

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

10 new challenges for teachers

The Pottstown School Board honored its teachers of the year last week at its monthly meeting.

Teachers have never faced more challenging times, and with that in mind, I thought readers might find of interest an article by California essayist Jeremy S. Adams, who teaches political science at Bakersfield High School and California State University at Bakersfield. He has been awarded numerous teaching and writing honors. This essay recently appeared on the "Educator's Room" web site.

By Jeremy Adams

It is no headline to announce that schools mirror the dysfunction of society *writ large*. Every failure of civil society manifests itself in our schools: institutional rot, political cynicism and polarization, tattered family and other filial relations, depressed expectations of student behavior, a preening and non-apologetic narcissism, extravagant self-regard, anti-intellectualism in our minds and moral relativism in our hearts.

With this in mind, I offer the following list of 10 things teachers did not have to deal with just a decade ago.

1. Difficulty disciplining students

A hodgepodge of disciplinary policies has resulted in a situation where many teachers feel they are no longer in control of their own classrooms and schools. While many of these policies are instituted with just and well-meaning motivations, such as trying to end the tragedy of the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon and ensuring poor students are not disproportionately disciplined, the consequence has been a loss of control on many campuses across the country.

Suspension and expulsion should never be the first or even second option for discipline. But there must be consequences for destructive student behaviors if for

no better reason than to protect the vast majority of students who are well behaved and want to learn.

2. Cellphone addiction

The constant need for "dopamine baths," to quote Andrew Sullivan, has produced a generation of endorphin junkies populating the modern American classroom. The statistics are jarring by any account: Teens are on their phones, on average, for nine hours a day and the heaviest cellphone addicts swipe, touch or use their phones up to 5,427 times a day, one study says. A cor-

relation between cellphone addiction and youth levels of depression, isolation, and low academic performance seems clear.

3. Online bullying

When I was a child, weekends and nighttime served as reprieves from the school bully and the general drama of school itself. Nowadays there is no escape. Up to one-third of children have been threatened online, according to stopbullying.com, and most distressing of all, half of all children who are bullied fail to tell adults about it. It is not hyperbole to state that young people live much of their lives in a cyberspace unregulated by adults. We would never let our children play and wander in unfamiliar parts of town and yet that is precisely what they do when they engage in a cyberspace that is foreign to their own parents. We cannot protect children if we do not know where they are being harmed.

4. Constant student anxiety

Over 20 percent of today's teenage students experience a form of acute anxiety leading to disengagement, more absenteeism, and isolation. And this anxiety has harmful offshoots such as eating disorders, self-harm, and frequent fainting in classes. Instead of seeking counseling, taking a walk, or spending time with friends or family, the modern teen often finds solace in an online world that perpetuates this cycle of anxiety and isolation.

(To be continued Thursday.)



Commentary by
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