



California Teachers Empowerment Network

Standing out from the crowd, fully informed on the issues

January 20, 2009

Dear Colleague,

Our December newsletter concerned itself mostly with the looming budget disaster in California. As you know, nothing has been resolved yet, but the rhetoric has been turned up and there is a general feeling of alarm throughout the state. As of this writing, the latest idea is to cut 5 days off the school year statewide in order to save money.

In Los Angeles, Superintendent Ramon Cortines sent out a gloom-and-doom email in which he mentioned teacher layoffs. (While LA is the subject here, many other districts will face similar actions.) There was no mention of numbers in his email, but in a subsequent article he said that as many as 2,300 of the newest hires (about 6.5% of the workforce) could lose their jobs. This action would wreak havoc in many schools.

First, the newest generation of teachers would disappear, possibly forever. Secondly, the teachers who are fortunate (or senior) enough to keep their jobs would be impacted by now having larger classes. Students would be inconvenienced by being uprooted from their current classes and placed in other bigger classes. In short, the educational process would be affected substantially.

There are many other ways to tackle the budget mess. Dealing with systemic inequities would help to alleviate the problem. Federal inability or unwillingness to deal with illegal immigrants costs California dearly - educating their children is very expensive, as are all the unfunded special education mandates that the federal government foists on us. And then there is privatization. Michigan, for example, has saved money in transportation, food and janitorial services by hiring private contractors. Why can't we?

On a local level, districts might consider cutting all non-academic activities, as well as offering early retirement incentives which would induce higher paid teachers to leave the field. Then, there is an option that no teacher will happily embrace - a 3 or 4% salary cut. This would save jobs, but teachers would be taking a pay cut of up to \$3,500 a year and it would be even worse for teachers nearing retirement. Of course the unions could help out here by lowering their dues, which in CA come to about \$1,000 a year. (We are not going to hold our breath on that happening.) Clearly there is no easy way out of this, but

we would urge you, if possible, to get involved in the process - learn what other districts are doing, go to school board meetings, study your district's budget, etc.

Not surprisingly, the CTA has weighed in with its answer to the budget crisis – raise taxes. In addition to a proposed 1% increase in the sales tax, the CTA is also proposing to promote “progressive taxation” in CA. It seems to us that this is a very bad idea. Californians are the highest taxed people in the country already. To gain support for his plea, he refers to CA as 47th in the country in education spending. It is interesting that according to the NEA, CA is in fact 26th in the nation. Also, it is worth noting that the same report (take heart, Mr. Sanchez) states that CA has the highest paid teachers in the country. (To see NEA's yearly Earnings and Rankings Report, go to

<http://www.nea.org/home/29402.htm>)

And finally, according to a recent Rasmussen poll,

http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/issues2/articles/most_voters_say_teachers_unions_more_focused_on_jobs_than_education the public is becoming less enamored of the teachers unions. In short, an attempt by the unions to raise taxes might be met with something less than enthusiasm by Californians.

One other noteworthy money matter is the condition of public employee retirement systems. While the following is not specific to CA, it is certainly worth pondering and more than anything reminds us to be vigilant in these matters –

<http://www.nber.org/digest/nov08/w14343.html>

For those of us who are interested in blogging, *Education Next* issued a press release in December in which they rate the best education blogs. To read about this, go to

<http://www.hoover.org/publications/ednext/35746919.html>

The always entertaining Malcom Gladwell has an interesting article on identifying good teachers in the New Yorker --

http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/12/15/081215fa_fact_gladwell?printable=true

For a brief commentary on the article in the Washington Post, go to

http://voices.washingtonpost.com/x-equals-why/2009/01/good_teaching_-_art_or_science.html

For those of us of a certain age, writing in, and being able to read cursive is a given, but things are most definitely changing. To read about what some consider an alarming trend, please go to --

<http://www.timesargus.com/article/20090104/FEATURES07/901040346/1016/FEATURES07>

We have received (and incorporated) several excellent ideas from our subscribers about improving our website. Please visit it -- www.ctenhome.org and let us know what you think. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Larry Sand, President