

Education not left behind in Georgia budget crunch

If you wondered how Georgia's leaders would respond to the pandemic's disruption to education this Spring, the answer is in: They're conceding next year, too.

Gov. Brian Kemp and the state's schools superintendent, Richard Woods, on Thursday said they were asking for a federal waiver of standardized-testing requirements next year – exams still some 10 months away. In the name of “common sense,” they would eliminate the state's most meaningful measure of student progress.

Let's hope the feds turn them down. “High stakes” testing is a four-letter word among the education establishment. But measuring student learning remains vital.

Are more students likely to be behind grade level next year?

Unfortunately, yes. Remote learning this Spring was uneven – not only from district to district or school to school, but from teacher to teacher and student to student. The usual learning losses over the Summer will probably be worse; most of Georgia's students will go almost five months without seeing the inside of a classroom. And it's certainly possible a “second wave” of Coronavirus will again disrupt classes.

That is all the more reason to measure where students are when they resume schooling in the Fall, and how far they advance by next Spring. Tests tell us those things, in clear terms. If a future disruption makes testing untenable, deal with it then. But why concede now?

An analogy: If you know you've gotten behind on your credit card payments, the answer is not to stop looking at your statements. It's to use the numbers on those statements as clear indicators of whether your problem is getting better or worse.

We know this problem is real. Opportunity Insights, a nonprofit based at Harvard University, reviewed data from an online math-education company called Zearn that works with school districts across the country, including some in Georgia. The trends it found in our state this Spring are disturbing, to say the least.

On March 1, before schools shut down, Georgia students using Zearn had shown an improvement of about 13% since January. The gains were similar across ZIP codes with high, medium and low incomes; students in low-income ZIP codes actually outperformed the average.

Then the shutdowns began. By May 3, the average student's learning had fallen by 14.5% since January. Students in high-income ZIP codes continued to make solid progress, but progress among those in low-income ZIP codes fell by a whopping 54.3%. Given the current debate about social inequities, that's unconscionable.

That isn't the only data point. A new study by national nonprofit EmpowerK12 and Georgia-based Learn4Life and RedefinED Atlanta estimated that, had third- through eighth-graders in metro Atlanta taken this year's standardized tests, their scores would have fallen by almost 8% in English/language arts and by more than 10% in math. “Economically disadvantaged students and students of color, who were already behind their peers, will fall further behind,” the authors noted.

Are those ominous signs the reason Georgia's leaders don't want to know how bad things will be next Spring? I hope not. Perhaps the reason is more typical than that, such as caving to an education establishment that has long hated the tests and now sees a chance to wriggle out of them.

An alternative metric, such as allowing students to move on from a topic only after demonstrating mastery of it, might be more appropriate. But scrapping the test altogether isn't the answer.

If the state receives that federal waiver, parents should demand a way out. Like what? Well, in this month's Republican primary, 73% of voters agreed that legislators should “expand educational options by allowing a student's state education dollars to follow to the school that best fits their needs, whether that is public, private, magnet, charter, virtual or homeschool.”

That's three voters in favor for every one opposed. If Georgia's Republican leaders won't insist on accountability for schools, they could at least hand that accountability to parents in the form of a choice. Nothing is more “high stakes” than your own child's future.

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Guest Editorial
Kyle Wingfield

The New York Times owes us an apology

In case you haven't heard, there is a big stink permeating the offices of the *New York Times*. Let me ask the question for you: Why should you care? Let me answer the question for you: We may be entering an era where opposing viewpoints are no longer acceptable. That bothers me. I hope it bothers you, too.

The *Times* has apologized for running an opinion piece by Arkansas Senator Tom Cotton suggesting that military force be called in to deal with recent riots. The editorial page editor has resigned as a result.

Remember, this was on the editorial pages, not in the news section. That is where opinions belong, even opinions with which you might disagree. But that is not the case at the *New York Times*. They seem no longer willing to have opinions stated with which they disagree internally or to risk the predictable mobs at their front door. So much for freedom of expression.

