Solving our school problems not a matter of gimmicky ideas

By Mary Sanchez

COMMENTARY

Clearly, change needs to happen. Our students are falling behind their peers even in lesser-developed nations. To become competitive again, our schools have to focus more heavily toward the STEM: studies; science, technology, engineering and math. And we don’t have the teaching staff.

Duncan has pointed to a problem that all teachers know. The first month back from summer break is often spent re-teaching concepts children last studied during the summer. So let’s keep groups such as the Boys & Girls Club of America not to build new facilities, rather to utilize schools.

Parks and schools as centers for communities, with all of its classes ranging from extracurricular activities offered (inside and outside the public school system) become an important and valuable part of the offftime of summer.

It sounds like a nice idea. But the reality is, the district is supposed to stretch the school year and make it more rigorous when many of them are struggling to find the resources to offer art, gym and reading.

Yes, it will be tough, Duncan admits. But parents must demand it. Drop-down change or ordered from Washington will not renew the U.S. education system, he says; parent will.

In a statement of support for the proposals authored by Parenting Magazine, Duncan relayed a conversation Obama had with leaders in South Korea, one of the nations whose children have been out-scoring ours. Apparently, parental apathy is not a problem there. The government is consistently pushed by students (even the poorest parents) to raise the quality of educational offerings and demand more rigorous study, at younger and younger grades.

“I wish our parents were more demanding,” Duncan told the room. “I wish parents were beating down my door.” Which part of that is not more plausible? That Arne Duncan wants to be harried by parents, or that parents would believe that a federal agency could be a source of help in tackling problems at their kid’s schools?

The fact is, we don’t really have an education system in the United States — certainly not in the sense of South Korea’s centralized system. We have a balkanized patchwork of bureaucratic failings. A handful of these throughout the country are responsive to the active parents Duncan wishes for. Most are not. Some of them, typically in large cities, are simply out of the reach of even the most ardent parents.

Time to cut back on county legislators

I have read in The Ithaca Journal a notice about seeking potential county legislators for the county’s Independent Redistricting Commission as required by the recently adopted 2010 census population change.

During the redistricting commissions, it would be a good time to look at the county Legislature as it is today. There are many too many legislators at present — and more than. Why?

We have in the district that a legislator serves, I find that many of them overlap the same municipalities, same districts. Why can we not have 13 legislatures, 11 for the same job — or maybe nine?

From a personal observation of the county board, I find there are too many county legislators for the tax payers who think, or they seem to intrude on one another. The redistricting commission should seriously look at the reduction of the number of legislators, which would reduce their operating budget and save tax payers money.

JOHN A. BENTKOWSKI

THACA

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Address feral pig issue at the source

Breeding and stockpiling exotica animals to be shot be-

hand a fence is bad enough — but when these non-native animals escape these facili-
ties, a whole new set of problems occur ("Invasion of fer-
al pigs poses problems").

Captive shoots — facilities where customers pay to shot fenced in, semi tame exotica animals for a trophy — are a black eye on the hunting industry. Captive shoots lack the ethical and reporting practices of a fair chase, a principle essential to many hunting codes of ethics.

Feral pigs, often es-
capers from these facilities, have become a major problem in several states, including New York.

Feral pigs are extremely adaptable and can be very co-

vulsive to habitat. They are well known for their ability to escape their fenced enclo-

ures and establish wild populations.

If the state is serious about its efforts to stop the spread of these animals, it must ad-

dress this problem by cutting these facilities on the front end and tackle the source of the escapes.

There is no way to stop the spread of feral pigs while capturing them will only change their location to breed and stock them.

PATRICK KWAN

NEW YORK TIMES

THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

COMMENTARY

As we are all increasingly aware, our future energy supply

involves difficult choices and significant consequences.

Last fall, a group of Cornell University engineering stu-

dents considered the possibilities

of biomass. The professor who led the class and the

president who provided community input to the class sum-

marized the findings of the students and our own

subsequent thoughts.

Our adaptation to the power grid currently genera-
ates 300 megawatts by burning coal, releasing coal from

stockpiles at Cayuga.

As an alternative, a path to a cleaner and more sustainable

electric grid is the use of three basic components:

1. The anaerobic digestion of food waste to produce

biogas.

2. The carbon capture process to remove CO2 from

the biogas.

3. The use of the captured CO2 to carbonate the

biogas, allowing it to create fuel or electricity.

Cornell’s process would cover our enter-prise needs but the out-

put would be gradually re-

distributed to Cornell.

The biogas could provide a clean, low-carbon source of

electricity for the college and could supply the auto-

motive needs of the campus.

Additional thoughts

Solar photovoltaics was studied but is not considered as a
growth method.

Complete solar would re-

quire a high percentage of the city of Ithaca, also, the cost to
electric users would be $7,500 per year, five times cost of
the conventional grid.

Interestingly, the Cayuga site was originally consid-

ered for a nuclear plant until the area was determined for

the expansion of the current fossil fueled plant.

New developments in nu-

clear power could provide a clean energy alternative to

both wind, biogas, and solar.

Ithaca also has a small but significant potential for hydroelectric. Cornell currently utilizes

twenty-half the Fall Creek water flow to produce 1 megawatt of electrical power.

The Cayuga Idea could pro-

duce an additional 1 megawatt from water flow above the dam. This would be more than 100 times larger than the current solar output of the solar panels on the Tompkins County Public Li-

brary, currently the largest PV installation in the state.

Utilization of the additional sun-areas required for the energy options discussed, presented student pro-

jections and details of our calculations can be viewed at

DOONESBURY

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Thursday, April

28, 2011. On this date:

• In 1945, on the British ship

Bountiful, in the Pacific, the

Japanese surrendered to the

Allied forces.

• In 1974, the Watergate

scandal began.

• In 1996, President Clinton

was impeached for lying.

DOONESBURY

Catholics is professor of earth and atmospheric sciences at Cornell.

and do you royal pain in the neck take royal pain in the behind?...