



California Teachers Empowerment Network

Standing out from the crowd, fully informed on the issues

August 24, 2010

Dear Colleague,

We are coming to you a week late this month due to the fact that CTEN board member Vicki Heggem and I were at a school choice conference last week. I will be reporting more about that event at a later date.

There have been several major education stories the past couple of weeks. Perhaps the biggest with long lasting ramifications for teachers all over the country is the Los Angeles Times decision to run a piece called *Who is Teaching Our Kids?*

<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-teachers-value-20100815,0,2695044.story?page=1> What they did was this--

- The Times obtained math and English scores for the California Standards Test for the years 2003-2009 under the California Public Records Act.
- They hired Richard Buddin, a senior economist and education researcher at the Rand Corporation to conduct an analysis of the data.
- The scores were then converted into percentile ratings, dividing them into five equal categories from *least effective* to *most effective*.
- The first report, including 6,000 third, fourth and fifth grade teachers, will be posted by the Times on its website later this month.
- The Times provided teachers an opportunity to comment on their ratings.

It is important to note that teacher performance is being measured using the value added technique <http://articles.latimes.com/print/2010/aug/15/local/la-me-qanda-20100816> , which rates teachers “based on their students’ progress on standardized tests year after year. The difference between a student’s expected growth and actual performance is the ‘value’ a teacher adds or subtracts during the year.”

Predictably, AJ Duffy, president of the United Teachers of Los Angeles, which represents 36,000 LA school teachers, went on the attack and promptly sent out an autodial phone message to every UTLA member urging them to boycott the Times. Additionally, a lawsuit by the union is being considered. Duffy claims "You're leading people in a dangerous direction, making it seem like you can judge the quality of a teacher by ... a test."

In any event, a huge can of worms has been opened and where all this will go, no one knows at this point. We will be asking for your opinions on this issue next month. LA Unified doesn't reconvene until September 13 and we certainly want to get input from the teachers who are being directly affected by the Times story. (On Thursday morning, several days after the story was published, the writers held an online chat with teachers and can be found here - <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/readers/2010/08/chat-about-grading-the-teachers-laUSD.html>)

The other big story of August is the \$10 billion bailout which is allegedly going to save some teachers' jobs -- but is it? First, many districts had already begun saving their own jobs <http://www.eiaonline.com/intercepts/2010/08/04/edujobs-clears-senate-while-schools-are-rehiring/> before the feds stepped in with their so-called Edujobs Bill. It is also worth noting that not only do our legislators turn a deaf ear to the fact that there were far fewer layoffs than originally stated, they also ignore the reality that maybe we need to layoff *some* teachers because we hired too many in the first place. According to teacher union watchdog, Mike Antonucci, "In the 2007-08 school year, 48,396,076 students were enrolled in the U.S. K-12 public education system. That was a **decline of 45,397 students** from the previous year. They were taught by 3,150,061 teachers (full-time equivalent). That was an **increase of 7,859 teachers** from the previous year." (Emphasis mine)

So why are our legislators tripping over each other to spend a massive amount of money unnecessarily? The answer is of course election year politicking. The Democrats need to keep the teachers' unions happy as the latter contributes many millions to the former on a yearly basis. The Washington Post sums it up quite succinctly here - <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/05/AR2010080506275.html> . "The crusade for an education jobs bill, led by the Obama administration and Democratic leaders in Congress, has always struck us as more of an election-year favor for teachers unions than an optimal use of public resources. What, except for election-year politics, motivated him (the bill's sponsor, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid) to consider it in the first place?"

Who are the winners and losers? Amazingly, the losers are people who need food stamps – the federal food stamp budget is being cut in order to accommodate the teachers' unions, **which will gain at minimum \$40 million dollars** – the amount of dues money these already wealthy unions will be able to realize from the retained teachers' paychecks.

In an underreported story from last month, The California Teachers Association has taken an apparently legal step and moved \$2 million of teachers' dues money from the general fund to their Political Action Committee fund. The details are a bit arcane, but Mike Antonucci clears them up as much as possible here - <http://www.eiaonline.com/intercepts/2010/07/15/california-teachers-association-shifts-2-million-of-dues-money-to-pac/>

In July's National Council on Teacher Quality Bulletin, they post a very interesting New York Times story which, according to a not yet peer reviewed study, makes *The Case for \$320,000 Kindergarten Teachers* - http://www.nctq.org/docs/Kindergarten_Teachers.pdf . The study shows a positive correlation between how well one does in Kindergarten and the rest of

one's life, and recommends paying the best ones accordingly. According to the study, class size and socioeconomics mattered but not as much as the quality of the teacher.

In this past Sunday's Orange County Register, I take something of a contrarian view in an op-ed on the class size issue. In *It's Time for Larger Classes, Fewer Teachers* - <http://www.ocregister.com/opinion/teachers-262070-class-percent.html> My contention is that we need fewer, but better, teachers. (Also, due to a "communications" problem with OCR, the first sentence should have ended "... to save **an indeterminate number of** teaching jobs as the new school year begins.") We will poll you on this issue in the future.

In any event, if you enjoy these letters and find them informative, please pass them along to your colleagues. We know that there are many independent-minded teachers in California who are looking for alternative sources of information.

If you would like to see us address certain issues, topics, etc. in these newsletters or on our website – <http://www.ctenhome.org/> - please let us know.

As always, we at CTEN want to thank you for your ongoing support and feedback.

Larry Sand
CTEN President