champion of racial and social justice. Her loss is more than a seat on the nine-justice Supreme Court; her loss is devastating and will be felt for generations. NEA members will honor her legacy by redoubling our efforts to fight for justice," said Pringle.

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten said Justice Ginsburg is an icon, calling her loss "incalculable."

"Long before she became notorious, she broke barriers most never even dreamed to approach. Her unfailing sense of justice reminded us of its awesome power, and her unbending sense of duty reminded us to remain committed to protecting our democracy, our Constitution and the rule of law," Weingarten said.

Ginsburg weighed in on numerous notable education cases, including:

- *United States v. Virginia*, the 1996 case that struck down the state's exclusion of women from the Virginia Military Institute. "A prime part of the history of our Constitution ... is the story of the extension of constitutional rights and protections to people once ignored or excluded," Ginsburg wrote for the court. "There is no reason to believe that the admission of women capable of all the activities required of VMI cadets would destroy the Institute rather than enhance its capacity to serve the 'more perfect Union.'"
- *Missouri v. Jenkins*, her first opinion in an education case. Justice Ginsburg joined the principal dissent in a 5-4 decision that overturned a sweeping desegregation plan for the Kansas City, Mo., school district after only seven years. "Given the deep, inglorious history of segregation in Missouri, to curtail desegregation at this time and in this manner is an action at once too swift and too soon," Ginsburg wrote.

Message from our President

09/19/2020

‘Back to school’ like never before

by Randi Weingarten
President, American Federation of Teachers

“Back to school” has never looked like this. Classes in three-quarters of the 100 largest school districts are entirely online, even though more than 16 million students in the United States lack internet access. Parents are struggling to help their children learn and also do their own jobs, while some families with means are forming learning pods. People who used to laud virtual charter schools, even Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, now champion in-school instruction. President Donald Trump occasionally tweets “OPEN THE SCHOOLS!!!” But he has put less effort into helping schools get the funding and support to reopen safely than he’s put into those tweets. To date, 6.7 million Americans have been infected with COVID-19, 500,000 of whom are children, and nearly 200,000 Americans have died. It is unconscionable to pit life against learning in this way.



Weingarten, top, and participants in the AFT’s “Teaching in the Time of COVID-19” webinar. Photo credit: AFT

Trump’s response to the coronavirus has been chaotic, contradictory and inept. Without federal guidance or funding, we’ve seen a patchwork of school reopening plans. Teachers unions throughout the country have reached creative and innovative agreements to meet the instructional and safety challenges. But in Florida, Georgia, Indiana and elsewhere, many schools had to close days after

they reopened, after outbreaks of COVID-19. Now, like nursing homes and meatpacking plants early in the pandemic, college campuses are COVID-19 hotspots.

Trump has failed us. He lied about the coronavirus instead of working to contain it. He politicized the wearing of lifesaving masks. He said kids don't get COVID-19, and that it would disappear. He admits that he deliberately downplayed its risks to prevent "panic." Now, because he and DeVos have done nothing to plan and provide resources to reopen schools safely, many families are, indeed, panicking. Kids not being in school is hard for everyone. But it is a crisis for many families—for essential workers and others who can't stay home, children with disabilities, vulnerable families and those without the necessary technology. The only guidance DeVos has issued for this year is to mandate standardized high-stakes tests. How is it that kids' and teachers' health is dispensable, but high-stakes testing is not?

Despite this chaos and disruption, parents and educators view going back to school similarly. The AFT, the NAACP, the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools and the League of United Latin American Citizens commissioned a new poll that found majorities of both parents and teachers believe protecting the health of students and staff should be the primary factor in weighing whether, how and when schools should open their doors for in-person instruction. Majorities of both parents and teachers are not comfortable starting the school year in-person, and they worry that their districts will reopen schools too quickly, risking the safety of students, families and school staff. But when safety precautions such as masks, hand washing, daily deep cleaning, physical distancing and proper ventilation, and the funding to do all this, are in place—which the AFT has been fighting for since April—71 percent of parents and 79 percent of teachers are comfortable returning to school.

Those precautions are not in place in many schools. In Florida, the governor ordered all schools to reopen for in-person instruction, even as coronavirus hotspots flare in the state and infections among school-age children have jumped 34 percent. In response, the AFT and the Florida Education Association sued to allow remote instruction until community transmission is lowered and health and safety provisions are in place. In Texas, state officials are reporting coronavirus infections only at the district level, often with delays; to address this, the Texas AFT launched an online tool so teachers and others can track confirmed cases at individual school sites.

The AFT and our affiliates have been working to reopen schools safely since they closed last March. The AFT released our initial "Plan to Safely Reopen Schools" in April and updated guidance in August. The United Federation of Teachers, our New York City affiliate, engaged independent medical and public

health experts to develop a 50-item plan for the health and safety standards schools must meet before they open. And it negotiated a new reopening schedule to give additional time to ensure New York City schools are safe. The Boston Teachers Union just reached an agreement with the district that includes increased testing for school staff, independent air-quality tests in school buildings, more training on remote learning, and verification of health and safety measures before schools will be cleared to reopen. And we are working with Congress and telecommunications companies to connect more students and households—through internet service, computers, modems and Wi-Fi hotspots.

