

After The Millennials

Ever heard of Generation Z? Maybe Siri or Google can help.

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WHAT IS GENERATION Z? A Netflix zombie series? A new app? A contemporary fashion line? Nope. Generation Z is the term associated with those born after 1995. Or, to put it another way, these are the students who walk our hallways, roam Main Street, attend college, and are members of the workforce. So what defines Generation Z and why should we care? Let me share a recent exchange in the Murphy household.

On one of the rare occasions when I was home and able to sit down and have dinner with my family, my 16-year-old daughter started to pepper me on the current education reforms taking place in our country. At first, I was a little startled. While I find the topic interesting, I often don't meet high school sophomores who care about school funding formulas. She wanted to know my perspective. But as I started to talk, I was quickly shut down. (Any parent with a 16-year-old daughter can, I'm sure, relate.) She then began to speak quickly, passionately and loudly about what she knew, what she found to be a problem, and how that problem should be addressed. She was well-informed with facts, knew the arguments from both sides of the aisle, and appreciated the nuances that were involved. She gave a

cohesive and persuasive argument on what the problem was and how we as a society should tackle it. Welcome to Generation Z.

Sure, Millennials were digital; their teenage years were defined by iPods and MySpace. But Generation Z is the first group to be raised in the era of smartphones. Most don't remember a time before social media. They're aware of phrases such as a "digital footprint," "Google It," and "Hey, Siri." Looking back, I was excited when Asteroids made it to my local arcade hall.

Members of Generation Z have a different viewpoint from Millennials and Generation X. Some say they're "overly" passionate on

topics such as technology, health care, gender, the role of government, education, international affairs and privacy. Growing up, privacy meant having my very own room. Now, privacy has a whole other meaning—with billions of dollars and government secrets at stake.

Generation Z has access to more information than my World Book Encyclopedia ever offered to me. They're bombarded and often overwhelmed with information from multiple sources in multiple formats all at the same time, and they must learn how to handle it. They must also be able to identify "fake news." Right or wrong, I never doubted Peter Jennings, Walter Cronkite or Tom Brokaw.

Every day, I see Generation Z students accessing information, making sense of it, and then using it in authentic scenarios. Whether it's in our classes, on our stages and fields, or in the virtual classroom, Generation Z students are asked not only what they know but what they can do with what they know. I'm amazed and impressed at the depth to which they can discuss issues. If you doubt me, ask your child about a topic for which they have a passion. And, yes, I'm sending my Madison to Washington to fix the issues in public education. They'd better be ready! ↵