



A debate in schools

Gifted and talented, or racist and elitist? > 19



HEALTH: Vaccines for elementary-
age children > 18



STATE: Child care crisis hampers
the economy > 17



LATIN AMERICA: Villages try to
preserve Day of the Dead > 15

EDUCATION

Gifted and talented, or racist and elitist?

NEW YORK (AP)

Communities across the United States are reconsidering their approach to gifted and talented programs in schools as vocal parents blame such elite programs for worsening racial segregation and inequities in the country's education system.

A plan announced by New York City's mayor to phase out elementary school gifted and talented programs in the country's largest school district — if it proceeds — would be among the most significant developments yet in a push that extends from Boston to Seattle and that has stoked passions and pain over race, inequality and access to a decent education.

From the start, gifted and talented school programs drew worries they would produce an educational caste system in U.S. public schools. Many of the exclusive programs trace their origins to efforts to stanch "white flight" from public schools, particularly in diversifying urban areas, by



In this Thursday, October 14, 2021, file photo, protesters at City Hall condemn Mayor Bill de Blasio's plan to phase out the Gifted and Talented (G&T) public school program in New York.

providing high-caliber educational programs that could compete with private or parochial schools.

Increasingly, parents and school boards are grappling with difficult questions over equity, as they discuss how to accommodate the educational aspirations of advanced learners while nurturing other students so they can equally thrive. It's a quandary that is driving the debate over whether to expand gifted and talented

programs or abolish them altogether.

"I get the burn-it-down and tear-it-down mentality, but what do we replace it with?" asked Marcia Gentry, a professor of education and the director of the Gifted Education Research and Resource Institute at Purdue University.

Gentry coauthored a study two years ago that used federal data to catalogue the stark racial disparities in gifted and talented programs.

It noted that U.S. schools identified 3.3 million students as gifted and talented but that an additional 3.6 million should have been similarly designated. The additional students missing from those rolls, her study said, were disproportionately Black, Latino and Indigenous students.

Nationwide, 8.1% of white and 12.7% of Asian American children in public schools are considered gifted, compared with 4.5% of Hispanic and 3.5% of Black students, according to an Associated Press analysis of the most recent federal data.

In Seattle, a schools superintendent who left her job in May sought to do away with the district's Highly Capable Cohort program, as the district's gifted and talented program is called, blaming it for causing de facto segregation. In its own recent analysis, Seattle public schools found only 0.9% of Black children had been identified as gifted, compared with 12.6% of its white students.

In Boston, the school committee voted this summer to expand eligibility to its exclusive exam schools and guarantee spots to high-achieving students from poor and disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Latino students account for roughly 42% of Boston's 53,000 public school students -- about twice the number as whites -- but are vastly underrepresented in advanced courses. By the district's account, fewer than 20% of the fourth graders invited to participate in advanced work classes were Latino, while 43% of those invited were white.

Many children are overlooked because of language and cultural barriers, said Iván Espinoza-Madrigal, the executive director of Boston's Lawyers for Civil Rights. Subconscious bias among teachers who nominate students for the program also play a role, he said.

Table of Contents

- 19 EDUCATION:** Gifted and talented, or racist and elitist?
- 18 HEALTH:** COVID-19 vaccine campaign expands to elementary-age children
- 17 STATE:** Exacerbated by pandemic, child care crisis hampers economy
- 15 LATIN AMERICA:** Mexican villages try to preserve authentic Day of the Dead
- 14 SPORTS:** Smith did his job and Seattle now waits for Wilson's return
- 14 POLITICS:** Biden cites 'overwhelming obligations' of US on climate
- 13 HEALTH:** COVID-19's global death toll tops 5 million in under 2 years
- 13 IMMIGRATION:** US in talks to compensate families separated at border



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HEALTH

COVID-19 vaccine campaign expands to elementary-age children



This October 2021, photo provided by Pfizer shows kid-size doses of its COVID-19 vaccine in Puurs, Belgium.