Teachers are working harder than ever to make both remote and in-person teaching and learning effective, engaging and equitable. We know that in-person learning and interactions are best for students, so we'll keep fighting for the resources and health protocols necessary to return to school as quickly and safely as possible.

Editor's Note

Each month the On Target will come out near the end of the month.

If you have something that you would like included, please send as a Word document by the 20th of the month to: lpanek@clarenceschools.org

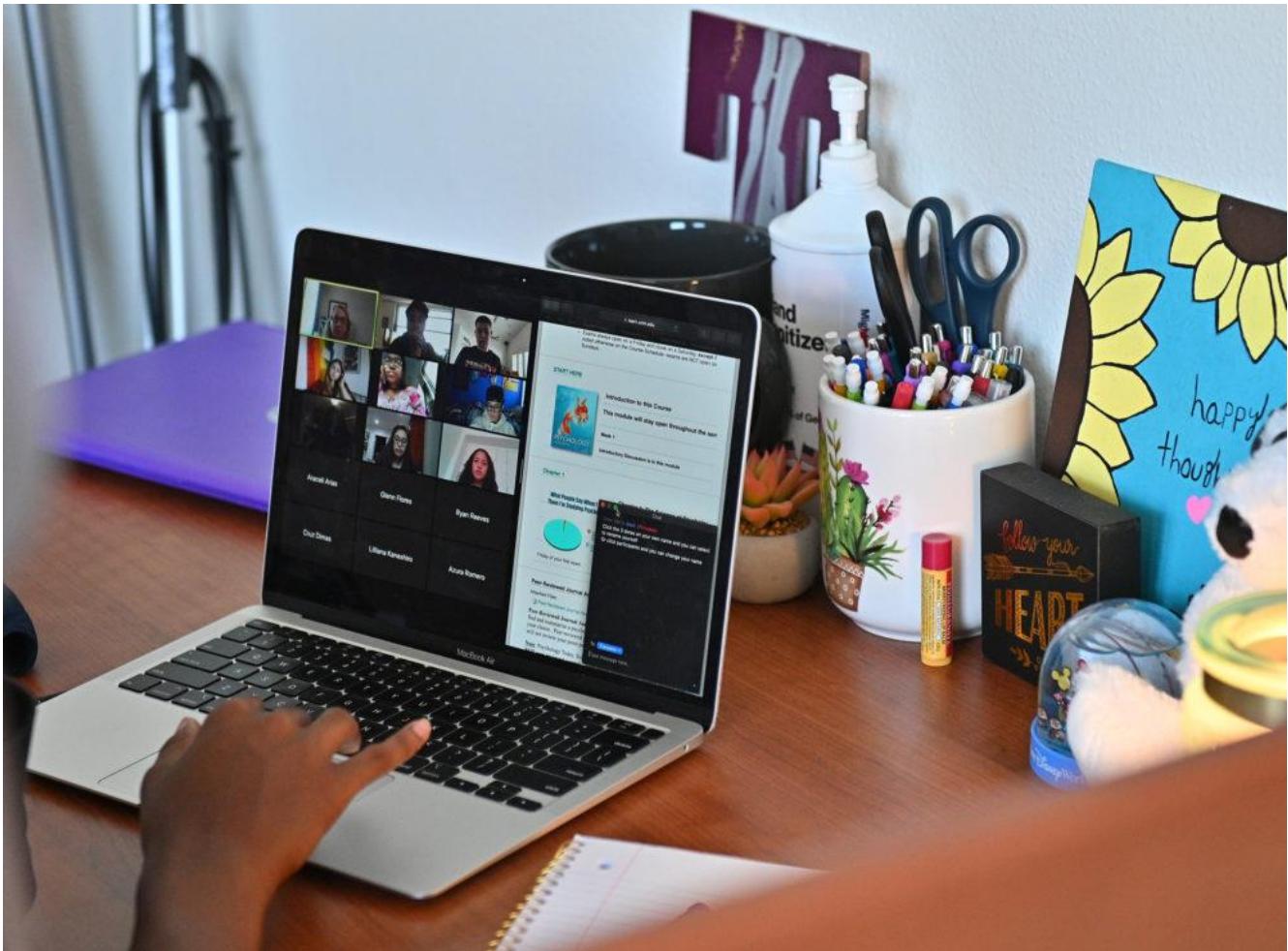
Items that could be included are: Articles dealing with education/unions, Good ideas for teaching, something humorous/light dealing with education, Information for sharing, Opinion pieces on education, Advertisement for a service you provide.

