



California Teachers Empowerment Network

Standing out from the crowd, fully informed on the issues

January 19, 2010

Dear Colleague,

The new year has arrived and with it a bevy of educational news and commentary – proposed new laws, charter school analysis, *Race to the Top*, provocative articles about teachers unions, etc. Indeed, it's a very exciting time for public education. With a few exceptions, no one is happy with the status quo. The big question is, "In what direction do we go?"

Brandon Durst, a legislator in Idaho has some very interesting ideas. He has proposed a bill, which if passed, will

- 1. Set up a pilot project*
- 2. Require the DOE to define what is wanted in each year in K-6 and each class in 7-12*
- 3. Allow students to challenge the year/semester or class at any time and upon successful completion move to the next level of instruction*
- 4. Allow students to finish the K-12 in less than 13 years*
- 5. For each semester a student finishes early, they will receive approximately \$1,000 scholarship from the money they saved the state by finishing in less time*
- 6. Continue to encourage the expansion of college level classes into the high school setting so students don't need to leave home if they graduate early*
- 7. Provide for another mechanism of transferring funds from the state to the local units based upon what is learned instead of strictly attendance*

In a very stimulating article, George Leef claims that much could be improved by overhauling our schools of education. I doubt there are many reading this letter who would disagree with that. To read Dr. Leef's article, please go to http://www.popecenter.org/clarion_call/article.html?id=2287

In National Review Online, Jay Greene takes a hard look at *Where the Unemployment Isn't*. Dr. Greene claims that, just as the private sector has trimmed fat, "schools need to face some pressure to rid themselves of ineffective educators." Many of you are probably uncomfortable with the idea of eliminating teachers, but I urge you to read this very compelling article nonetheless - <http://tiny.cc/V9GcS>

Probably the most written about phenomenon in education these days has been the charter school movement. Like it or not – charter schools are here and they are not going away. Even the unions have given up trying to kill them. Their current strategy is to exert pressure to cap the number of charters allowed, start their own, and unionize the rest of them. Recent studies on charters mostly indicate they are having positive effects on public education. While clearly not a panacea for all our educational ills, charters seem to be a very healthy step in the right direction. This recent article from Education Week which examines charters in New York City is worth reading - <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/01/05/18charter.h29.html>

David Bass has written a very important article in the current issue of *Education Next* about our nation's free and reduced lunch program. He claims that "...new data suggest that the process for verifying eligibility for the program is fundamentally broken and that taxpayers may be picking up the tab for participation by ineligible families." As a former Title 1 coordinator, I am very happy to see this issue brought to light. The public needs to be made aware of the fact that poor government oversight could be turning a well meaning social program into something of a racket. To read the article, please go to <http://educationnext.org/fraud-in-the-lunchroom/>

The subject of teachers unions is no stranger to these letters and this edition is no different. Andrew Coulson, director of Cato's Institute's *Center for Educational Freedom* has written an article in which he contends that the unions' effects on collective bargaining are trivial. He claims that their key success has been their effective lobbying to maintain the educational status quo. To read this exceptional article, which will appear in the Winter 2010 issue of the *Cato Journal*, go to <http://www.ctenhome.org/PDFdocs/CoulsonCato%20Journal.pdf>

In addition, many people are under the general impression that the unions wield power only in the K-12 realm and that colleges are free from their influence. Not so. In the January 3 edition of *American Thinker*, Dr. Leila Beckwith, Professor Emeritus at the University of California at Los Angeles, goes into depth about the heavy-handedness of the California Faculty Association. CFA is one of the largest academic unions in the U.S., representing 23,000 faculty, counselors, librarians, and coaches on the 23 Cal State University campuses. To read this eye-opening article, go to http://www.americanthinker.com/2010/01/california_faculty_association.html

If you are an NEA member and wonder where the political portion of your dues is being spent these days, you can go to the LM2 area of our website - <http://erds.dol-esa.gov/query/getOrgQrv.do> and surf around. The site is a bit difficult to navigate, but if you keep at it you will get the information you are looking for. But Mike Antonucci, in his January 11 *Communique*, makes it very easy by presenting in list form, with links, the NEA's 2008-2009 output. The nation's largest union gave gifts (paid for by teachers) to groups such as People for the American Way, Amnesty International, and National Council of La Raza. As usual, a great proportion of the money goes to organizations that have nothing to do with education. There are a few *notable* exceptions such as the National Association for Bilingual Education, the Gay Lesbian and Straight Education

Network and the Zimbabwe Teachers Association. To see the entire list, go to <http://www.eiaonline.com/archives/20100111.htm>

We recently sent you an article about Race to the Top and asked for your opinion. We were particularly interested in your take on the so called *parent trigger* and said that we would publish some of your responses in this letter. However, the response has been much greater than we expected - in fact, they are still trickling in. As such, we have decided to send out the results in a separate mailing. Thanks to all who responded. If you missed that email, but would like to weigh in, here is the article that accompanied it - <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-schools6-2010jan06,0,915398,print.story>

Our CTOC forum is temporarily down, but will be up and running in the very near future. We will let you know as soon as it happens. The online community is a great place to meet and exchange ideas with teachers all over California.

One final note – various districts now block our emails. To ensure that these letters keep coming to you, if you are using your school email address, please consider letting us use your personal address. Thanks.

As always, we at CTEN want to thank you for the continued support. Please let us know if you have any ideas as to how we can improve, items we can add to the website, etc.

Sincerely,

Larry Sand
CTEN President