

Safetyism Eclipses Common Sense

School's out on April 8 for many kids in the U.S. and Canada. On that date, a full solar eclipse will be visible from Texas to Ontario, and "There are risks associated with viewing a solar eclipse," several Toronto-area school boards announced.

Those schools moved their May 17 kid-free professional development day to April 8 "to ensure that students will not be outdoors during the total solar eclipse."

How prudent! That way their kids are protected from accidentally getting interested in science!

"I am baffled, dismayed, and hugely disappointed by this decision," a Toronto area school administrator wrote me to say. "It is misguided to keep children inside when they could be seeing this event. However, risk-aversion and groupthink are leading the process."

It does sound that way – in Canada. But elsewhere on the eclipse's path, schools are closing for seemingly the opposite reason: in order to make sure kids do go outside and have plenty of time to watch the gods display how displeased they are with us. ("Eclipse" comes from the Greek word for abandonment.)

"Buffalo Public Schools students will have the day off to view the total solar eclipse," reports KTLA. (Of course, freezing Buffalo students already know plenty about the gods' displeasure.)

Buffalo is also expecting an influx of tourists who'll be watching the late afternoon eclipse at just about the time kids would be getting out of school, so the day off is a traffic-calming measure as well.

Many Ohio schools in the eclipse's path are also closing, too, or letting kids out early to make sure they get a chance to see it. Although, couldn't a school have all the kids just go out to the playground with pinhole projectors or those solar glasses and enjoy it en masse? And at school, someone could announce: "It's time!" and the kids briefly could look up – because, according to the National Park Service, you actually CAN look at an eclipse safely with your naked eyes during the two to four minutes that it is total. (Who knew?)

That's how some schools in Texas are leaning: While school is being canceled in some towns, in others, they're making the solar spectacle the focus of the school day. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime thing. It only happens in the same area every 300 years. So for Dripping to be in the totality, this is huge," said Lisa Sullivan told KXAN TV. *Dripping???* Turns out that's the name of a place – the City of Dripping Springs – where Sullivan is the communications director.

And as for Arkansas: You can hardly blame it for closing an enormous number of schools in anticipation of a million visitors. The state's non-eclipse population is 3 million.

But in Canada, the rationale is simply that kids shouldn't be outside when the eclipse makes it dark and also tempting to look up. As the school boards announced, "There were concerns that children would be outside and possibly looking directly at the sun, which without appropriate protection, can lead to serious problems such as partial or complete loss of eyesight." Who wants to deal with that?

The liability gods are looking with great pleasure on Toronto.

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