

OPINIONS

Arizona schools can follow leads



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My son's first day of kindergarten is Aug. 5.

We have a school computer to use, but no log in.

We haven't met his teacher yet and only late on July 31 received a rough daily schedule for his lessons.

I don't blame the school for the limited and late-arriving details. The goalposts keep moving, and educators are doing their best to keep pace.

But I know a lot of parents are frustrated and stressed out, not knowing what to expect (much less what to tell their employers).

That's why I hope the Arizona Department of Health Services doesn't take until its Aug. 7 deadline to suggest metrics for when schools can reopen to in-person learning.

It was the right move to create these metrics. Deciding when to reopen schools – and when to close them if cases emerge – should have a firm foundation in public health data.

But, man, we're down to the wire here. And schools are mostly paralyzed in their decision-making until the state makes its recommendations.

Yes, schools have the final say on

when to reopen. But I doubt most districts and charters will forge their own public health parameters to inform that decision.

Most are going to use what DHS suggests.

And depending on what those metrics are, they could result in vastly different planning scenarios for schools, which must pivot staffing, sanitation and a slew of other resources relatively quickly once they are cleared to reopen.

It's one thing if that pivot may come within a few weeks of the new school year starting. It's another if it isn't likely to happen for the first quarter or even the first semester.

State schools superintendent Kathy Hoffman has called for Arizona to consider using "a downward trajectory in new confirmed cases of COVID-19, a decrease in positivity rates for COVID-19 testing" and "the widespread availability of testing with timely results."

But it's unclear which public health metrics the state health department will ultimately recommend, or what the thresholds for reopening will be.

If Arizona follows the direction that schools in other states are taking, it's probably going to be a while before in-person instruction resumes.

Schools can reopen in New York, for example, when their specific region has a daily infection rate of 5% or below, on average, over 14 days. Schools must close when the infection rate increases

Will Arizona choose similar metrics to reopen schools or forge its own path? If Arizona follows the direction that schools in other states are taking, it's probably going to be a while before in-person instruction resumes.

to 9% using a seven-day average. The state is expected to release the formula to calculate this next week.

In Oregon, its statewide testing positivity rate must be 5% or less over the preceding seven days for three straight weeks. Counties must have similar positivity rates, as well as 10 or fewer new cases per 100,000 population, with a few exceptions.

Oregon noted in its research that when Denmark, Germany and Australia reopened schools, they had new daily case rates ranging from 2.6 per 100,000

people in Denmark to less than 1 in Australia.

According to data from Covid Act Now, Oregon's daily new case rate as of July 29 was 7.3 per 100,000.

Arizona's was 33.9.

Tennessee, meanwhile, has created three zones – green, yellow and red – for school operations, allowing schools to open with five or fewer new daily cases per 100,000 people.

Its Department of Health also has created a decision tree to help guide schools on whether to close classrooms or the entire building when cases are confirmed on campus.

In Milwaukee, schools can reopen when the city reaches Phase 5 of its reopening plan, which requires a slew of case, testing, hospital capacity and contact tracing metrics to not only be met but maintained – something that has yet to happen.

I'm sure some will point out that most of these are blue cities and states, and that a red (or perhaps purple) state like Arizona will not choose similar thresholds that would ensure in-person education remains off the table for a long time.

Indeed, it'll be interesting to see which way we go.

I just hope we decide soon. Schools – and parents – need to know.

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Never Trumpers become Never Republicans



Rich Lowry
Columnist

"Burn it down" is rarely a wise or prudent sentiment.

A cadre of Republican opponents of President Donald Trump is nonetheless calling for a purifying fire to sweep through the GOP in the fall, taking down as many Republican officeholders as possible.

Only this willy-nilly bloodletting will teach the party the hard lesson it needs to learn for accommodating Trump over the past four years. As a Soviet commissar once put it: "We must execute not only the guilty. Execution of the innocent will impress the masses even more."

These Never Trumpers, as my colleague Ramesh Ponnuru puts it, are becoming Never Republicans. Their ranks run from columnist George Will, to Charlie Sykes of the anti-Trump website The Bulwark, to the operatives of The Lincoln Project.

Their hoped-for GOP electoral apocalypse doesn't make sense on its own terms, and their advocacy for one bears all the hallmarks of this perfervid time in our politics – it, too, is rageful and extreme, but satisfyingly emotive.

Let's stipulate that Republicans have often excused or looked past the inexcusable during Trump's presidency, and almost every Republican senator has a dimmer view of Trump than he or she will let on publicly. GOP officeholders have been especially loath to speak of the character defects that blight his presidency.

All of this deserves to be called out, but should the party of Lincoln be leveled?

The Never Republicans refuse to account for the practical calculations of practical politicians hoping, in difficult circumstances, to achieve practical results.