Thank you,
Lisa Panek



• Lessons

Some Lessons Zoom Can't Teach



A Zoom meeting for an 'Introduction to Psychology' course is displayed on a laptop as classes begin amid the coronavirus pandemic on the first day of the fall 2020 semester at the University of New Mexico on Aug. 17, 2020 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. (Sam Wasson/Getty Images)

School sucks, ask any kid.

But it turns out the only thing worse is not being able to go back to school — and using Zoom.

"All you're doing is just staring at a screen all day and not doing anything else," says 10-year-old Nicholas Orlando Gonzales.

At his school in Philadelphia, he says he partakes in fun activities with his friends. In contrast, remote learning is "like being tortured by the internet," he told The Pulse's high school student reporter Kaitlyn Rodriguez, who's also his cousin.

On the one hand, like lots of adults, he's scared of the coronavirus because he feels he's "too young to die."

But Nicholas misses his friends, and he talked about his best friend, Akim: how they used to hang out all the time and how they were fourth graders together but now they're technically fifth graders. Only now, they're not together really.

Not seeing his teachers and friends makes him sad, he says. To cope with his emotions, he rests and cries until he feels he needs to stop.

For kids like Nicholas, remote learning is all the boring parts of school without any of the fun little moments that make it worthwhile. There's no more joking around in the few minutes between sitting down and the teacher demanding they turn to this page or that. The locker room razzing, the lunchroom roundtable discussions are gone.

But more is missing than just the fun. Development researchers say a different kind of learning happens amid the countless social interactions that going to school provides.

Socialization happens in school

When the pandemic hit and schools went remote, people weren't talking about what kids would miss beyond academics, says Becky Lakin Gullan, a professor of psychology at Gwynedd Mercy University in suburban Philadelphia.

"We were not really thinking about these kids that might really be losing a lot of skills that take time to develop," she says.

Lakin Gullan studies a kind of socialization older kids and young adults go through called emerging adulthood. It's something she thinks is lost in the coronavirus pandemic's back-to-school debates.

In June, the American Academy of Pediatrics made a statement saying kids should go back to school in person if possible. This angered many people, Lakin Gullan says.

People are still pretty angry, and with the virus picking up steam in parts of the country since then, they're scared.

"And people weren't wrong in what they were saying — look, this is really scary, and it's a health issue," she says. "But what the American Academy of Pediatrics was trying to do is say that it also matters to physically be present with other people."

The social interactions we have at school as kids are practice for the roles we'll play at work and in adult life, Lakin Gullan says. They help us differentiate between the person we are when interviewing for jobs, brainstorming with peers or talking to a boss. All that may feel effortless, but Lakin Gullan doesn't think it is: We have to learn it.

The little friend and the big mean girl

Tamar Kushnir heads up the Early Childhood Cognition Laboratory at Cornell University. She shares a lesson she learned in second grade.

“I very much remember having a friend who was a smaller girl, and she was easily picked on. She was smart and bookish. And we talked about books and things that, you know, things we read. ... But there was a big mean girl who found her — she's about half the size of this girl — and she just found her very easy to pick on.”

Kushnir, though, was a big kid herself.

“And I wasn't afraid of this girl,” she says. “I came up to her head, as opposed to coming up to her knees.”

One day, 8-year-old Kushnir decided enough was enough. It was time to act. She walked over to the big, mean girl and her small bookish friend and stood directly between them.

“And I learned how to stand up for my friend when my friend was being picked on,” she says. “I learned how to put my body physically in between a person who was being mean and a person who I cared about.”

The crucial thing to keep in mind is that Kushnir did what she did without anyone telling her to — she made the decision. Researchers think healthy people are born with this innate sense of something like right and wrong.

“We're social creatures, and we're built with some capacity to understand harm and to be averse to it,” Kushnir says. “But that doesn't mean we act.”

Whether we act, how we act, is where we get our character — what Kushnir calls moral agency.

At her lab, researchers think independently making decisions empowers kids to do it again, she says. One experience that gives a child a feeling of agency can empower them to take action again.

Kushnir's interview took place around the height of the Black Lives Matter protests that followed the police killings of George Floyd and other Black Americans.

Did she think about the demonstrations differently, knowing all this? She says she sees all the strands of childhood social experience in the type of adults we become.

"I think it does start when we're kids," Kushnir says. "Standing up despite the fact that someone might be bigger and stronger than you is a lesson that a child can learn at age 7 or 8 or 15 in a context where people are different."

Kids learn from everyone they interact with at school, even those they don't even really talk to, she says. It's not just friends or bullies, every person brings some different variable that does not exist at home among a child and parents and siblings.

Children learn who they are in relation to others at school, she says — something neither worksheets, flashcards nor math problems can teach.

These are things we learn by interacting with others. We learn about the complexity of others, and we also learn who we are or can be. A big thing Kushnir talked about is the way kids push themselves in school to try their limits. But that's not so easy in a virtual setting.