(AP)

The U.S. entered a new phase Wednesday in its COVID-19 vaccination campaign, with shots now available to millions of elementary-age children in what health officials hailed as a major breakthrough after more than 18 months of illness, hospitalizations, deaths and disrupted education.

With the federal government promising enough vaccine to protect the nation's 28 million kids ages 5-11, pediatricians' offices, pharmacies, hospitals, schools and health clinics were poised to begin the shots after the final OK late Tuesday.

"This is not going to be 'The Hunger Games,'" said Dr. Allison Arwady, Chicago's public health commissioner, referring to the chaotic early national rollout of adult vaccines nearly a year ago. Chicago expected to have nearly enough vaccine in just the first week for nearly half of its 210,000 school-aged children, and many more doses later on.

"Our goal is to be ready, have a calm rollout," Arwady said.

Kid-sized doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine cleared two final hurdles Tuesday — a recommendation from CDC advisers followed by a green light from Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The actions mean sleepovers, playdates and family get-togethers put off for more than a year will be back on the agenda for

many kids, along with a chance for fewer school interruptions.

"There are children in the second grade who have never experienced a normal school year," Walensky said. "Pediatric vaccination has the power to help us change all of that."

Thousands of pediatricians pre-ordered doses, and Pfizer began shipments soon after the Food and Drug Administration's decision Friday to authorize emergency use. Pfizer said it expects to make 19,000 shipments totaling about 11 million doses in the next several days, and that millions more will be available to order on a weekly basis.

The vaccine — one-third the dose given to older children and adults and administered with kid-sized needles — requires two doses three weeks apart, plus two more weeks for full protection to kick in. That means children who get vaccinated before Thanksgiving will be covered by Christmas.

"This is a big milestone for 5- to 11-year-olds because they make up nearly 40% of children under 18," said Dr. Jennifer Shu, a Decatur, Georgia, pediatrician, who received her first shipment Tuesday morning.

"The timing before winter holidays is very fortunate," she added. "This age group will be able to spend holidays with friends and family more safely than they have been able to since the start of the pandemic."



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STATE

Exacerbated by pandemic, child care crisis hampers economy

SEATTLE, Washington (AP)

After Bryan Kang's son was born in July, the occupational therapist and his wife, a teacher, started looking for child care in the Los Angeles area. The couple called eight day care centers: Some didn't have spots for months; others stopped taking their calls and some never answered at all.

So with no viable options, Kang scrambled to find a new job that would allow him to work remotely.

"I told my manager, 'Hey, by the end of the month, I have to transition out,'" Kang said. "They were very supportive and very understanding because they're all mothers. But now there's one less body to see patients."

Kang said he's fortunate he found a job teaching online classes, but the unexpected career pivot forced him to take an 11% pay cut.

The truth is, even if he could find a day care spot for his now 3-month-old son, the \$2,500 monthly cost of infant care is so high that taking a lower-paying

job so he can work from home and care for the baby is the most financially sensible thing to do.

The child care business has for years operated in a broken, paradoxical market: low wages for workers and high costs for consumers. Yet the critical service somehow managed to limp along.

Now, the pandemic has made clear what many experts had long warned: The absence of reliable and affordable child care limits which jobs people can accept, makes it harder to climb the corporate ladder and ultimately restricts the ability of the broader economy to grow.

Child Care Aware estimates 9% of licensed child care programs have permanently closed since the pandemic



Amy McCoy reads a book to preschoolers as they finish their lunch at her Forever Young Daycare facility, on Monday, October 25, 2021, in Mountlake Terrace, Washington.

began, based on its tally of nearly 16,000 shuttered centers and in-home day cares in 37 states between December 2019 and March 2021.

The national crisis has forced many people — mostly women — to leave their jobs, reshaping the child care crisis as not just a problem for parents of young

children, but also anyone who depends on them. It has contributed to a labor shortage, which in turn has hurt businesses and made it more difficult for customers to access goods and services.

At Forever Young Daycare in the Seattle suburb of Mountlake Terrace, Amy McCoy is burning out fast.

She's spent half of this year trying to hire a new assistant for her in-home child care, but until then, the former public school teacher works 50 hours a week caring for children herself, and more doing the cooking, cleaning and administrative work needed to run her business.