Was Mitch McConnell supposed to say after Trump's election, "I can't work with him," and, to borrow a phrase, burn down any chance of achieving anything constructive during a rare instance of unified Republican control of Washington?

McConnell obviously bites his tongue about the president all the time, but his main project has been working with the White House to confirm judges to the bench who are thoroughly committed to faithfully interpreting our laws and Constitution and will be doing their jobs when Trump is a distant memory.

Even if you think McConnell should have played it differently, what would defeating him and every other Senate Republican accomplish?

Back in the tea party era, purists insisted on nominating in 2010 the flagrantly unelectable Christine O'Donnell to stick it to the Republican establishment. Sure enough, she lost to Democrat Chris Coons, who is well on his way to a stress-free 30-year career in the Senate.

If Susan Collins loses her Senate seat in Maine this year in a burn-it-all-down conflagration, it will play out the same way. Put aside that she is hardly a Trumpist. If she goes down to defeat, Republicans are never winning her seat back. And it doesn't matter who the next Republican president is – an anti-Trump moderate or Don Jr. – the Democratic senator from Maine will be there to op-

pose whatever he or she is doing.

What the Never Republicans are hoping for is the least resistance to the most progressive president of our lifetimes to give him the greatest possible running room on abortion, conscience rights, health care, judges, climate, immigration, policing, gun rights, campaign finance, taxes and spending.

This is a high cost to pay, not just for the GOP, but for the country – at least, that's what you think if you are a conservative who believes progressives are deeply wrong on all these questions.

It's not even guaranteed that the posited purifying loss will purify. It's entirely conceivable that a post-Trump party will be more Trumpist, i.e., more populist, than before. Regardless, even after a landslide, the Republican Party will be made up of the same voters and officeholders who steadfastly supported Trump.

If the Never Republicans want a party untainted by these people, there is one available, and if they get their wish, it will be at the zenith of its power next year.

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Phoenix must ban flavored tobacco items targeting kids



Your Turn
Michael Nowakowski
Guest columnist

With Arizona's COVID-19 rates still a concern, we should consider everything we can do to keep ourselves and our youth healthy.

The bulk of COVID-19 cases, similar to our state's population, is centered in Maricopa County, with our Latino communities hit particularly hard and facing an infection rate more than twice that of non-Latinos.

Phoenix residents should follow public health guidance, but it is also critical that policymakers address the many factors that drive health and other disparities and make people of color more vulnerable to this pandemic – from housing and work conditions to health care access to high rates of underlying health conditions.

This is an important time for city leaders to take immediate action to pro-

tect the lung health of its residents. As we battle the novel coronavirus in Phoenix, we must also prioritize tackling tobacco addiction. Helping people quit smoking and vaping, coupled with a policy to end the sale of flavored tobacco products, is a great start.

The coronavirus attacks the respiratory system, which means that in the midst of this pandemic it's best to avoid behaviors that harm the lungs. We know that smoking increases the risk for respiratory infections, weakens the immune system and causes many underlying conditions, like lung and heart disease, that expose individuals to deadly complications from COVID-19.

In a recent study, researchers found smokers were more than twice as likely as nonsmokers to experience severe symptoms from COVID-19. There is also growing evidence that vaping e-cigarettes weakens the lungs' normal functions.

But even in the midst of one of the nation's worst health crises, the tobacco industry has not backed down from selling its lies. Vape shops have given away

protective masks with purchases in exploitative pandemic-themed promotions.

E-cigarettes have risen dramatically in popularity among youth over the past few years, fueled largely by flavored tobacco products.

More than 5.3 million middle and high school students across the nation used vaping products in 2018, and more than 16% of Arizona high school students vape. Moreover, e-cigarettes are the most commonly used tobacco products among Latino youth.

In addition to flavored e-cigarettes, we must also end the sale of menthol cigarettes and other flavored tobacco products. The tobacco industry has a long history of targeting kids, African Americans and other communities of color with marketing for menthol cigarettes, at great cost in health and lives.

Today, 7 out of 10 African American youth who smoke and 57% of Hispanic youth who smoke use menthol cigarettes. Menthol masks the harshness of smoking and makes cigarettes more addictive, making it easier for kids to start

smoking and harder for smokers to quit.

So, in the face of both a deadly virus and a predatory industry, the Phoenix City Council should pass the citywide ordinance I am sponsoring to end the sale of flavored tobacco products, including flavored e-cigarettes, menthol cigarettes, flavored cigars and flavored smokeless tobacco.

This policy protects the lungs of young people and people of color, who are most likely to be targets of the tobacco industry's deceptive marketing tactics.

In addition to an end to the sale of flavored tobacco products, culturally appropriate, bilingual efforts to help users quit are critical to preventing serious outcomes from COVID-19, and resources to help those who want to stop smoking and vaping should be promoted even more as we fight COVID-19.

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