



California Teachers Empowerment Network

Standing out from the crowd, fully informed on the issues

Please note that in addition to the traditional emailing of the CTEN monthly newsletter, we will once again post it on the CTEN blog- <http://www.ctenteachers.blogspot.com/> As usual, there are several controversial issues covered in this letter and we urge you to share your opinions with other teachers.

January 22, 2013

Dear Colleague,

In the last five or so weeks, the country has witnessed several grisly school shootings, most notably the slaughter in Newtown, CT. The anguished national conversation has swung all over the place, from calls for more gun control, to more armed guards, fewer violent video games, more mental health professionals in the schools, etc. Not surprisingly, the teachers unions reacted very quickly; the NEA and AFT issued a rare joint press release (<http://www.nea.org/home/53943.htm>), the main point of which can be summed up here,

Guns have no place in our schools. Period. We must do everything we can to reduce the possibility of any gunfire in schools, and concentrate on ways to keep all guns off school property and ensure the safety of children and school employees.

... Greater access to mental health services, bullying prevention, and meaningful action on gun control—this is where we need to focus our efforts, not on staggeringly misguided ideas about filling our schools with firearms. Lawmakers at every level of government should dismiss this dangerous idea and instead focus on measures that will create the safe and supportive learning environments our children deserve.

Unfortunately, I'm not sure the unions' ideas would have made much if any difference in any of the shootings and rebutted the teachers unions here - <http://unionwatch.org/thoughts-on-reactions-to-the-sandy-hook-tragedy/> In any event, we at CTEN really want to know your take on how best to avert future tragedies, and will soon conduct an internal poll on this and other questions of import to the teachers of California. (More on this later in the newsletter.)

National School Choice Week, which this year runs from Jan. 27-Feb. 2, provides an unprecedented opportunity to shine a spotlight on the need for effective education options for all children.

Planned by a diverse and nonpartisan coalition of individuals and organizations, National School Choice Week features special events and activities that highlight support for school choice programs and proposals. The effort is a collaboration of more than 200 partner

organizations, which each use the week to advance their own messages of educational opportunity while uniting with like-minded organizations across the country.

National School Choice Week believes that parents should be empowered to choose the best educational environments for their children and supports a variety of school choice options -- from encouraging increased access to great public schools, to public charter schools, magnet schools, virtual schools, private schools, homeschooling and more.

For more information, to find an event near you or see if this year's whistle-stop train tour will roll through your neck of the woods, go here- <http://www.schoolchoiceweek.com/>

Head Start, the much touted preschool program, has been with us now for 48 years. The taxpayers have forked over about \$180 billion for the program which is supposed to even the education playing field for economically disadvantaged kids. The only problem is that it doesn't work according to the government's own study. Lesli Maxwell in *Education Week* explains,

In the first phase of the evaluation, a group of children who entered Head Start at age 4 saw benefits from spending one year in the program, including learning vocabulary, letter-word recognition, spelling, color identification, and letter-naming, compared with children of the same age in a control group who didn't attend Head Start. For children who entered Head Start at age 3, the gains were even greater, demonstrated by their language and literacy skills, as well their skills in learning math, prewriting, and perceptual motor skills.

The second phase of the study showed that those gains had faded considerably by the end of 1st grade, with Head Start children showing an edge only in learning vocabulary over their peers in the control group who had not participated in Head Start.

And now, in this final phase of the study, "there was little evidence of systematic differences in children's elementary school experiences through 3rd grade, between children provided access to Head Start and their counterparts in the control group," the researchers wrote in an executive summary.

For more, go here -

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/early_years/2012/12/head_start_advantages_mostly_gone_by_third_grade_study_finds.html

We have recently learned about *ClickSchooling*, an excellent homeschool website which has a wealth of information that regular classroom teachers can also use. The site is constantly updated and is worth visiting frequently. Or you can sign up and start receiving *ClickSchooling's* web-based curriculum ideas. To learn more, go to <http://clickschooling.com/>

From the National Council on Teacher Quality, we get a report called "No One Benefits" which details the sorry state of our teacher pension systems.

... NCTQ examines how teacher pension systems are failing both teachers and taxpayers. In addition to a 50-state analysis of the funding crisis, we explore the technical and sometimes hidden features of teacher pensions that make them so costly and identify the features of these systems that aren't fair, advantageous or beneficial to all teachers.

We find states nibbling around the edges--in ways that put the squeeze on districts and teachers-- rather than summoning the collective will to take on comprehensive reform. But with districts paying an average of \$1,200 more per teacher in annual pension contributions (and teachers paying almost \$500 more) than just a few years ago, something has got to give.

To read this unsettling report, go to http://www.nctq.org/p/publications/docs/nctq_pension_paper.pdf

A book on education reform has come to our attention that we feel is both informative and highly entertaining. *Push Has Come to Shove* was written by Steve Perry, the principal of a magnet school in Connecticut. Forceful and opinionated, Dr. Perry may get under your skin at times but he always makes a great case for his beliefs. From Amazon,

Steve Perry gets it. He understands why some parents are panicked about what's going on in their kids' classrooms, and how other parents, whose kids supposedly attend the "good" schools, still fear that their children are falling behind. As principal of one of the best performing schools in America – one that sends 100% of its mostly minority students to four-year colleges – Perry delights in proving "the system" wrong.

In this solution-oriented manifesto, Perry covers the full range of issues holding back today's students. He shows parents and principals how to find great teachers (and get rid of the bad ones), how to make readers out of kids who hate to read, how to make the school curriculum thrilling rather than sleep-inducing, how to conduct an all-important education "home audit," how to "e-organize" if school boards and administrators aren't getting the message, how to build a "school of the future," and much more.

To read reviews and get ordering info, go here - <http://www.amazon.com/Push-Has-Come-Shove-Deserve-Even/dp/0307720322/>

I reported a while back about Eileen Blagden, a principal who lost her job for going to the police about a dangerous situation on her campus. The district bureaucrats, opting for protocol and image over the safety of teachers and kids, tried to shove the incident under the rug. To read the infuriating story of a whistleblower who did the right thing which ultimately led to her unemployment, go here - <http://www.city-journal.org/2013/cjc01111s.html>

We know that the teachers' unions claim to speak for all teachers, but they clearly do not. As I mentioned earlier in this letter, CTEN will be conducting an internal poll to get your take on various educational issues. Some suggested topics are:

- thoughts on Props. 30 and 32
- the *Students Matter* case
- armed presence on school campuses
- common core
- the Smarter Balance assessment

If you would like to add any suggestions to this list we will consider using them in the poll.

CTEN has two Facebook pages. If you have a Facebook account, we urge you to visit ours and let us know your thoughts. Having a dialogue among teachers is an effective way to spread information and experiences and share ideas. Our original Facebook page can be found here <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/group.php?gid=125866159932&ref=ts>
Our second page, which deals with teacher evaluation and transparency, can be accessed here - <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/group.php?gid=126900987357825&ref=ts>

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.

Thanks for your continuing support and interest.

Sincerely,

Larry Sand
CTEN President