



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.

October 18, 2012

Dear Colleague,

In last month's newsletter, we mentioned that education spending levels are at an all-time high. Nationally, average per-pupil spending exceeds \$11,400 this year. To learn more, go to <http://blog.heritage.org/2012/08/27/back-to-school-some-surprising-education-numbers/>

One of our subscribers suggested that we post California's spending numbers. There are actually two sets of figures that are used: one for actual spending (we are 41st nationally at \$8,667 per pupil) and one is adjusted for cost of living. Using this formula, we are 47th nationally. For more, go to <http://california-in-crisis.news21.com/node/24> As I wrote last month, for a comparison of years past, go to the National Center for Education Statistics website for some surprising numbers – <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=66>

The California Charter Schools Association (CCSA) is celebrating the 20th anniversary of the charter school movement with the “California's Charter Schools: 20 Years of Reinventing Public Education” campaign.

According to CCSA:

Charters are tuition-free public schools.

- *Serve all student populations and are designed to boast student achievement.*
- *Can make innovative changes to meet a student's individual needs.*
- *Have more flexibility and greater accountability.*

The schools are flourishing, engaging more students every year, and giving families and kids more educational options than ever before.

Since the signing of the charter school legislation, California has been on the leading edge of the innovative and fast-growing charter public school movement. There are currently 982 schools across the state, which serve more than 412,000 students.

More information about the anniversary, events and milestones can be found on the campaign website: <http://anniversary.calcharters.org>.

By now most of you are aware that there is a new (and in some quarters controversial) education movie playing all over the country. *Won't Back Down* centers around two determined mothers, one a bartender and the other a teacher, who team up and try to transform their failing public school in Pittsburgh. Facing a powerful and entrenched bureaucracy, administrative corruption and the teachers union, they devote their lives to making a difference in the education and future of their children.

It's a very good film, with a narrative in which the educational establishment is presented in a realistic and honest way – the portrayal of good teachers, bad teachers and mediocre ones and the parents' frustrations in dealing with the system's bureaucracy are quite true to life. The union leaders are not caricatures, but are like many that I knew and worked with during my long teaching career. Here is the trailer - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0J5-w7a78Xg>

For a libertarian take on unions and their relationship to management, John Stossel has written a pointed piece on the subject. (http://townhall.com/columnists/johnstossel/2012/09/26/strangulation_by_union/page/full/) If you would like to share your thoughts on the article, please do so at <http://www.ctenteachers.blogspot.com>

Last week, Jay Greene had an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal about a topic that will get a lot of mixed reactions from teachers. "The Imaginary Teacher Shortage" (<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10000872396390443482404578042704123153548.html>) will definitely rankle some of you. Again, if you are so inclined please let your feelings be known here - <http://www.ctenteachers.blogspot.com>

Mike Antonucci had a very interesting post recently which included some rather startling information. Here is one of the more provocative bullet points:

**That CTA Board explore options to generate additional resources from both internal and especially external sources to counter the vast resources available to our political opponents due to the Citizens United decision.*

Rationale: CTA needs to recognize we are in a war we do not currently have the resources to win. Since the Citizens United decision our political opponents have been able to raise unlimited amounts of money via "Independent Expenditure Only Committees," popularly known as "Super PACs." Although CTA currently has such a committee, it has only been utilized on an ad hoc basis. We need to aggressively pursue consistent funding sources. These could include entertainers, professional athletes or other wealthy individuals with possible ties to public education. CTA-retired members could be a valuable resource to assist in this effort.

To read more, go to <http://www.eiaonline.com/intercepts/2012/09/21/charter-caps-laser-pointers-and-superpacs/>

Maybe the teachers unions need a new strategy. Motoko Rich suggests just that in a *New York Times* piece, "Teachers' Unions Court G.O.P., Too" To read it, go to <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/25/us/politics/challenged-by-old-allies-teachers-unions-court-gop.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>

A report from our friends at the Education Action Group tells us that,

Prior to the 2010-11 school year, the San Francisco Unified School District made a series of painful spending cuts in an effort to eliminate a \$113 million budget deficit.

Teachers, principals and support staff were laid off, according to the media reports. The school year was shortened by four days, teachers were given unpaid furlough days and many programs like summer school, art, music, and special education were trimmed back.

Yet somehow the district found the resources to spend \$134 million on salaries for athletic coaches and other extracurricular labor costs, \$44.8 million on health insurance for union employees (employees only contributed a combined \$14.7 million), more than \$800,000 on national board certification bonuses for teachers, and more than \$500,000 on retention bonuses for teachers.

To read the report, go to <http://eagnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/San-Francisco-report.pdf>

CTEN now has a YouTube page. We have three videos posted with more to come; they deal with agency fee status and conscientious objector status. To view these videos, go to <http://www.youtube.com/user/TheCTEN?feature=mhee>

And talking about becoming an agency fee payer....

