

Wednesday, May 31, 2006

## News Nuggets

School Busses are Dangerous for our Children

What's going on that the air inside our school busses is worse than the air outside the bus (if the bus windows are closed)?

Check these articles:

School Bus Fumes

from: ScienceNetLinks.com

<http://tinyurl.com/lewjx>

School Bus Diesel Fumes Fueling Kids' Cancer Risk?

from: Life.FamilyEducation.com

<http://tinyurl.com/h4oho>

School Bus Diesel Fumes May be Cause of Rise in Asthma from: Mindfully.org

<http://tinyurl.com/gey6h>

Protect Children From Diesel Fumes from: the Minnesota OEA and MPCA

<http://www.moea.state.mn.us/ee/noidle.cfm>

The Office of Environmental Assistance and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency states on their web site...

"The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has determined that diesel fumes contain 40 toxic chemicals, including 15 carcinogens."

<http://www.moea.state.mn.us/ee/noidle.cfm>

Accolades to the Minnesota State Legislature for passing a bit of legislation that benefits and protects children.

"In May 2002, Minnesota adopted legislation to protect the health and safety of children from harmful diesel bus emissions. This law calls for schools to reduce the unnecessary idling of school buses in front of schools, and reroute bus parking zones away from air-intake vents or if necessary, relocate the air-intake vents."

<http://www.moea.state.mn.us/ee/noidle.cfm>

What is going on here?

"Toxic chemicals in diesel emissions increase the risk of asthma, lung and heart disease, and are responsible for as many as 125,000 cancers nationwide. Yale University's Dr. John Wargo recently found that students on school buses are exposed to 5 to 15 times the levels of particulate pollution than at nearby monitoring sites. Bus idling and bus queuing (back-to-front line-up of buses) increases the concentrations of harmful particulate pollution inside school buses."

<http://www.moea.state.mn.us/ee/noidle.cfm>

What these articles also state is:

Older busses have higher concentrations of noxious and toxic chemicals

Some school busses that were tested were built in 1975, and are still on the road

Concentrations of toxic and noxious chemicals are higher in busses when the windows are closed

What these articles don't mention that:

In times of high fuel prices (maybe for the foreseeable future), idling busses get 0 miles per gallon, and fuel economy dissipates faster than the noxious fumes

The busses do not have to idle to keep the air conditioner in operation (Does anyone know of a school district that has air conditioned busses?)

Maybe the bus drivers want to keep the heater running during the Minnesota winters!

The fumes outside the bus are unhealthy for teachers who are required to perform bus duty  
The gasoline powered vehicles of the parents who wait in a cue to pick up their children donate a lot of fumes to the parent pick up area, too  
Some states have moved school bus fleets to the use of natural gas as a cleaner, more environmentally friendly, alternative to diesel fuel

It is nice that some attention is being paid to the health of our students in one state out of 50.  
And, what about seat belts on school busses? If we care so much for our students, wouldn't seat belts make sense?  
No, it turns out. The cost retrofitting seat belts on school busses would be too high. And, if two seat belts were placed on a seat, then they wouldn't be much good when three students have to sit on one seat because of over crowded routes.

One author states that school busses are safer than private transportation, and that parents shouldn't pull their children from the busses.

Sure, it is better for some children to die a lingering cancer death years later than for our school districts to spend the money to do what protects them now. The number of children that acquire cancer from school bus riding will only be a small percentage, as compared to the huge number of students that benefit economically from going to school.

And, what is the reason that school districts keep busses running for thirty years? Could tight budgets be the culprit?

The saga of bureaucracy and management is the endless compromises that are caused by budget shortfalls, and a "Let's do something, even though it isn't enough" reality.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

## **Short Article**

Tips for Interviewing your Prospective Employer: Questions for Choosing the Right District

This article coaches you on how to interview your prospective school district or campus. While, most articles reveal how to excel at a job interview, this article shares strategies to ensure that you don't choose the wrong school district or campus to work at.

