



## PRESIDENT COMMENTARY

# Summertime Musings, 2017

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The field of education in the U.S.A. has, for a long time, operated with a set of assumptions or “givens”, which are often unspoken. These may range widely and some factors may have been challenged, including those related to diversity and violence. It is time to challenge practices that involve “business as usual”.

One assumption, having the summers “off”, evokes varying reactions depending on one’s point of view. Some react with the belief that teachers have an easy row to hoe. Others recognize the importance of taking valuable time to regroup and process, as well as to continue to engage in professional development.

Few teachers would assert that their primary motivation for going into the field of education is to have summers off, but many others may hold this stereotypical view, including some parents who work all year round. The historical roots of this sojourn in the summer, of course, stems from the agricultural tradition and the (usually unpaid) employment of youth in the fields during growing and harvesting season.

Given the industrialization of agriculture, along with the growing achievement gap, the possibility of restructuring schools so they meet all year round re-surfaces. Might this have a positive impact on student outcomes? The realities of experiences gaps are all the more poignant when we see some children benefitting from quality time during family vacations, learning from travels and visiting different places.

While other children may be stuck at home, potentially without books or access to other cultural opportunities, potentially food and/or nutrition insecure without the meals provided by schools during the academic year. Some communities have stepped up to address the needs of young people all year long.

All of this is especially painful as we launch the new fiscal year without a fully developed budget, and some districts have even needed to cancel summer school. The beginning of summer, usually experienced with at least some sense of relief, is this year accompanied by an often unspoken sense of apprehension and a fervent hope that the extended contention will yield to consensus or, at least, some degree of resolution. It is small comfort to know that Connecticut is not alone with many of these challenges.

In Connecticut, one of the many challenges relates to the ongoing processing of the CCJEF case. While this is still a work in progress, there are pressures related to the redistribution of resources, as well as some undercurrents regarding the ways to address ongoing needs perpetuated by disparities.

There are also varying perspectives on how, and how fast, to take action. “... We have much work to do to improve the odds that all of our children will have high expectations of themselves and high success rates in our schools. The schools can’t do this on our own.”

This clearly articulated perspective was shared by **Mary Broderick**, former NSBA president, in 2004, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of *Brown vs the Board of Education*, when she was CABE’s president. How have things changed since then? A new initiative for Connecticut’s State Board of Education, on which **Donald Harris**, CABE’s Vice President for Government Relations serves, is to increase the focus on recruitment of teachers who represent culturally diverse groups.

It is sometimes hard to break away from the ongoing challenging circumstances, especially when there is such a profound sense of unfinished business and the impending, perpetual sense of what “should” be done.

At the same time, it is all the more important that

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we take pause, breathe deeply, create some respite, center, prioritize, and somehow figure out how to do the best we can, under the circumstances. We can take the time to reorganize, renew, and perhaps reenvision possibilities. Our commitment to social change, equity and clarity is essential to our ongoing work.

This may be especially true when consensus is hard to reach and there are shortages of civility. To operate in the context of chronic crisis takes a toll. The nature of the shared work, through which we learn to acknowledge personal patterns and have the courage to change them, as needed, warrants full, aligned and attuned states of being.

Our collective focus, now, is on systems and structures. We are working with other organizations to address systemic discrimination, which has been part of the fabric of our society. We are also building upon past initiatives to enhance social justice. It may help to remind ourselves of some of the challenges of the past.

Langston Hughes asked, in 1951 “What happens to a dream deferred . . . does it dry up like a raisin in the sun . . .? Maybe it just sags, like a heavy load . . . or does it explode . . .?” Whatever the potential answers to those questions, it is evident that it is healthy to make choices that reduce deferred dreams.