Final reminder: If you are considering becoming an agency fee payer, it is a two-step process. First, you resign from the union (thus becoming an agency fee payer) and then request that the political part of your dues be returned to you. Sample letters for both steps are available here - <http://www.ctenhome.org/knowMembership.htm#exoptions> (First timers, you must complete both steps by November 15th to get a full rebate.)

If you already are an agency fee payer, you must request your rebate this year (and every year!) by November 15th. If you are even one day late, you will not get a penny back. Also, because liability insurance is very important for teachers, we suggest joining the Association of American Educators <http://www.aeteachers.org/> or Christian Educators Association <http://www.ceai.org> Both AAE and CEAI are professional organizations, not unions, and are apolitical. (Also, teachers who mention CTEN when they sign up with AAE for the first time will get a \$30 discount off the regular \$180 first year membership.)

A repeat from last month, in case you missed it... regarding information about how teachers can start up their own independent teacher association, and the details of a lawsuit that could affect all teachers in CA: **I have pasted in the salient information at the end of this newsletter.** If you contact either of the parties, please keep CTEN in the loop, via CC or separate email; it will help us keep track of our members' activities and involvement.

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.

If you would like to see us address certain issues, topics, etc. in these newsletters or on our website – <http://www.ctenhome.org> - please let us know.

As always, we at CTEN want to thank you for your ongoing support and feedback.

Sincerely,

Larry Sand
CTEN President

A Better Model

The big teachers' unions have been taking from teachers for decades, often pushing policies that build their membership and power but don't necessarily improve working conditions or wages for the very teachers they claim to represent – let alone improve the educational system. The power of CTA in California seems too big, too entrenched to ever change. But what if there was a better model, and the shift to that model could happen one school district at a time?

In California, individual teachers can opt out of paying a portion of their union dues by becoming an agency fee payer. That can save a teacher hundreds of dollars a year, but they are still forced to pay as much as \$700 a year or more. Teachers who become agency fee payers also lose many benefits of union membership, including the right to vote on their contracts.

The Better Model is an independent public teacher association that controls its own destiny. By contracting out for expert legal and labor representation, but retaining for its members all policy and decision-making authority, teachers can easily save half of their current dues (\$500/year or more) and get better and more responsive representation than the big union model.

CTA apologists will say that such a model would be risky and leave the teachers unprotected by the vast resources of the statewide organization. The thing is that tens of thousands of California public employees are already doing it. Hundreds of public employee associations are independent - meaning, they are simply not attached to CTA, SEIU, AFSCME, or one of the other large national and international unions. Public employee associations represent California public employees that work for the state, counties, cities and special districts, including police officers, nurses, managers, firefighters, general employees, and everything in between. There are even public school teachers operating under this model, including traditional public and charter schools.

This model works. Ask around. Chances are that your local police officers' association or deputy sheriffs' association are not affiliated with a statewide or national union (though they probably

belong to a lobbying organization and/or legal defense fund) and they pay substantially less than teachers do in dues.

The truth is that CTA and CFT have had a virtual monopoly of teacher representation in California. While we can debate the long term success or failure of such representation statewide and nationally, there is no doubt that locally, the big union model is not responsive, not independent...but it is very expensive.

California Independent Teachers was founded by labor and legal professionals that have been working for independent employee associations for decades. We know that this works; we make our livings from making sure that we provide superior value and responsive representation to our association clients.

If you are interested in talking to someone with CIT about their model and about the steps that need to be taken to decertify CTA in your district, go to www.caindependentteachers.com or call Rafael Ruano at (888) 993-1600.

Students Matter Case

Students Matter was formed to bring an education reform case here in California. The purpose of the litigation is to remove barriers from the education code that make it nearly impossible to identify and reward quality teachers and almost equally as impossible to remove those who persistently underperform. Students Matter believes so strongly in the critical importance of teachers to improving student achievement, we want to ensure that there is a quality teacher in every classroom.

We filed our case, Vergara v. California, on May 15 on behalf of eight students currently enrolled in California public schools. The case challenges three provisions of the education code: the process for granting teacher's permanent employment, mandated seniority-based layoffs, and teacher dismissal procedures. For more information, please visit the Students Matter website studentsmatter.org, where you'll find recent press coverage and editorials, and read the attached FAQ and statement of support from Los Angeles Unified Superintendent Dr. John Deasy.

The voices of courageous teachers who stand up for school reform help us bring attention to the issues at the heart of our case and ultimately help us help those who matter the most: students.

If you would like to get involved in any capacity, either through contributing your story to an op-ed piece, sharing your insight on background with reporters or simply passing our information along to interested friends and colleagues, please email Jaclyn Matthews at jmatthews@griffinschein.com.