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Give kids the tough truth about 9/11


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By ARI KAUFMAN

Thanks to former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani's lead, a new curriculum is being introduced in the public schools of seven states, including California, aimed at teaching students about the events of 9/11. While I'm thrilled that seven American states have wisely taken the first step toward honest discourse and honoring the dead from this horrific day, I believe every state should adopt the curriculum.

Challenging images will be included, in order to give young people a framework for understanding a day few, if any, personally remember. The mission is an ambitious but necessary one: giving students a framework to think about 9/11, what it meant then, and what it means now.

On September 11, 2001, I was living in Los Angeles, and awoke to reports that an airplane had crashed into the World Trade Center. Driving to the school where I taught, I received updates and details from radio reports. An hour later, I was trying to explain the incomprehensible to 33 fourth- and fifth-graders.

During the morning assembly our assistant principal opted to deem what happened a "tragedy," not an attack, and spoke of those who "lost their lives" instead of those who were murdered. While no one yet knew who had taken control of those planes, it was immediately clear to all that the nation was under attack.

Looking back on that day eight years later, I can't help but wonder how teachers discuss the anniversary in their classrooms. In many ways, their challenge is much greater than mine was, as most elementary and middle school students today have no memory of this event that changed America.

We all now know that 19 radical Islamists hijacked four airliners that fateful Tuesday morning, with the intention of killing as many innocent Americans as possible. We also realize that terrorists are not hesitant about slaughtering children or the mentally handicapped to further their goals. Are we doing the next generation more damage by shielding it from the reality that the Western world faces ruthless enemies? Are there basic facts that even children should know about the war that has been waged against us by such evildoers?

Yes, there's a fine line between imploring children to fear all the evil in the world and simply being alert, but it's quite another to imply, as some abroad have, that if America would only change its ways, bad people would disappear forever.

Instead of the hatred, intolerance and ignorance we see from terrorists, I'd feel more confident about the future if our children were fully aware that there are some really bad people intent on taking away our freedom and liberal values.

This new curriculum, which requires students to use Google Earth software to map terrorist activity, will assist our children in obtaining this vital knowledge. Reports say the lesson is balanced, and I'd contend imperative and much overdue, as we proceed forward into the next phase of our post-9/11 world. After the program's initial year of existence, I hope the 43 other states will choose to educate their children about this first monumental moment of the 21st century.

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