



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 17, 2018

Dear Colleague,

“Disappointing but not surprising” is how California’s Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan is being described. As written in *The 74*,

The federal feedback was extensive, exceeding what most other states received. “California got dinged for a lot more than other states,” said Adam Ezring, director of policy for the Collaborative for Student Success, which together with Bellwether Education Partners is providing an independent review of each state’s school accountability plan. “Parents want to know how their kids’ schools are performing, and how their students are performing.”

The government’s feedback to California included:

- *California’s plan doesn’t show how the state will identify its lowest-performing schools so they can receive extra support.*
- *It’s not clear how the state will ensure progress is actually made at low-performing schools.*
- *It doesn’t include high schools in its academic achievement goals.*
- *It doesn’t show how the state will measure improvements among student subgroups, such as English learners, or provide long-term goals for all English learners.*
- *It’s not clear how the state will support schools with student subgroups who are consistently underperforming.*

And that is just the beginning. To read more, go to <http://laschoolreport.com/disappointing-but-not-surprising-californias-essa-plan-gets-some-of-the-harshes-feedback-yet-from-washington/>

Additionally, California does not do well in teacher training either, according to the National Council on Teacher Quality:

California earned the most needs-to-improve marks in the area of teacher and principal evaluation. Specifically, the council recommended that the state include evidence of student

growth in teacher evaluations, require student surveys be part of teacher evaluations and ensure that teacher evaluators are trained and certified.

The council also recommended that California require teachers be evaluated annually and observed multiple times, offer appropriate training and improvement plans for teachers, equitably distribute teacher talent among schools, effectively evaluate principals, and place ineffective ones on improvement plans.

State officials took exception to the NCTQ report, however. To get a balanced view, go to <https://www.mercurynews.com/2017/12/27/teacher-training-report-california-earns-a-d-below-most-states/>

According to data published by the federal government in December, the national high school graduation rate has risen to 84 percent, an all-time high. While this would appear to be a reason to celebrate, there are many who are not ready to break out the champagne.

News media investigations have found that some schools improve their graduation numbers by not counting some low-performing students in their graduating classes. Others try to get rid of students who are at risk of dropping out by encouraging them to transfer to alternative schools or to be home-schooled. One recent investigation found that a school in Washington D.C. graduated half of its students last year even though they had missed three months of school, too much to have earned diplomas.

Michael J. Petrilli, the president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, says, "There is a plausible case to be made that the education system is doing a better job for more of these kids, especially for disadvantaged subgroups. But there is 'reason to be nervous about the rapid progress' in the graduation rate, since requirements for diplomas can be 'squishy' and some high schools decide to make themselves look good by lowering standards.

To learn more, go here -

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/high_school_and_beyond/2017/12/US_graduation_rate_new_all_time_high_gains_in_all_groups.html

As 2018 unfolds, contributors are flocking to sign up for the brand new Illinois tax credit scholarship program. The idea behind the endeavor is to help poor students get a chance at attending private school.

Donors who want to take advantage of the tax credits must register with the Illinois Department of Revenue and reserve their credit, up to \$1 million per individual. Once approved, they can write the check. Donations cannot be earmarked for particular students, but they can be sent to a specific schools or network of schools if made by an individual. Corporate donations go into a general fund. Donors can take a \$.75 credit on every dollar they give until the \$75 million in credits is exhausted....

Priority is given to the lowest-income families first, and to those who live in lower-performing "focus districts" where the students and the local public school are at or below state averages for the lowest-10 percent of students or those with graduation rates of less than 60 percent.

