

Contact: Rachel Schwartz/PR Advantedge
Tel/Cell : 310.990.2764
E-mail: rachel@pr-a.biz



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MEDIA ADVISORY – AVAILABILITY FOR COMMENT

24-YEAR VETERAN LAUSD SCHOOL TEACHER REPRESENTS TEACHERS WHO CHALLENGE UTLA’S PROTESTS SCHEDULED FOR TOMORROW AGAINST SCHOOL CHOICE PLAN

LARRY SAND, PRESIDENT OF THE CALIFORNIA TEACHERS EMPOWERMENT NETWORK, AN UNPRECEDENTED AND ALTERNATE EDUCATION INFORMATION RESOURCE FOR TEACHERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC OFFERS DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON WHERE TEACHERS STAND ON SCHOOL CHOICE PLAN

WHO: Larry Sand, President, California Teachers Empowerment Network (www.ctenhome.org)

The California Teachers Empowerment Network (CTEN) was started in 2006 by Larry Sand, a classroom teacher for over 28 years (24 of those years in the Los Angeles Unified School District)

WHY: Sand offers an alternate perspective to UTLA from within the teaching community. He argues that teachers, students and schools are not, in fact, the “property” of UTLA and that many teachers disagree with UTLA stance on the School Choice Plan and other education reform efforts in the district:

1. Calling this a “Giveaway” is a misstatement of facts.

UTLA claims that "we won't let our schools be given away". Sand responds that nothing is being “given away” -- the schools that will be part of the school choice reform efforts will remain public schools.

Furthermore, this statement makes it sound as if UTLA thinks they “own” the schools.

What may happen – and what UTLA is ultimately concerned about – is that some of these public schools will no longer be unionized. Nationwide only about 10% of approximately 5,000 charter schools are unionized. There has been much talk at UTLA about public education being privatized. Once again, the school choice reform effort is about charters, which are public. Perhaps UTLA’s underlying fear is that charters are the first step in what the union perceives to be a “slippery slope” toward the overall privatization of public schools – something that is of grave concern to the teachers unions.

2. Do public schools belong to UTLA?

UTLA claims in its materials that a decision will be made tomorrow “on whether to give away our schools to outsiders or to respect the voice of parents, staff, and students”. Sand and teachers at CTEN argue that this language is simply a red herring – first of all, public schools in Los Angeles are not the property of UTLA. If UTLA, claiming to represent the so-called “insiders” is doing so well, why is the dropout rate in LAUSD 50%? Sand and CTEN teachers are also curious as to whether UTLA actually asked the parents, staff and students about their thoughts on the school choice initiative. Has UTLA polled the staff? Does

UTLA care what the parents think? On the contrary, UTLA has been quite vocal in its attempts to discredit the recent “parent trigger” law, and other education reform efforts, many of which are supported by rank-and-file teachers, designed to change the downhill course of public education in Los Angeles. UTLA claims that the “in the LAUSD advisory votes, parents, students, and staff overwhelmingly chose the teacher-developed proposals for EVERY school.” Recent reports in both the Los Angeles Times and the Los Angeles Daily News suggest that the process for these advisory votes has been problematic, to say the least. (See Paragraph 4 for additional details on advisory vote issue).

3. UTLA’s ultimate concern: schools going non-union. Will teachers be unhappy if this happens?

UTLA claims that "the loss of schools could ultimately mean the loss of salary, jobs, health care, and retirement benefits for all of us." This statement reveals UTLA’s ultimate concern with the school choice reform effort. **If every school included in this effort would automatically become unionized, no doubt UTLA would welcome the reform effort with loud public support.** However, since this is not the case, UTLA’s statement is designed to let teachers know that they might wind up in a situation where they are not unionized – implying that teachers will be poorly treated should this reform effort proceed. A group called *Public Agenda* recently released a survey which showed that 40% of public school teachers are “disheartened.” These teachers are frustrated, thinking that their efforts in the classroom are making no difference. They feel powerless to change their environment, and have been frustrated by students and administrators alike. Another study, *Free to Teach: What America’s Teachers Say about Teaching in Public and Private Schools*, showed a great difference in attitude between public school teachers and their private school counterparts. Even though the latter make considerably less money than public school teachers and were more likely to work in urban areas, they have much greater job satisfaction. (There was no difference in workload between the two.) Yet, private school teachers were shown to be much happier with their job because they had more input in things like discipline policy and choice in instructional materials. In addition, many want to have the opportunity to teach as long as they are able, unlike their public school counterparts. While charter schools are not private, they share many of the same qualities. Most importantly, the charter movement has done much to decentralize education and make it more manageable – an element that will do doubt be part of LAUSD’s school choice reform efforts. Public school teachers are now too often under the thumb of bureaucracy laden school districts; their counterparts – the teachers’ unions – have no interest in rewarding excellence and try to keep all teachers under their control, insisting that if not for them, teachers would be treated as second class citizens and receive no respect at all. Sand and CTEN believe that the unions have it exactly backwards.

4. Controversy surrounding the “Advisory Votes.”

UTLA claims that the “in the LAUSD advisory votes, parents, students, and staff overwhelmingly chose the teacher-developed proposals for EVERY school.” Recent reports in both the Los Angeles Times and

the Los Angeles Daily News suggest that the process for these advisory votes has been problematic, to say the least. Howard Blume wrote in the Los Angeles Times that: “For one thing, the voting age could dip to 14. Undocumented residents are welcome. Some people will get multiple votes. Ballot stuffing is expected. And did we mention that each contestant will actually be competing in seven simultaneous elections? And that the results could be meaningless? Whoever said democracy is messy could have been thinking of the Los Angeles Unified School District.”

<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2010/02/voters-on-tuesday-will-choose-reform-plans-for-30-los-angeles-area-schools-in-an-election-like-no-other--for-one-thing-the.html>

Connie Llanos echoed these concerns in her piece for the LA Daily News: “In every school, voters chose LAUSD as the preferred operator under the School Choice plan, which forces the district to compete with outside groups to run new and underperforming campuses. The vote, however, was advisory only, and some critics have questioned a system which allowed people to vote more than once under different categories.” http://www.dailynews.com/education/ci_14370415

Larry Sand/CTEN - Background Information

After graduating from college on the East Coast, Sand spent four and a half years as a classroom teacher in the New York City public school system. After leaving the profession for a number of years, he had a radical change of heart at age 38 and made the active choice to become a teacher because he passionately believed, and continues to believe, that teaching is a noble profession. He received his California credentials, and started teaching in the Los Angeles Unified School District in 1985. During his 24 years in the LAUSD, Sand taught in inner city schools, as well as schools on the affluent Westside. He has taught Math, English, English as a Second Language, History, and he has also worked as a Title 1 Coordinator. Sand became aware of the need for an organization like CTEN four years ago, in the wake of Proposition 75. Prop 75, which was on the ballot in California in 2005, was a measure that was fiercely opposed by labor leaders yet alluring to many in the rank and file. The measure would have barred government employee unions from spending members’ dues on political campaigns without prior consent. Sand worked on the campaign to pass Prop 75, and the manner in which the teachers unions fought against, and handled that campaign, was an eye-opener for him. Sand realized that many of his fellow teachers were unaware of information concerning their union, as well as other education issues and policies, and he wanted to change that reality. Sand started the CTEN network with fellow teachers in 2006 as the first organization of its kind in California -- a non-partisan, non-political group dedicated to providing teachers with free reliable and balanced information that includes multiple viewpoints about professional affiliations and positions on educational issues, information teachers may not get from their unions or other information sources, and which is critical to them making informed choices about their careers.

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