Student reporter Kaitlyn Rodriguez can attest to that.

"When COVID happened, I felt lost," the rising sophomore at a performing arts high school in Philadelphia says. "I found myself becoming instead of this, you know, extroverted Kaitlyn, this Kaitlyn that was so outgoing, someone that wasn't scared to do anything, I found that Kaitlyn becoming more timid."

Part of it, she thinks, is that the only role she gets to play at home is that of someone's kid. All teenagers hide some parts of themselves from their parents, she says, and being at home all the time takes away the opportunity to express them.

Kaitlyn says freshman year at her artsy high school was like a chance at a fresh start, to be what she considered the real Kaitlyn, kind of quirky, kind of out there. She says she thrived on the energy of her classmates and she spoke up. But she's worried that's changing.

"I found myself becoming more nervous about speaking in front of others, I found myself scared," she says. "I found myself having that fear that I didn't want to have. I found myself quiet."

Lakin Gullan says she worries about this type of thing happening to kids kept apart from

their peers for too long. They unlearn the type of social interaction that used to be normal.

“You know, you start working out, you start exercising, and the first few days are just terrible, but then after a while you just get out of bed and you do it and it doesn't feel as exhausting,” Lakin Gullan says. “And I think that it's the same thing with social engagement. There was something to constantly working that muscle.”

Lakin Gullan’s big concern is that when schools finally do open in person, too narrow a focus on academic recovery will take up all the air in the room — things that build social interaction will be seen as extra. Recess will be cancelled.

That’s on Kaitlyn’s mind, too.

“Now we're not going to go back to school until November,” she says. “I have to learn how to be the way I used to be.”

She’s decided she can’t just sit around waiting for school to open its doors.

“I have to learn how to learn from the situations in my own household, rather than the situations in school, and I have to learn how to thrive off of my own energy rather than other people's energies,” Kaitlyn says. “That's something that I have to work on.”

This segment aired on September 23, 2020.

• Coronavirus



- Re-Opening

Published: August 5, 2020

Teaching and Learning in the Pandemic

—Stephanie Shafer for Education Week

When teachers go back to school this fall, the classroom as they've known it will be gone, and their instruction will be more critical than ever.

That's a daunting combination, but it's what the pandemic has delivered. The spring produced crisis schooling, and teachers and schools scrambled to find online resources and master remote teaching techniques. A more deliberate approach this fall could mean a better experience for students; the lack of one could turn equity gaps into chasms.

With so much riding on instruction, districts need to plan for it with the same rigor they've applied to more operational aspects of reopening. "School leaders can't be swallowed up in figuring out where the hand sanitizing stations are going to go," said Justin Reich, the director of the MIT Teaching Systems Lab.

It's a lot to take on even as the ground shifts under teachers' feet. In the building, social distancing could put an end to the group projects and partner work that are central to many teachers' pedagogy. Online, they will have to develop relationships and classroom routines with students they may have never met in person.

And engaging students is more essential than ever: Months of unequal access to instruction last spring mean that students will be coming back to school, in person or remotely, with varying degrees of learning loss. Teachers will have to address those losses as they introduce grade-level content.

They'll also have to keep instruction coherent across online and in-person settings, since many districts plan to offer hybrid schedules. Schools might well need to respond to that reality by forging new roles or responsibilities for staff members—making one teacher the

“remote lead,” or creating new cross-grade teams to support progressions in learning.

Schools should acknowledge upfront that they’ll likely have less instructional time this year and should plan to identify the highest priority parts of their curriculum accordingly. Teachers will need to create flexible, adaptable assignments that students can complete in different environments and with varied levels of technology access.

Experts say no students should be held back from grade-level work—instead, teachers and instructional leaders should figure out where they might need to revisit prerequisite skills in the context of instruction. That’s where a rethought approach to assessment can play a role. Experts are advising educators to use standardized tests sparingly and focus more heavily on informal assessments in the classroom: well-designed activities that “assess” the few, most critical things their students haven’t yet mastered for the next unit. Teachers can then remediate those gaps “just in time,” instead of trying to cover every standard or skill that might have been missed last spring.

Professional development will carry an outsized burden this fall, too, as school staff members require training to serve not only as instructors, but as social-emotional supports for students.

Connection and trust are as central to instruction as curricular mapping and assessment. More than ever before, it’s essential that instruction encourages strong, caring relationships with adults and provides opportunities for students to think deeply, to connect with their peers, and to get excited about learning again.

Education Week reporters Catherine Gewertz and Sarah Schwartz interviewed 50 teachers, instructional leaders, and curriculum and assessment experts, and reviewed dozens of documents for this installment. It offers advice for deciding what to teach this year, how to teach it, and how to make sure students and teachers both get the support that they need from schools.

—The Editors

In Defense of Our Teachers

When it comes to the daunting question of reopening schools,
America's educators deserve a plan, not a trap.

