

Finally, someone who gets it

This past week, U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos put the kibosh on pleas to stop meaningful assessments of student learning before the school year had even begun in many places.

Acknowledging it was “the right call” to skip year-end tests during the chaos of this past Spring, DeVos explained in a letter to chief state school officers that students couldn’t afford to miss another year of having their learning measured.

Statewide standardized tests, DeVos wrote, “are among the most reliable tools available to help us understand how children are performing in school.” They “can help inform personalized support to children based on their individual needs and provide transparency about their progress.” And most people recognize “that parents deserve to know how their children are performing, and that it should be no secret how a school’s performance as a whole compares to other schools.”

That’s exactly right. As she also noted, there is bipartisan support for these tests. Republicans and Democrats agree we need an objective accounting of whether students are really learning, or simply being shuffled through the system.

Tests are particularly important for poor kids, minority kids, kids with special needs, and others who for decades simply weren’t learning at the rates their white and more affluent peers were. How do we know there’s an achievement gap? Because all kids across a given state have to take the same tests.

Maybe that’s why an opinion poll DeVos cited, by the Data Quality Campaign, showed 77% of parents wanted to see year-end tests return in Spring 2021.

Only 48% of teachers surveyed, however, agreed. Which brings us to a different reaction to DeVos’ statement.

Richard Woods, Georgia’s state schools superintendent, wasted no time branding the decision “disappointing” and, going further, “a detriment to public education.”

He asked, “In a year when instructional time is so precious, why cut into it with high-stakes testing?”

If instructional time is “precious” this year, perhaps it’s because Woods’ own agency told schools they don’t have to meet the usual standards for instructional time. As a result, some districts started their school years late without clear plans to make up the time. It’s also meant many students get just a few hours of instruction per day, and are losing more instructional time every week than the year-end test would take to administer.

Woods continued: “At a time when our economic outlook is still shaky and millions of dollars are having to be cut from our classrooms, why divert millions to high-stakes tests?”

As I’ve previously reported, most districts have reserves on hand to offset state budget cuts, and federal emergency funding has also helped to close the gap. But let’s reverse the question: Why would Georgia taxpayers spend an amount approaching \$20 billion on education this year, and then cheap out on the comparatively few dollars it would take to know if students learned anything?

Finally, there’s this from Woods: “Continuing to administer high-stakes tests during these unprecedented and uncertain times is, sadly, more about adults than the needs of students and teachers.”

That’s exactly backward. Students need to learn, and teachers need to know if students are learning. How do we know if that’s happening? By giving tests. And who benefits from not testing? Adults who want to shirk accountability.

You may have noticed that phrase “high-stakes tests” in each of those quotes. In all, Woods used the phrase nine times in his response to DeVos. But because learning growth is a key factor in accountability, the lack of a test earlier this year means we already didn’t measure growth in 2020 and can’t measure growth in 2021. That lowers the stakes. If no tests were to be given in 2021 as well, the same would already be true for 2022.

By the time we got to 2023, then, it would have been four years since Georgia had an objective, statewide measure of student learning and growth. Ask yourself: Who would that serve? Students?

Yeah, right.

Kyle Wingfield is president and CEO of the Georgia Public Policy Foundation: www.georgiapolicy.org.



Guest Editorial
Kyle Wingfield

Not finding much good news in this bumper of a year

We are now into September of what has so far been a bumper of a year. My colleague, David Carroll, a Chattanooga TV anchor with whom I share the editorial page in several papers, calls 2020 “the Edsel of years.” I wish I had thought of that line. I hate it when TV anchors are funnier than I am.

We have had to endure eight months of sheltering in place, social distancing, to mask or not to mask, boycotts, layoffs, government bailouts and computer-generated everything else except burning up buildings and tearing down statues. That has been human-generated.

Can things go further into the dumpster? With a presidential election roughly eight weeks away, the answer is self-evident. Having to watch two old white guys with bad hairdos going at each other while political pundits ponderously pontificate will likely drive me to binge-watch all the back episodes of “The Gong Show.”

So, what do we have to look forward to? Certainly not the annual scrum between the scholar-athletes from the University of Georgia, the oldest state-chartered university in the nation, located in Athens, the Classic City of the South, and You-Know-Where Institute of Technology.

Absent this momentous event, I will strive to be gracious. I promise not to bring up all the Rhodes Scholars we have that YKWIT doesn’t have. That seems to upset them worse than laying 52 points on

their scholar-athletes in a recent scrum.

Frankly, September doesn’t hold a lot of promise. How excited can you get over the fact this is National Blueberry Popsicle Month? I asked Junior E. Lee, general manager of the Yarbrough Worldwide Media and Pest Control Company headquartered in Greater Garfield, Georgia, if he had done any surveys on public attitudes regarding National Blueberry Popsicle Month. Given the way things are going these days, it wouldn’t surprise me that somebody has their nose out of joint over blueberries or popsicles, or both.

Junior was late getting back to me. He told me he had been observing Fight Procrastination Day and had lost. He didn’t seem to be too upset about it.

Between us, I have been having a bit of a problem with Junior’s attitude recently. While he is one of the most respected media analysts in the free world, he is also a pest control professional. That is something he likes to rag the snoots in the national media about. He can hang with the best of them on stuff like the U.S. trade deficit and what is going on in Belarus but loves to ask them how they would get rid of clover mites and then watch the blank looks on their faces.