A student whose family is within 185 percent of the poverty level or less can get a full tuition, up to \$13,000; a family within 185 percent to 250 percent of the poverty level is eligible for a 75-percent scholarship; and a family that earns 250 or above the federal poverty level can a scholarship for half of tuition. For more details about the program, go to <https://chicago.suntimes.com/chicago-politics/what-you-need-to-know-about-illinois-new-tax-credit-scholarship-program/> and <http://chicagotonight.wttw.com/2018/01/04/abcs-illinois-new-private-school-scholarships-tax-credit-program>

Speaking of choice, January 21-27 is National School Choice Week, the aim of which is to “raise public awareness of all types of education options for children. These options include traditional public schools, public charter schools, magnet schools, online learning, private schools, and homeschooling.” There are 232,240 events and activities planned for NSCW in 2018. Celebrations include “school fairs, parent nights, school tours, educational field trips, homeschool information sessions, student performances, celebratory rallies and more. It will be the largest series of education-related events and activities in US history.”

To learn more about National School Choice Week and events near you, go to <https://schoolchoiceweek.com/>

On February 26th, the U.S. Supreme Court will hear arguments in the *Janus v AFSCME* case, with a decision scheduled to be announced in June. If successful, it would free public employees in 22 states from having to pay any money to a union as a condition of employment. Many union leaders are beside themselves with the thought that their days of getting to collect forced dues payments may well be numbered. In an attempt to rally the troops, the lies and half-truths have been flowing. Eric Heins, president of the California Teachers Association says, “They want to use the Supreme Court to take away the freedom of working people to join in strong unions.” Wrong. The case is about giving working people the choice to be a part of a union or not. He also claims, “A decision in *Janus* to strip public employees of their collective bargaining rights in the workplace moves us further in the wrong direction.” Wrong again. The case has nothing to do with collective bargaining; it’s about the Constitutionally-guaranteed freedom of association for workers.

To learn more about the case, go to <http://www.scotusblog.com/case-files/cases/janus-v-american-federation-state-county-municipal-employees-council-31/> To read more about union distortions, go here - <https://californiapolicycenter.org/its-janus-in-february/>

If *Janus* is successful, how many California teachers will choose to cut ties with the union? All we can do at this point is guess. But in Michigan, membership is down 25 percent since right-to-work became law in 2012. To learn more about the hit that the Michigan Education Association is taking, go here - <https://www.michigancapitolconfidential.com/michigans-largest-teachers-union-has-lost-25-percent-of-its-members>

Also, on the union front, Mike Antonucci had an interesting post a few weeks ago, which begins with a quote from NEA President Lily Eskelsen García. “For decades, corporate CEOs and the wealthy have fought to enrich themselves at the expense of the rights and pocketbooks of working people, and that harms families in communities across the country.”

Antonucci then proceeds to point out:

The NEA currently holds \$108.5 million in investments. Its public disclosure reports require it to itemize only those investments that exceed 5 percent of the total in two categories: marketable securities and “other investments.” NEA has almost \$73 million in “other investments,” no single one of which exceeds \$3.65 million, so NEA is not required to itemize those transactions. Where that money goes is anyone’s guess.

However, we do know where almost all of NEA’s \$35.7 million in marketable securities are invested. The marketable securities consist of various types of mutual funds — some that invest in bonds, some in stocks, and some that are indexed to exchanges. Here they are (rounded off):

Eaton Vance Atlanta Capital Small- to Mid-Cap Fund — \$1.8 million

Federated Strategic Value Dividend Fund — \$2.8 million

iShares Russell 1000 Growth Exchange-Traded Fund — \$3.3 million

Loomis Sayles Bond Fund — \$5 million

SPDR Standard & Poor’s Dividend Exchange-Traded Fund — \$2.8 million....

To see the rest of the list, go to <https://www.the74million.org/article/union-report-the-national-education-association-assails-corporations-when-not-making-money-from-them/>

If you are still using a school email to receive these newsletters, please consider sending us your personal email address. More and more school districts are blocking CTEN. In any event, if you enjoy these letters and find them to be informative, please pass them along to your colleagues and encourage them to join us.

Also, anyone wishing to donate to CTEN can do so very simply through check, money order or PayPal - <http://www.ctenhome.org/donate.html> As a non-profit, we exist only through the generosity of others. Thanks, as always.

Sincerely,
Larry Sand
CTEN President