DAVE GROHL

JULY 21, 2020



GUY LE QUERREC / MAGNUM

I hate to break it to you, but I was a terrible student.

Each day, I desperately waited for the final bell to ring so that I could be released from the confines of my stuffy, windowless classroom and run home to my guitar. It was no fault of the Fairfax County Public Schools system, mind you; it did the best it could. I was just stubbornly disengaged, impeded by a raging case of ADD and an insatiable desire to play music. Far from being a model student, I tried my best to maintain focus, but eventually left school halfway through 11th grade to follow my dreams of becoming a professional touring musician (not advised). I left behind countless missed opportunities. To this day, I'm haunted by a recurring dream that I'm back in those crowded hallways, now struggling to graduate as a 51-year-old man, and anxiously wake in a pool of my own sweat. You can take the boy out of school, but you can't take school out of the boy! So, with me being a high-school dropout, you would imagine that the current debate surrounding the reopening of schools wouldn't register so much as a blip on my rock-and-roll radar, right? Wrong.

My mother was a public-school teacher.

As a single mother of two, she tirelessly devoted her life to the service of others, both at home and at work. From rising before dawn to ensure that my sister and I were bathed, dressed, and fed in time to catch the bus to grading papers well into the night, long after her dinner had gone cold, she rarely had a moment to herself. All

this while working multiple jobs to supplement her meager \$35,000 annual salary. Bloomingdale's, Servpro, SAT prep, GED prep—she even once coached soccer for a \$400 stipend, funding our first family trip to New York City, where we stayed at the St. Regis Hotel and ordered drinks at its famous King Cole Bar so that we could fill up on the free hors d'oeuvres we otherwise could not afford. Unsurprisingly, her devoted parenting mirrored her technique as a teacher. Never one to just point at a blackboard and recite lessons for kids to mindlessly memorize, she was an engaging educator, invested in the well-being of each and every student who sat in her class. And at an average of 32 students a class, that was no small feat. She was one of those teachers who became a mentor to many, and her students remembered her long after they had graduated, often bumping into her at the grocery store and erupting into a full recitation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, like a flash mob in the produce aisle. I can't tell you how many of her former students I've met over the years who offer anecdotes from my mother's classroom. Every kid should be so lucky to have that favorite teacher, the one who changes your life for the better. She helped generations of children learn how to learn, and, like most other teachers, exhibited a selfless concern for others. Though I was never her student, she will forever be my favorite teacher.

It takes a certain kind of person to devote their life to this difficult and often-thankless job. I know because I was raised in a community of them. I have mowed their lawns, painted their apartments, even babysat their children, and I'm convinced that they are as essential as any other essential workers. Some even raise rock stars! Tom Morello of Rage Against the Machine, Adam Levine, Josh Groban, and Haim are all children of school workers (with hopefully more academically rewarding results than mine). Over the years, I have come to notice that teachers share a special bond, because there aren't too many people who truly understand their unique challenges—challenges that go far beyond just pen and paper. Today, those challenges could mean life or death for some.

When it comes to the daunting—and ever more politicized—question of reopening schools amid the coronavirus pandemic, the worry for our children's well-being is paramount. Yet teachers are also confronted with a whole new set of dilemmas that most people would not consider. "There's so much more to be addressed than just opening the doors and sending them back home," my mother tells me over the phone. Now 82 and retired, she runs down a list of concerns based on her 35 years of experience: "masks and distancing, temperature checks, crowded busing, crowded hallways, sports, air-conditioning systems, lunchrooms, public restrooms, janitorial staff." Most schools already struggle from a lack of resources; how could they possibly afford the mountain of safety measures that will need to be in place? And although the average age of a schoolteacher in the United States is in the early 40s, putting them in a lower-risk group, many career teachers, administrators, cafeteria

workers, nurses, and janitors are older and at higher risk. Every school's working faculty is a considerable percentage of its population, and should be safeguarded appropriately. I can only imagine if my mother were now forced to return to a stuffy, windowless classroom. What would we learn from that lesson? When I ask what she would do, my mother replies, "Remote learning for the time being."

Remote learning comes with more than a few of its own complications, especially for working-class and single parents who are dealing with the logistical problem of balancing jobs with children at home. Uneven availability of teaching materials and online access, technical snafus, and a lack of socialization all make for a less-than-ideal learning experience. But most important, remote setups overseen by caretakers, with a teacher on the other end doing their best to educate distracted kids who prefer screens used for games, not math, make it perfectly clear that not everyone with a laptop and a dry-erase board is cut out to be a teacher. That specialized skill is the X factor. I know this because I have three children of my own, and my remote classroom was more *Welcome Back, Kotter* than *Dead Poets Society*. Like I tell my children, "You don't really want daddy helping, unless you want to get an F!" Remote learning is an inconvenient and hopefully temporary solution. But as much as Donald Trump's conductor-less orchestra would love to see the country prematurely open schools in the name of rosy optics (ask a science teacher what they think about White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany's comment that "science should not stand in the way"), it would be foolish to do so at the expense of our children, teachers, and schools.