"Nobody wants to work for what I can afford to pay right now," McCoy said. "I absolutely believe these are \$20-an-hour employees, but I hate that, most likely, I will have to raise tuition."

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LATIN AMERICA

Mexican villages try to preserve authentic Day of the Dead



Family members keep vigil beside graves during Day of the Dead festivities at the Tzintzuntzan cemetery in Michoacan, Mexico, on Sunday, October 31, 2021.

AROCUTIN, Mexico (AP)

The famed Day of the Dead ceremonies around Mexico's Lake Patzcuaro were once again thronged with visitors on Monday, economic relief for a tourist-dependent region that suffered from last year's pandemic shutdown of the observance.

In the lakeside city of Patzcuaro itself, tourists were treated to a parade, theater and music performances.

"Come and visit us, Patzcuaro welcomes you with open arms," said Julio Arreola, mayor of the city in the western state of Michoacan that is famed for its colonial-era plazas and architecture.

But in some smaller villages around the lakeshore, residents tried to preserve the authentic, non-tourist flavor of traditions passed down for hundreds of years.

While kids in Mexico City donned Halloween-style costumes based on the Netflix series "Squid Game," people in the village of Arocutin were more concerned with the flower arrangements and candles meant to guide the spirits of the dead home.

Residents of Arocutin started hanging up traditional garlands of marigold flowers early morning Sunday to adorn the entrance of the small local cemetery.

Arocutin remains a holdout: It is the only town in the region where the cemetery lies in the churchyard, and where all the tombs are dug directly into the earth, surrounded by a simple ring of stones, rather than the more elaborate cement and brick vaults used elsewhere.

"It's all about preserving tradition as much as we can," said Alma Ascencio, the

representative for local artisans. "Tourism has distorted everything. This is a celebration, sure, but a religious one, so there is no music or much alcohol. It is very private, a completely different thing."

While the island of Janitzio in Lake Patzcuaro is the site best known for colorful Day of the Dead celebrations, the tiny island remains closed to visitors to avoid crowding.

That raised concerns that tourists might flock to smaller villages nearby.

Those concerns may be overstated. The only American in Arocutin Monday was Georgia Conti. A retired healthcare manager, she decided to move to Arocutin precisely because of its beauty and traditions, and she now lives here with her dog.

When she was building her house with her late husband, they found bones that were believed to be those of a soldier killed in 1915 during the Mexican Revolution.

"Some tourists do come around here, but here is a different world. I really respect their traditions," said Conti. "Villagers are really welcoming and told me I could lay my mother's ashes here, next to the unknown soldier. I will probably be buried here when I die."

The Day of the Dead originated in Indigenous cultures and has been celebrated for thousands of years, but tourists started arriving in Arocutin only in 2002. Residents are open to sharing their costumes, but resistant to changing them in any way.

"We don't celebrate Halloween here. We are not American, we celebrate our dead. Our culture is rich enough here in Michoacan and Mexico," Ascencio said while preparing marigold garlands.



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SPORTS

Smith does his job and Seattle now waits for Wilson's return

RENTON, Washington (AP)

In the bigger picture of what he was being asked to do, Geno Smith did his job as a three-week starter at quarterback for the Seattle Seahawks.

He won the game he should be expected to when the Seahawks routed Jacksonville 31-7 on Sunday. He kept Seattle competitive in losses to Pittsburgh and New Orleans before making a few late mistakes, neither game the Seahawks were favored to win.

Smith served his role as the bridge between Russell Wilson undergoing finger surgery and the reality of when the Seahawks' franchise QB may be able to return.

"I'm not trying to be arrogant or anything like that, but I've done it for a long time. You can pull up tape from 2014 of me doing the same thing," Smith said after he went 20 of 24 passing with two TDs against the Jaguars. "The reality is that I know who I am. I'm never going to get too big or too high on it."

But now all eyes will be on Wilson, espe-

cially after his tweet on Monday afternoon of the pin in his surgically repaired right middle finger being removed. The pin being removed is the first step in the realistic progression of when Wilson may be able to return to action.