Sen. Cotton posited that President Trump could legally invoke something called the Insurrection Act to deal with current protests if he felt it necessary. This act has been on the books since 1807 and has been used on several occasions, including against the Ku Klux Klan, enforcing civil rights laws and helping restore law and order during riots in Detroit in the late 1960s and in Los Angeles in 1992.

Personally, I think the Insurrection Act is a draconian measure that should not be employed at this time but I also think we should all have the opportu-

nity to see why the Senator thinks maybe it should be. By the way, for all the snoots out there who think everybody in Arkansas raises pigs and marries their third cousins, Tom Cotton is a magna cum laude graduate of Harvard University and was on the editorial board of *The Crimson* newspaper. You would think that would get him some respect from the intellectual weenies at the *Times*. Not so.

The decision of the paper to apologize for publishing an opinion piece by a conservative Senator that in some ways might be considered favorable to Donald Trump further convinces the President's supporters that anything the national media runs about Trump is fake news. Other fair-minded people wonder about the media's objectivity. Even though the media's public approval ratings these days are slightly lower than that of mule skinnners, they don't seem to care. This war of words with Trump is personal with them. Objectivity be damned.

I think fake news to Donald Trump is anything that our thin-skinned President doesn't like, but it does occur. I can attest to that fact. During the planning for the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games, Arizona Senator John McCain, a great American war hero but a deceitful and duplicitous politician, began telling the media we were using military personnel to wash the athletes' uniforms and cook and clean for them — all at taxpayer expense. The tale was preposterous and totally without merit. Let me rephrase that. It

was a bold-face lie.

Yet a compliant press loved McCain then as much as they despise Trump today. Nothing we could tell them or show them made a difference. This was a favor to the Senator who, in turn, would then owe them a favor.

I lost my last trace of naiveté when legendary *New York Times* columnist William Safire asked me about McCain's charges. Finally, I thought a chance to get the truth told. Safire was a hero of mine and I knew he would see through McCain's falsehoods. I could have better spent my time talking to a fence post. His column was a hatchet job on the Olympics and a paean about McCain. Another suck-up favor for a friend.

But the apology by the *New York Times* for running a controversial opinion piece by a respected United States Senator is on a far more disturbing level. The Poynter Institute, a nonprofit journalism school and research organization located in St. Petersburg, Florida, asks, “Will editorial page editors shy away from any touchy topics in the future for fear that it could lead to them losing their jobs if enough people don't like it?” A good question.

More important for me – and you – in these unprecedented times with political correctness running amok, will I be able to continue to express my honest opinions? I certainly hope so. If not, we will both be the losers, thanks to the unprecedented actions of the *New York Times*. They owe us all an apology.

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Dick Yarbrough

I'm starting to smell like an old man

My sense of taste was the first to go.

Someone gave me a mayonnaise sandwich years ago. “This tastes like nothing,” I said, startled by the lack of flavor offered by the paste of white lard.

Next, it was my sense of hearing. It started failing me shortly after I got married, over 24 years ago.

“Len, can you come into the kitchen and wash these dishes for me?” My new wife called from across the house.

“Huh?”
“Can you come wash these dishes?” This time, louder.

“Huh?”
“Can you come wash ... oh, never mind.”

My hearing's gotten so bad since then that I can only hear her when dinner is ready.

Then it was my sense of sight.

“I can't read the scroll at the bottom of ESPN!” I screamed in horror about 12 years ago. The next day, I went to the eye doctor and received a prescription for eyeglasses.

Of late, it's been my sense of smell.

“Len, do you smell that?”



Len's Lines
Len Robbins

“Huh?” (hearing again).
In a semi-scream – “DO YOU SMELL THAT? Smells like a cat urinated in our closet,” my wife said, very concerned.

I stuck my head in the closet for a moment.

“Nope, I don't see a cat,” I said. “But you must remember, my eyesight is rather poor unless I'm wearing my glasses ... hey, why is my Mr. T signed portrait on the closet floor? I thought someone had stolen that from above the fireplace mantle.”