Every teacher has a "plan." Don't they deserve one too? My mother had to come up with three separate lesson plans every single day (public speaking, AP English, and English 10), because that's what teachers do: They provide you with the necessary tools to survive. Who is providing them with a set of their own? America's teachers are caught in a trap, set by indecisive and conflicting sectors of failed leadership that have never been in their position and can't possibly relate to the unique challenges they face. I wouldn't trust the U.S. secretary of percussion to tell me how to play "Smells Like Teen Spirit" if they had never sat behind a drum set, so why should any teacher trust Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos to tell them how to teach, without her ever having sat at the head of a class? (Maybe she should switch to the drums.) Until you have spent countless days in a classroom devoting your time and energy to becoming that lifelong mentor to generations of otherwise disengaged students, you must listen to those who have. Teachers want to teach, not die, and we should support and protect them like the national treasures that they are. For without them, where would we be?

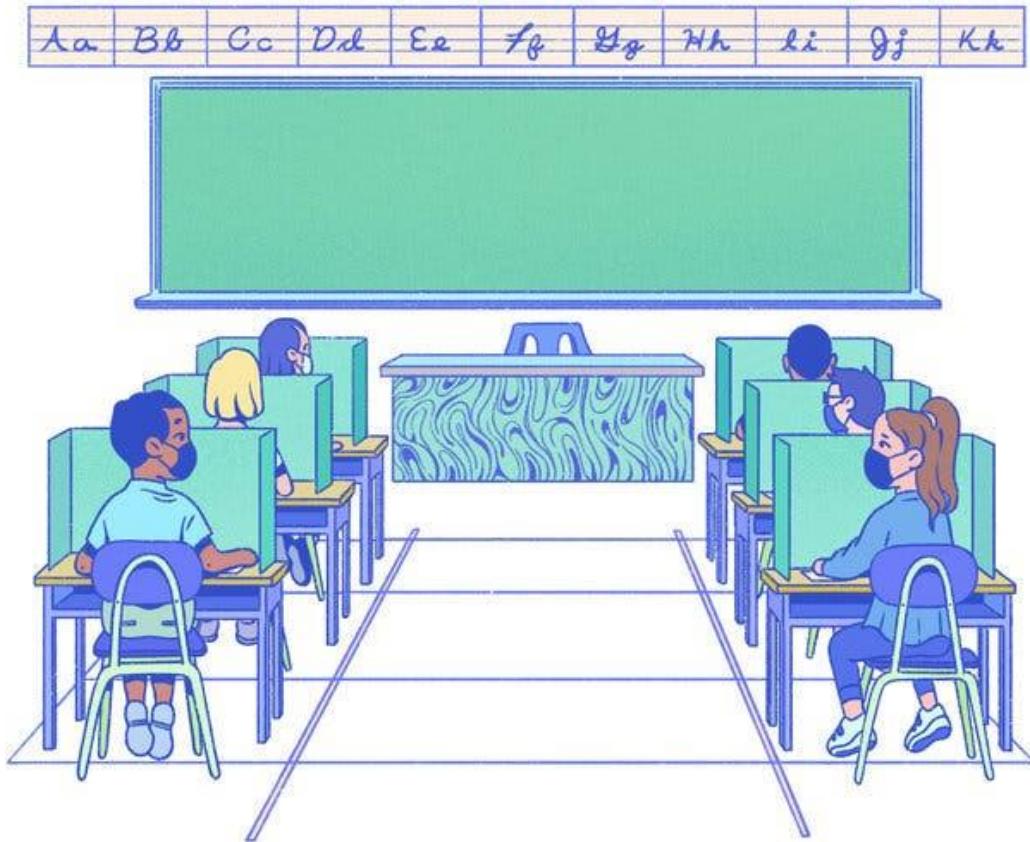
May we show these tireless altruists a little altruism in return. I would for my favorite teacher. Wouldn't you?

• Re-Opening

Get Ready for a Teacher Shortage Like We've Never Seen Before

If we force teachers to return to schools during an out-of-control pandemic, I don't know how many will stick around.

By Kelly Treleaven Ms. Treleaven teaches middle school English.
Aug. 17, 2020



Credit...Olivia Fields

HOUSTON — Usually on the first day back to work after summer break, there's this buzzing, buoyant energy in the air. My school is a small school-within-a-school designated to serve gifted children, so there are only 16 teachers and staff members. We typically meet in a colleague's tidy classroom, filled with natural light and the earthy smell of coffee.

We hug, remark on one another's new haircuts. Sure, there's an element of sadness about not being able to sleep in or pee on our own schedules anymore, but for the most part, we're eager to get back to doing work that we believe is the most important work in the world.

Coming back this year was different.

