

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

10 new challenges for teachers

*The Pottstown School Board honored its teachers of the year last week. 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.*

The first half of this essay appeared in my column space Tuesday.

5. Pep rallies for standardized testing

The era of high-stakes testing has done very little, if anything, to improve student performance. It has spawned cuts in the arts, less recess time for elementary school children, more rote memorization, and perpetuated the illusion that test-taking prowess is synonymous with academic achievement. It has also discouraged the brightest and most ambitious young people from entering the education profession. On a deeper level, schools are told they must be held “accountable,” which requires analysis of student performance, which perpetuates an endless stream of gimmicks, cynical incentives and activities to motivate students to do well on standardized tests. That includes pep rallies. Schools who hold these pep rallies are not at fault. The policies that drive them are the culprits.

6. Fear of school shootings and lockdowns

In the corner of my classroom sits a bucket with a shower curtain stuffed inside. It’s there in case we are on lockdown, and a student is forced to use the bathroom in front of his/her peers. This is the tragic reality of school today. Several of the deadliest school shootings have happened in the past half decade and there is no reason to think school violence will abate any time soon.

7. Opioid epidemic

In 2016, more than 42,200 Americans died from overdosing on a prescription or illegal opioid, according to the latest available data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That was five times higher than in 1999. David Cox, the superintendent in Allegany County in



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western Maryland, is one of many school leaders trying to deal with opioid epidemics savaging their communities. He said in this Education Week interview: “We have kids who have lost their parents, and, unfortunately, there have been situations where the parents have overdosed with the kids watching.”

8. Politicized schools

Like it or not, schools have become epicenters of hot-button political issues. From transgender bathrooms to guns and Second Amendment discussions, schools are now at the intersection of division and discord. U.S. education has always been a “political issue,” but that is a qualitatively different status than being the place where schisms about the culture manifest themselves.

9. Era of ‘feelings’ where students are never wrong

It has happened to almost all of us recently. A student will “feel” like a test is unfair, will “feel” like a fact is not true, will “feel” like a teacher who is simply trying to modify a behavior is being “disrespectful” to him or her. In an era that no longer views reason and fact as tribunals of truth, it can be difficult to explain to students that they have a right to feel anyway they want but their feelings do not excuse behavior that is disruptive or harmful to themselves or those around them.

10: Naked educational utilitarianism

Policymakers seem to never talk about education through any lens except as an exercise in early job training. While education does prepare one for the workplace, it should also prepare students on a deeper and more human level. Our students will be more than workers in the future; they will be citizens, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, friends and confidants. They must be able to think, communicate, cooperate, and be reflective about the many conundrums of being a human being in the world, figuring out how to live what scholar Leon Kass labels the ability to lead “a worthy life.” Their lives will not begin when they go to work and end when they go home every evening. A true and edifying education recognizes that what students learn intimately affects who they are.

(From the Educator’s Room” web site.)