

EDVOCATE

Not all that can be measured, should be; not all that should be measured, can be

YES Opportunities

The 2017-18 school year has been deemed the Year of Excellent Service (YES). PSTA is teaming with Habitat for Humanity, the Red Cross and other local service groups in order to give something back to our communities. Keep checking the website and reading your district email for opportunities to make a difference.

More Professional Development Coming

PSTA wants you to be the best possible teacher you can be. We will continue to offer professional development throughout the year. If you missed Dave Burgess and his "Teach Like a Pirate" conference, you've still got time to register for our next PD, "EdCamp Coachella," on October 21. Go to our website for a registration link and keep going back to see additional PDs on preparing for an interview, educators and the law, and more.



Time to Change the Narrative - A Message from your PSTA President

Some fifteen years ago I came to the realization that public education in this country isn't really failing. Oh, I've seen all the data that say we are. I've been reading articles carrying this message for as long as I've been a teacher, and I, like many of you, bought into it. Ironically, it was through public education that I learned the narrative was, and is, false.

Around 2002 I asked my Eng. III CP class to pick a topic for a research project. One curious girl who was studying the Cold War in her History class, chose to explore the affects of Sputnik on the American psyche. No, that wasn't the moment I realized





Socialize with Us

One of the most common complaints teachers have is that they often feel isolated. When we give so much of our time to students, we sometimes forget to take care of ourselves. PSTA is offering many opportunities for you to socialize with other members.

You can join us for the 32nd Tram Road Challenge on October 28th. We'll even supply you with a new PSTA t-shirt to run or walk in.

If you still feel the need to burn calories after the Tram Run, we'll have members participating in the Veteran's Day 5K Run/Walk Parade. Our own Lee Wilson will be there with his mobile "Fallen Heroes Project." You can register for the Tram or the parade at our web page.

Bargaining/Benefits

Bargaining for a new Collective Bargaining Agreement will begin as soon as Tony Signoret takes over as the district's new Asst. Superintendent of Human Resources. Besides total compensation, we'll be negotiating improved working conditions.

American education isn't a failure, but given her enthusiasm and the way she and her classmates dove into their topics, it should have been. While helping her plow through the card catalogs and vertical files for information (for our younger teachers, that's how we used to access information prior to research data bases and the internet), I stumbled across a copy of *US News and World Report* from 1959. I was immediately taken aback by the cover title: *What Went Wrong with American Education*.

Wait just a doggone minute. Weren't the fifties the heyday of education in this country? Isn't this what we're trying to recapture when we aspire to "Make America Great Again"? If we buy into the narrative, we've been failing for more than sixty years. Heck, I'll be sixty next year and am a product of our public school system; it's a wonder I can stream together complete sentences in any coherent manner.

The truth is, American education wasn't failing in 1959 and it isn't failing in 2017. We've just been told the lie so long, we now accept it as fact. I realize I might be one of the few you-kids-get-off-my-lawn generation who feel this way. I might be one of the only



baby boomers who believe schools (read that as teachers) do a better job educating the masses today than at any time in our history.

According to the US Census Bureau, in 1960 just over 40% of the population age twenty-five or older graduated from high school. For the next fifty-plus years, while schools were supposedly failing, the number has increased steadily to today's 85% (https://www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/censusatlas/pdf/10_Education.pdf). How's that for sixty years of failure?

Obviously, I'm ignoring all of those studies the media is so quick to report showing our students don't match up with the rest of the world. That was, of course, the whole point behind the *US News and World Report* article of 1959. Those dirty Reds were beating us in space because we failed our youth in the classroom. Since then it's been Japan, China, India, and more recently, Finland who have, at various points in history, blown us away with standardized test scores. And as every non-analytical mind knows, standardized test scores tell us everything we need to know.

According to the Economic Policy Institute, when we've compared different countries standardized tests scores, we've been comparing apples to orangutans. Since the U.S. tests every student in its system, the "average performance appears to be relatively low partly because we have so many test takers from the bottom of the social class distribution," not to mention students with special needs and, in California at least, every immigrant who has been here for one full year (<http://www.epi.org/publication/us-student-performance-testing/>). None of the countries to whom we are compared test such a diverse group.

Sixty years of misinformation may have shaped the collective American opinion about education in our country, but it hasn't changed the way parents feel about their local schools. In one of the greatest examples of cognitive dissonance I've ever encountered, the most recent Gallup poll revealed that although only 47% of the respondents were at least "somewhat satisfied" with the quality of education in the U.S., an overwhelming 79% were at least "somewhat satisfied" with the quality of education their child received locally - and 35% were "completely satisfied" (<http://news.gallup.com/poll/1612/education.aspx>). It's easy to see that the American psyche doesn't match the American experience.

I'm sure I would have responded similarly to an identical poll when my son was attending elementary school at Katherine Finchy twenty-five years ago. The message of failing schools was so ingrained in my mind, I probably would not have recognized it didn't match what I was seeing with my own eyes. My son is the product of wonderful PSUSD teachers, of a wonderfully successful American educational system. Surely, it's not perfect; we have challenges that are unlike any other profession. And yet it's still the one other countries aspire to become. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, it's the worst possible system, with the exception of all the others.