It was Thursday, Aug. 6, the same day that the Houston area reported its new [single-day high](#) for deaths from Covid-19. Instead of gathering, we all tuned in to a Zoom meeting from our separate classrooms.

There was no buzz in the air, and we weren't hugging and chatting. We were talking about how long we had: a few weeks of virtual teaching before students returned to our classrooms on Sept. 8. Or maybe sooner. We've been told our start date is subject to change at any time.

We asked about short- vs. long-term disability plans on our insurance. We silently worried about a colleague who has an autoimmune disease. We listened as our counselor, who, along with her daughters, tested positive for the coronavirus the week before, shared how they were doing. We tried not to react from inside each of our little Zoom squares as we began to realize there was no way of maintaining true social distancing when school reopened.

"We're a family," one of our administrators kept saying while talking about the measures we would need to take to reduce our and our students' exposure.
"We're a family."

I know what he meant — that our tight-knit community would get through this year together — but I kept wondering, "Wouldn't it be safer for our family to stay home?"

I invite you to recall your worst teacher. Mine was my seventh-grade science teacher, whose pedagogical approach consisted of our reading silently from our textbooks. Once, when I asked if I could do a project on Pompeii, she frowned and said: "This is science class. Your project has to be on a real thing."

She sent a message loud and clear: "I really, really don't want to be here."

We are about to see schools in America filled with these kinds of teachers.

Even before Covid-19, teachers were leaving the profession in droves. According to a [report by the Economic Policy Institute](#), the national teacher shortage is looking dire. Every year, fewer and fewer people want to become teachers.

You would think states would panic upon hearing this. You would think they'd take steps to retain quality teachers and create a competitive system that attracts the best, brightest and most passionate to the profession.

That's not what they do.

They slash the education budget, which forces districts to cut jobs (increasing class size), put off teacher raises and roll back the quality of teachers' health care. They ignore teachers' pleas for buildings without black mold creeping out of ceiling tiles, for sensible gun legislation, and for salaries we can live on without having to pick up two to three additional part-time jobs.

So, a lot of good and talented teachers leave. When state leaders realized they couldn't actually replace these teachers, they started passing legislation lowering the qualifications, ushering underqualified people into classrooms.

This has been happening for years. We're about to see it get a lot worse.

My school is filled with the kind of teachers you would handpick for your own kids if you could. When the pandemic started shutting our area down in March, we dived into remote learning, going above and beyond.

We called weekly — sometimes daily — to check on students whose parents had lost their jobs, whose family members had contracted Covid-19 or who we just knew were struggling. It was the hardest thing any of us remember in our careers, including teaching during Hurricane Harvey, which flooded tens of thousands of homes in this area. We were proud of ourselves, of each other, of our students.

And then the education secretary, Betsy DeVos, told us — while Covid-19 numbers continued to surge — to get back in the classroom.

I've signed my contract to teach in-person starting Sept. 8. I care fiercely about my students, and I feel as though my purpose is still in the classroom. (I also don't have the financial flexibility to resign.)

But even if I teach in person this year, I may not continue doing so if teachers' perspectives continue to be minimized or dismissed. Already, I've learned of some of the most treasured teachers in our building turning in their resignation letters, and I worry that more of my colleagues may make the gut-wrenching decision to walk away.

It's our students who will suffer. Who could possibly replace the history teacher who created an improv comedy class that had kids laughing so hard they could be heard four doors down? Or the science teacher whose students' projects have been sweeping various science contests, including one group whose research proposal was selected to be completed on the International Space Station?