It was my fault that I had Junior E. Lee working on an assignment on June 6 and forgot all about that being National Pest Control Day, a salute to pest control professionals around the world. He wasn’t

happy. Pest control professionals are proud people.

Junior says pest control isn’t just a job, it is an essential service and had I heard anyone talk about defunding pest control professionals? I admitted I had not and told him National Pest Control Day would be duly observed next year. He seemed mollified and said he was heading over to Aunt Flossie Felmer’s house to rummage around in her drawers, supposedly looking for fire ants. He seems to be doing that a lot these days.

With that out of the way, we are back to trying to figure out how to outlast 2020. I don’t see much ahead that excites me. In October, there is National Punk Day which is sure to be big in Portland and Seattle. And we need to keep an eye on Leif Erickson Day. Leif was the first European to set foot in North America. He was from Greenland where they eat seals and make dogs pull people around on sleds. I guarantee you that’s going to get his statue pulled down somewhere.

There is National Take a Hike Day in November which will thrill those of you who have been suggesting for years I do just that and in December National Ding-a-Ling Day, a salute to those who believe everything they read on social media.

I am afraid that is about all the good news I have as to what to expect for the rest of 2020, boys and girls. In the meantime, I suggest we hunker down, give each other a virtual hug and pray there is not another Edsel in our future.

You can reach Dick Yarbrough at dick@dickyarbrough.com; at P.O. Box 725373, Atlanta, Georgia 31139; online at dick-yarbrough.com or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/dickyarb



Dick Yarbrough

Get a ‘Happy Birthday’ from Sinbad - for \$65

Tired of sending the same old Amazon virtual birthday gift of \$50?

Tired of putting the same old “Congratulations” gif on Facebook when someone graduates from college or gets a promotion?

Tired of the same old birthday card where you just sign your name at the bottom and don’t put any thought into it?

Yeah, me neither.

But in case you are, I may have something for you -- Cameo.com. Cameo.com is a website where you can get “personalized messages from your favorite celebrities.” For a fee, of course.

So, if you wanted to wish your husband a Happy Birthday, and he was a big “Revenge of the Nerds” fan (and who isn’t?), then you could pay “Booger” (actor Curtis Armstrong) \$150 to send a personal videotaped message to your husband from Booger himself.

Or, if you wanted to congratulate your parents on their anniversary, and they were big “Perfect Strangers” fans (and who is?), you could pay \$99 for a personalized video message from Bronson Pinchot (“Balki”).

Or if you wanted to apologize to your wife for breaking her grandmother’s priceless



Len’s Lines
Len Robbins

vase, who better than Flavor Flav (\$250) to deliver that message and get you out of a jam?

The “celebrities” run the gamut – actors, musicians, athletes, YouTube influencers, models, gamers, activists, Drag Queens.

Basically, anybody who used to be somebody, or never was somebody, is available on the Cameo website – again, for a price.

And that’s where the confusion begins.

Some of these “celebrities” don’t know their worth, and some have a misguided understanding of their worth.

For instance, some overseas basketball player named Landon Milbourne charges

\$700 for a video message. One of the greatest players to ever touch a basketball, Kareem Abdul-Jabaar, charges \$500.

A comedian-magician named Archie Manners demands \$1,000 on the website, or you can hire Chevy Chase to wish someone a happy birthday for just \$500.

A British actor nobody’s ever heard of, Jamie Muscato, bills \$1,000 for a video message, while the Six-Million-Dollar Man, Lee Majors, is a mere \$299.

For \$99, you can either hire little-known, yet well-named, Canadian musician Coyote Shivers, or have Marla Gibbs, Florence from “The Jeffersons,” deliver a sarcastic, eye-rolling message of your choice.

Actor and radio host Phil Hendrie bills \$1,000 per video message on Cameo. Or you can save \$850 and get Kurtis Blow, Joey Lawrence or Anthony Michael Hall to do the same.

How in the wide world of sports is former NFL player Pierre Garcon charging \$1,000 and Joe Montana – perhaps the best quarterback in NFL history – charging \$449 per message? Brett Favre (\$400) costs less than Deandre Baker (\$500)? Lawyers ain’t free.

Most ridiculous of all is Caitlyn (Bruce) Jenner charg-

ing \$2,500 per video, while Bo Jackson (a better, more famous, athlete even when Caitlyn was Bruce) costs \$400.

A personal message from your favorite (or not favorite) celebrity doesn’t have to break the bank, though. Cameo has celebrities available for all budgets, including:

- Former Heisman Trophy winner and NBA player Charlie Ward - \$93.
 - Sinbad (the comedian) - \$65.
 - Larry Gatlin (of Gatlin Brothers fame) - \$50.
 - Actor David Herman (Michael Bolton from “Office Space”) - \$40
 - Charlene Tilton (“Dallas”) - \$40.
 - Actor Zack Galligan (“Gremlins”) - \$39.99.
 - Larry Wilcox (Jon from “Chips”) - \$40.
 - Don Beebe (ex-NFL player from Buffalo Bills) - \$25.
 - Ventriloquist Christine Bayer - \$12.
 - Actor Tyson Jarvis - \$1.
- I’m no accountant, but \$1 is less than the \$50 I was sending folks for an Amazon gift card. So is \$12. Don’t know about \$40 – will have to check on that.
- Anyway, it’s certainly worth a try. And Charlene Tilton may need the dough.
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“My desire to be well-informed is currently at odds with my desire to remain sane.”

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