There are still doctors exams and grip tests that'll help determine Wilson's progression. But with Seattle not playing for another 13 days, the chances have grown of Wilson being ready on Nov. 14 at Green Bay.

"We're just kind of hoping for the best in terms of his return and that everything's handled really well," Carroll said Monday before Wilson's tweet.

The Seahawks will travel to Green Bay in Week 10, a place they have struggled badly. Including playoffs, Seattle has lost its last nine trips to Lambeau Field. Its last win in Green Bay came on November 1, 1999.



Seattle Seahawks quarterback Geno Smith gestures as he heads off the field after his team defeated the Jacksonville Jaguars in an NFL football game, on Sunday, October 31, 2021, in Seattle, Washington.

POLITICS

Biden cites 'overwhelming obligations' of US on climate

GLASGOW, Scotland (AP)

In a markedly more humble tone for a U.S. leader, President Joe Biden acknowledged at a U.N. summit Monday that the United States and other energy-gulping developed nations bear much of the responsibility for climate change, and said actions taken this decade to contain global warming will be decisive in preventing future generations from suffering.

"None of us can escape the worst that is yet to come if we fail to seize this moment," Biden declared.

The president treated the already visible crisis for the planet — flooding, volatile weather, droughts and wildfires — as a unique opportunity to reinvent the global economy. Standing before world leaders gathered in Scotland, he sought to portray the enormous costs of limiting emissions from coal, oil and natural gas as a chance to create jobs by transitioning to renewable energy and electric automobiles.

Yet he also apologized for former Pres-

ident Donald Trump's decision to leave the Paris Agreement and the role the U.S. and other wealthy countries played in contributing to climate change.

"Those of us who are responsible for much of the deforestation and all of the problems we have so far," Biden said, have "overwhelming obligations" to the poorer nations that account for few of the emissions yet are paying a price as the planet has grown hotter.

As for Trump's action, Biden said: "I shouldn't apologize, but I do apologize for the fact the United States, the last administration, pulled out of the Paris Accords and put us sort of behind the eight ball a little bit."

His words, in seemingly impromptu comments, appeared a break from past comments of many U.S. leaders, who either made little mention of U.S. responsibility for the warming earth or — as Biden himself did on the eve of the climate summit — blamed China as the



U.S. President Joe Biden speaks during the opening ceremony of the UN Climate Change Conference COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland, on Monday, November 1, 2021.

world's current biggest emitter of climate-wrecking coal and petroleum fumes.

Over history, scientists say, it's the United States that has pumped out the most climate-damaging pollution of any nation, as coal, diesel and gasoline powered the United States and other developed nations to wealth.

Biden, who briefly closed his eyes at one point during the speeches, used the summit to announce he planned to work

with the U.S. Congress to provide \$3 billion annually to help poorer countries and communities cope with climate damage, as developing nations increasingly are demanding of established, wealthier economies.

At Glasgow, the magnitude of the moment is crashing head-first into complicated global and domestic politics. The Biden administration is exhorting other nations to make big, fast emissions cuts to stave off the worst scenarios of global warming. But the president is simultaneously fighting to nail down his own climate investments with Congress that would keep the U.S. on track with Biden's own pledges.

"We'll demonstrate to the world the United States is not only back at the table, but hopefully leading by the power of our example," Biden said. "I know it hasn't been the case, and that's why my administration is working overtime to show that our climate commitment is action, not words."

HEALTH

COVID-19's global death toll tops 5 million in under 2 years

(AP)

The global death toll from COVID-19 topped 5 million on Monday, less than two years into a crisis that has not only devastated poor countries but also humbled wealthy ones with first-rate health care systems.

Together, the United States, the European Union, Britain and Brazil — all upper-middle- or high-income countries — account for one-eighth of the world's population but nearly half of all reported deaths. The U.S. alone has recorded over 745,000 lives lost, more than any other nation.

"This is a defining moment in our lifetime," said Dr. Albert Ko, an infectious disease specialist at the Yale School of Public Health. "What do we have to do to protect ourselves so we don't get to another 5 million?"

