

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Climate change and school districts

The following article was published in the April newsletter of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators. It has been edited to fit the space.

By Stephen Rodriguez
Pottstown School District Superintendent
Pa Association of School Administrators

When I first started teaching and leading, I was fascinated with the future of education. Would we all use computers? Would students be able to learn at home?

I remember attending a conference featuring Dr. Bill Daggett and being intrigued with the idea of a keyboard made of lasers and light. Oh, how that would change education for the better, right?

I'm now less convinced the technology or even social structure will create large "leaps" into educational accomplishment. The pandemic has proven how critical teachers are to the learning process and how technology only enhances, not replaces, what we do.

Advancement will likely occur more as a result of a change to our practice.

So what does that have to do with climate change? The reality is we are preparing students for jobs they won't have and very big problems we can't currently solve.

Our students will need to be smarter, braver and better than us if we are to survive and thrive.

A quick view of the chart below will show a classic "J curve" with CO2 emissions spiking at an unbelievable rate. That shouldn't be a surprise, but what is the surprise is that emissions for the US and Europe are actually shrinking slightly, while India, China and Asia are on a meteoric rise, outpacing other first world countries by more than a 2:1 ratio. Electric cars won't solve this problem. In fact if America reduce its omissions to near zero the rest of the world would more than make up the difference in short order.

I for one would like to enjoy my retirement one day without living on a planet that can't sustain human life.

As an urban

school leader, I'm all too familiar with Urban Heat Island, and based on the average rising temperatures worldwide, it's possibly the most critical of the issues we face today.

I was impressed when a school board member from my district rightly pointed out that this is a big problem, but we don't directly address it in our comprehensive plan.

So what can we do about it, while also ushering in new and better educational practices?

I suggest the following:
As educators, we need to get better about being informed and facilitating relevant educational opportunities. Data, not headlines!

In social studies instruction we learned long ago that even though it was harder, our students were far better off reading the Constitution rather than just reading about it. The same is true in all aspects of instruction.

I just recently met with a group of students whose chief complaint was the desire for relevance in class work and the need to be engaged at a higher level.

Relevance has a price. There is an inherent danger in not being boring, and it's important educators do not become associated with the political machine. If parents and students are to trust us, they need to know that we don't indoctrinate kids or take sides in the red versus blue fight. In that way we can become powerful partners for change with the big issues we face today.

Based on age appropriate levels, the more our students work together on real life situations, with source data, the better they will become and make evaluations necessary for world-saving discoveries. ...



STEPHEN RODRIGUEZ