Basically, and it's not COVID-related, but I no

longer can smell much of anything. Or maybe I can, and everything smells like nothing these days.

I assume losing one's olfactory senses is a sign of maturity. Then again, I could have just left something in my nose, like the time when I lost my pocket knife and hearing in my right ear in the same week. I found my pocket knife in the shower the following week, and miraculously began to hear again at the exact same moment. God is good.

This latest loss of sense is starting to become bothersome. The other day, I grabbed a carton of milk. Since I can no longer read the expiration date (loss of sight), I have become accustomed to smelling the milk to gauge its freshness. That's no longer an option. I sat there for 10 minutes, wondering how to solve this vexing conundrum without an acute sense of smell. I suddenly realized that sour milk isn't sour if you can't taste anything, so I took a swig.

Twenty minutes later, my stomach, whose senses are still acute, didn't appreciate that risk.

This loss of the scent sense has one exception: Smoke.

I can't smell the aroma of a rose or of feet, but I can smell a fire miles away, or feet away.

I walked in our house the other day and immediately noticed that familiar bouquet. I stood in the doorway and yelled toward our bedrooms upstairs.

“Are you burning your hair again?”

My meek hearing skills discerned a faint “Yes, I'm using the curling iron” from my daughter's bedroom.

I walked outside the next morning to greet the day and that same faculty came alive.

“Something burned last night,” I said aloud, my nose perked up to the one essence it can acknowledge. Later that day, I learned there was a fire in our community the previous evening.

So, in summary: I can't taste mayonnaise; I can only hear what I want to hear; I can only see what I want to see (with glasses); and I can't smell malodorous stench, but I can smell smoke, which can be quite beneficial.

Okay, it's official. I like growing older.

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Return Postage

Dear Editor:

In the minds of many, COVID-19 has ‘come to stay.’ Certainly that is the position some government officials want people to accept. There is much clamoring among the voices offering advice on how people could/must respond; doctors and nurses, who just happen to be “hands on,” the media offering opinion and the government agencies spouting information. Who do you want to believe?

Around the first of March, most news reports (at least of a Conservative bent) noted how little trust Americans had for government and the major news outlets. But in just a few days a virus

was elevated to world-ending status and the dis-believed suddenly became trustworthy. Amazing is not the word to describe mindless reactions.

There are several labels for the crowd with the most influence on our lives; the Insiders, Socialists, Liberals, Globalists and D.C.'s non-elected bureaucrats!!! This breed of people put their heads together long ago to set in motion a plan that would cause people to accept an all-powerful, totally controlling government. Part of the master plan: create a PROBLEM (or problems) until the desired REACTION is achieved (e.g. why doesn't the government do something?) then the SOLUTION is offered - a gov-

ernment figure or agency has an answer but it has a “do what we say” tag.

Reaction to the COVID-19 virus may have been better than the “Guiders” hoped for, nevertheless, getting people to drop everything and go into hiding was achieved. Our freedom was taken!

These events and actions prepare/condition people to accept a one-world government with an all powerful leader, a situation the Bible labels a godless world led by the anti-christ. Read the Bible and note the chaos all around. Directions toward two destinations can be seen by anyone.

Charles Musgrove

Letters to the Editor are always welcome

The *Donalsonville News* reminds letter to the editor writers that shorter is better. Concise letters are not only better read, they are more likely to be published because limited space is available. Almost any point can be made in 350 words or fewer, so this is set as an upper level for length.

Unsigned letters, letters signed with a fictitious signature, copies of letters sent to public officials, or letters containing unverified or anonymous quotes will not be accepted.

We limit letters on a subject when we feel it has been thoroughly aired to the point of letters becoming repetitive. Also rejected are letters that are libelous, in bad taste, or are personal attacks on individuals or private businesses.

Writers must include addresses and telephone numbers. These are for identification purposes only, and will not be published.

Send letters to the editor to P.O. Box 338, Donalsonville, Georgia 39845