If you live in a rural area, and there is only one choice, then study Classroom Toolkit to find ways of saving time while being more effective.

However, if you have choices of where to work, you are in a position to interview your prospective employer to learn what working in each organization is really like.

One strategy is to talk to people in the district's technology and maintenance departments. Technical staff members tell the truth, and as Scott Adams of Dilbert fame points quips, engineers are like Vulcans, and cannot lie.

If you cannot obtain permission to visit the Technology or Maintenance Departments, be wary. And, redouble your efforts during the interview to discover how the organization treats staff members.

Here are some questions:

How does a teacher communicate classroom needs, and what is the timeline for providing for these needs (in full)?

What is the tutoring program for every student, and if there is ever a delay in providing needed help, what is the length of that delay?

What process is in place to ensure a delay in providing needed help to every student does not happen again?

What administrative support keeps teacher morale high?

What tools does the workplace environment provide for staff and team collaboration?

What awards, recognition and commendations has the campus or district received for delivering outstanding learning opportunities to all students?

How does the school or district respond to changes in student demographics, federal law, and technical innovation?

What distinguishes this district or campus in the delivery of exemplary learning opportunities for students and teachers?

What specific professional develop initiatives of this district or campus target teacher creativity, collaboration and self-expression?

Accepting a job is cause for celebration, but, if you have a choice, pick the district or campus that matches the kind of answers that you want to hear when you ask questions similar to these.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Short Article at 10:00

## **Feature Article**

### Bilingual Programs: Short Shrift as Usual for a Double-Barreled Opportunity

There is a need for quality Bilingual education in many countries including the United States.

But, the delivery of quality, useful, benefiting-our-country learning to our children gets bogged down, side-tracked, subverted and "short-shrifted" by the bureaucracy, just like most other programs.

"A gentleman by the name of Ernesto Ortese, a foreman on the south Texas ranches quoted [sic] as saying, 'My children learn Spanish in school so that they can grow up to be bus boys and waiters. I teach them English at home so they can grow up to be doctors and lawyers.'"

(Thursday, April 30, 1998, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Youth and Families, Committee on Education and the Workforce, words of Representative Martinez)

(<http://tinyurl.com/jlcu4>)

Aside from the political issues (because there is a perceived connection between the need for Bilingual instruction and immigration in the mind of many citizens), there are basic educational issues that seem to be ignored by almost everyone.

In addition, some "Bilingual" issues are economic, because, in many cases, children with lower English language proficiency will earn less money, particularly in an "Information Economy."

Is Bilingual education responsible for maintaining a large Spanish-speaking underclass?

Here are words from Congressman Martinez at the same House Hearing...

"None of my brothers and sisters went to college. In fact, I was only one of two that graduated high school of ten. But we did all right, and we didn't have bilingual education. But I'll tell you something else, 50 percent of the kids that started with me in kindergarten never finished high school, because they dropped behind because they had English-barrier problems. They dropped behind until they were so frustrated they dropped out.

(Thursday, April 30, 1998, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Youth and Families, Committee on Education and the Workforce. Words of Representative Martinez)

(<http://tinyurl.com/jlcu4>)

"If you are learning math, you first learn all the terminology in Spanish, Laotian, Tagalog, whatever. Then you have to retranslate it when you are taught it again. Is it any wonder these kids are bombing achievement tests when they are given in English? They are having to learn the subject matter twice.

(Thursday, April 30, 1998, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Youth and Families, Committee on Education and the Workforce. Words of Mr. Jim Boulet, Executive Director, English First)

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Featured Article at 09:00

### Teacher Resources

Mind Tools -- A Career Resource Site

We have found a career development site that has many resources that parallel Classroom Toolkit's strategies for improving teachers' lives.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Resources at 06:00

### Book Review

Work 2.0: Rewriting the Contract

Author: Jensen, Bill | ISBN: 0-7382-0569-9 | Format: Hard Cover | Pub. Date: 2002

Publisher: Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishers | Pages: 194 | Cost: \$25.00 (List) | Available: Amazon at as low as \$0.50 (new paperback) \$0.03 (used paperback, shipping \$3.99 at eBay(TM))

(Note: if you are short of cash, wait until our review next month, and buy another book by Bill Jensen. This review tells you everything a teacher needs to know about this new concept of work.)