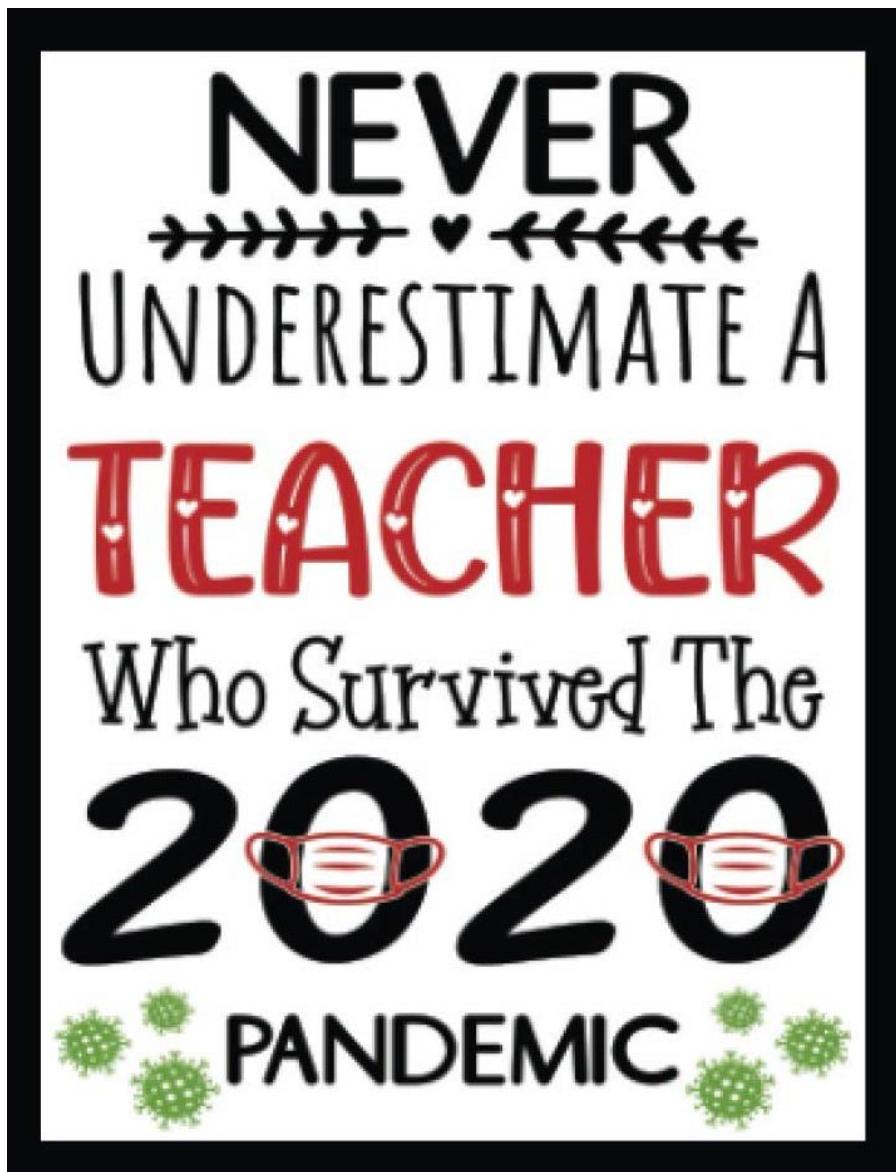
Americans who care about teachers can't just tweet platitudes during Teacher Appreciation Week. They have to back policy changes that would make teaching

an honorable, attractive profession, as it is in the many countries that [outshine us](#) in academic performance in math, science and reading.

We must commit to funding that goes past school supplies and includes things like mental health support for our students and great health care and retirement benefits for teachers. And it is urgent that we include current teachers in all of the conversations about reopening schools during Covid-19.

If we force teachers to return to schools at their own peril, I don't know how many will stick around. The politicians know they can't replace us. But they'll lower teaching qualifications until they do.

[Kelly Treleaven](#), a middle school English teacher, is the author of "Love, Teach: Real Stories and Honest Advice to Keep Teachers From Crying Under Their Desks."



Preventing Youth Suicide: Tips for Parents and Educators

If you or someone you know is suicidal, get help immediately via 911, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK or the Crisis Text Line (text "HOME" to 741741).

Suicide is preventable. Youth who are contemplating suicide frequently give warning signs. Do not be afraid to ask about suicidal thoughts. Never take warning signs lightly or promise to keep them secret.

Risk Factors



- Hopelessness
- Non-suicidal self injury (e.g., cutting)
- Mental illness, especially severe depression, but also post traumatic stress, ADHD, and substance abuse
- History of suicidal thinking and behavior
- Prior suicide among peers or family members
- Interpersonal conflict, family stress/dysfunction
- Presence of a firearm in the home

Warning Signs



- Suicidal threats in the form of direct (e.g., "I want to die") and indirect (e.g. "I wish I could go to sleep and not wake up") statements
- Suicide notes, plans, online postings
- Making final arrangements
- Preoccupation with death
- Giving away prized possessions
- Talking about death
- Sudden unexplained happiness
- Increased risk taking
- Heavy drug/alcohol use

What to Do



- Remain calm, nonjudgmental and listen.
- Ask directly about suicide (e.g., "Are you thinking about suicide").
- Focus on your concern for their well-being
- Avoid being accusatory (e.g., don't say, "You aren't going to do anything stupid are you?").
- Reassure them that there is help; they will not feel like this forever.
- Provide constant supervision. Do not leave the youth alone.
- Remove means for self-harm, especially firearms.
- **Get help!** Never agree to keep suicidal thoughts a secret. Tell an appropriate caregiving adult. Parents should seek help from school or community mental health resources as soon as possible. School staff should take the student to a school-employed mental health professional.

Reminders for Parents



After a school notifies a parent of their child's risk for suicide and provides referral information, parents must:

- **Continue to take threats seriously.** Follow through is important even after the child calms down or informs the parent "they didn't mean it."
- **Access school supports.** If parents are uncomfortable with following through on referrals, they can give the school psychologist permission to contact the referral agency, provide referral information, and follow up on the visit.
- **Maintain communication with school.** After an intervention, the school will also provide follow-up supports. Your communication will be crucial to ensuring that the school is the safest, most comfortable place possible for your child.

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