The death toll, as tallied by Johns Hopkins University, is about equal to the populations of Los Angeles and San Francisco combined. It rivals the number of people killed in battles among nations

since 1950, according to estimates from the Peace Research Institute Oslo. Globally, COVID-19 is now the third leading cause of death, after heart disease and stroke.

The staggering figure is almost certainly an undercount because of limited testing and people dying at home without medical attention, especially in poor parts of the world, such as India.

Hot spots have shifted over the 22 months since the outbreak began, turning different places on the world map red. Now, the virus is pummeling Russia, Ukraine and other parts of Eastern Europe, especially where rumors, misinformation and distrust in government have hobbled vaccination efforts. In Ukraine, only 17% of the adult population is fully vaccinated; in Armenia, only 7%.

"What's uniquely different about this pandemic is it hit hardest the high-resource countries," said Dr. Wafaa El-Sadr, director of ICAP, a global health center at Columbia University. "That's the



Relatives of Luis Enrique Rodriguez, who died of COVID-19, visit where he was buried on a hill at the El Pajonal de Cogua Natural Reserve, in Cogua, north of Bogota, Colombia, on Monday, October 25, 2021.

irony of COVID-19."

Wealthier nations with longer life expectancies have larger proportions of older people, cancer survivors and nursing home residents, all of whom are especially vulnerable to COVID-19, El-Sadr noted. Poorer countries tend to have larger shares of children, teens and young adults, who are less likely to fall seriously ill from the coronavirus.

India, despite its terrifying delta surge that peaked in early May, now has a much lower reported daily death rate than wealthier Russia, the U.S. or Britain, though there is uncertainty around its figures.

The seeming disconnect between wealth and health is a paradox that disease experts will be pondering for years. But the pattern that is seen on the grand scale, when nations are compared, is different when examined at closer range. Within each wealthy country, when deaths and infections are mapped, poorer neighborhoods are hit

hardest.

In the U.S., for example, COVID-19 has taken an outside toll on Black and Hispanic people, who are more likely than white people to live in poverty and have less access to health care.

"When we get out our microscopes, we see that within countries, the most vulnerable have suffered most," Ko said.

IMMIGRATION

US in talks to compensate families separated at border

SAN DIEGO, California (AP)

The U.S. Justice Department is in talks to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars to each child and parent who was separated under a Trump-era practice of splitting families at the border, a person familiar with discussions to settle lawsuits said Thursday.

The Wall Street Journal first reported that the government was considering payments around \$450,000 to each person affected. A person familiar with the talks told The Associated Press that figure was under consideration but changed, though not dramatically. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the discussions are private.

The discussions continue, and there is no guarantee the two sides will strike agreement.

About 5,500 children were split from their parents under President Donald Trump's "zero tolerance" policy, under which parents were separated from their children to face criminal prosecution for

crossing the border illegally, according to court filings in a federal case in San Diego. Inadequate tracking systems caused many to be apart for an extended time. The payments are intended to compensate for the psychological trauma.

Attorneys for the families are also seeking permanent legal status in the United States for those separated under the practice, which a judge halted in June 2018, six days after Trump stopped it amid an international backlash.

The Justice Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment Thursday night.

The settlement talks involve several law firms. The American Civil Liberties Union is representing parents in the San



In this Thursday, June 21, 2018 file photo, Ever Castillo, left, and his family, immigrants from Honduras, are escorted back across the border by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol agents in Hidalgo, Texas.

Diego case.

The National Immigration Litigation Alliance represents five mothers and their children who were separated for more than two months, including four chil-

dren who were sent to holding facilities in New York. A federal judge in Arizona denied the government's bid to dismiss the case last year.

"No amount of money can compensate for the amount of pain and suffering these parents and children endured under this unconscionable and unprecedented policy," said Trina Realmuto, executive director of the National Immigration Litigation Alliance.

A Justice Department inspector general's report in January said a "single-minded focus on increasing immigration

prosecutions came at the expense of careful and appropriate consideration of the impact of family unit prosecutions and child separations."