Subtitle:

Rewriting the Contract

This book really is about how information the economy is different from the Industrial Age economy, and how talent is an organization's most valuable asset.

The Books' Topics:

Finding and retaining talented workers is the most important aspect of an Information Economy

Information workers need to be supported in the creative and individual expression of their talents

People need to interact, find inspiration, motivate each other, and collaborate...and these relationships should not be restricted to a company or organization. Collaboration should be world wide

Leadership means supporting and nurturing talent, trusting people and allowing for wildly better results than were first anticipated

The central themes of this book are:

No one needs companies to help them collaborate in our information society

Talented workers won't stay on a job that restricts their output, or their expression

It is difficult (or impossible) for talented employees to accomplish organizational goals with a top-down structure

Leadership (and supporting talented workers) means delivering what workers need, now; and in creating easy solutions for that worker to use on the job

Keywords:

Invisible Workplace

Asset Revolution

Peer-to-Peer Value

Extreme Leadership

Main Idea:

The old-style, top-down, chain-of-command management of bureaucracy is ineffective and obsolete

Talented employees are the most valuable asset of any organization, and collaborating employees leverage (multiply) that value still further

Leadership and management is about trust, and about understanding that meddling with the talents and creativity of employees is always detrimental to the positive outcomes and beneficial results that the organization needs.

Management support means getting out of the way of these talented employees, and letting them express their abilities.

Quotes:

"The biggest shift in the next few years will be how leaders lead." (p. - 46)

"Your company may serve a critical marketplace or customer need. But nobody needs companies anymore to help them collaborate, share, or create. People can now self-organize amazingly well, thank you. Their daily challenge is to get the most out of each connection, often in the least amount of time." (p. - 47)

"If I'm not working on something that is incredibly challenging and incredibly important, I'm not going to be there...My Work My Way includes the way we need to work in order to meet the team's goals. Nonnegotiable are the best tools, total flexibility about how to achieve results, and completely open information sharing." (p. - 51)

"Extreme leaders constantly ask, "Am I doing enough to demonstrate that I respect and trust the people around me? Am I changing enough?" (p. - 120)

"Extreme leaders constantly ask, "How far will we go to ensure that employees can control their own destiny?" (p. - 120)

"...freedom and autonomy ranked equal to, or higher than, compensation in job-interview questions...in order to attract and retain key talent in highest demand, companies will need to create more opportunities to affect company decisions, build businesses, and share in wealth creation." (p. - 184)

Issues Addressed by the Book:

This book addresses the issue of employee's autonomy and creativity. This concept is important to teachers in two ways:

Politicians and school administrators need to understand that teachers are the most valuable asset of a school (and district), and need to understand that support for autonomy and just-in-time delivery of materials, supplies and resources

are the leader's main job

Teachers should be telling their leaders what they need, and leaders performance should be gauged by how well the employee's needs are fulfilled.

Students have the same talent and value as workers. It is the teacher's job to listen to students and to deliver what students need to create, collaborate and produce.

Teacher who demand that school leaders deliver what they need should provide a similar level of support to their students.

The Book's Shortcomings:

This book's style is a bit boring and objective. The book presents information and ideas, rather than a compelling story.

Comments:

The ideas that are presented in this book are valuable for teachers on two levels:

For teachers' contribution as talented knowledge workers

For teachers' "Extreme Leadership" with students

The author's belief that "trust is central" is precisely right-on.

Politicians and school administrators must trust teachers, and teachers must trust students.

The impulse toward mastery and achievement is innate in all people...a force that traditional, factory-oriented schools have been targeted for elimination.

Supporting and nurturing creative minds is required for a society to remain competitive in the global, information economy.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 05:00