



# 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 17, 2018

Dear Colleague,

“California test scores have barely improved,” read the headline in the *Los Angeles Times* two weeks ago. Younger students’ scores inched up this year, but that good news was undone by a drop in scores at the high school level. The scores for black and Hispanic students were not good at all. As Howard Blume writes,

*32% of black students met the standard in reading compared with 76% of Asians and 65% of white students. The gap in reading narrowed slightly for Latinos and black students in 2018, by less than 1 percentage point, as did the gap in math for Latinos. But the math gap widened slightly for black students.*

*At the current rate of improvement, it would take generations for black students to catch up, said Elisha Smith Arrillaga, a senior official with Education Trust-West, an Oakland-based advocacy group.*

To learn more, go [here](#).

While many think the answer to improving student outcomes is spending more money on education, there is no evidence for that. First, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, we currently spend about \$668 billion nationwide per year on public education. This puts us right at the top when compared to the rest of the world. In 2013, we were #1. Currently, we are third, a bit behind Switzerland and Norway.

Perhaps it’s not the amount we spend, but how and where we spend it. Researcher Benjamin Scafidi found that between 1950 and 2015, the hiring of non-teacher education employees in government-run schools – administrators, teacher aides, counselors, social workers, etc. – rose more than 7 times the increase in students, while academic achievement has stagnated or even fallen over the past several decades. Scafidi writes that absent this mostly wasteful expenditure, our schools would have had an additional \$37.2 billion to spend.

To learn more about our educational outlay, go [here](#). To see Scafidi’s data on the “Staffing Surge,” go [here](#).

On a related note, Martin Lueken, EdChoice’s director of fiscal policy and analysis, makes the case that not only do vouchers save the taxpayer money, they have no effect on per-pupil spending.

*When students leave public schools, they usually generate fiscal savings because the voucher amount in all programs is significantly less than the overall cost of educating students in district schools, and typically less than the short-run variable costs.*

*These savings, however, do not necessarily materialize as reductions in K–12 expenditures because public officials must make decisions to reduce expenditures. When they don’t reduce those expenditures as public schools lose students, public schools will end up with more resources on a per-pupil basis. A common by-product of introducing school choice programs is that spending per student in district schools increases. Although it may be the case that total revenue for a district may drop, it is usually not the case that revenue per student declines.*

To read Lueken’s study, go [here](#).

Also, on spending, many union leaders in districts with fiscal issues point fingers at charter schools as the reason for the shortfall. But this is usually very far from the truth. For example, United Teachers of Los Angeles President Caputo-Pearl constantly demonizes charters, which he claims suck blood from traditional public schools. But as Reason Foundation scholar Lisa Snell writes, charters account for only 13 percent of the district’s enrollment drop in 2017-2018. She places much of the district’s fiscal woes on its spending on pensions, health care, and special education programs.

*The district’s most recent budget of \$7.5 billion, approved in June 2017, projected that LAUSD will face a \$422-million shortfall by the 2019–2020 school year. In addition, in four years the combination of pension costs, health and welfare costs, and special education costs are projected to take up 57.5% of unrestricted general fund revenue (LAUSD’s main operational funding), before the district spends a single dollar to run a regular school program.*

To read more on Snell’s in-depth analysis, go [here](#).

Caputo-Pearl and UTLA are also using the charter issue as one reason for its threatened strike, which could come in early 2019, if not sooner. Most of the news reports on the issue focus on the district and union. But there is a rising parent voice that demands to be heard. Speak Up has been especially vocal in its opposition to a strike. The group is a grassroots organization of parents who want a more powerful voice in education policy. “Kids don’t have lobbyists, and kids don’t have a union. Kids have parents, and parents are the only people whose sole interest is the success of kids.” Speak Up leader Katie Braude recently penned a piece for *LA School Report* that spells out the parents’ concerns.

*As the adults fight over salaries and district finances, there's a simple fact that should not be forgotten or discounted: LAUSD kids would be deprived of an education during a strike. They are the innocent victims of these adult battles.*

*Last year, 70 percent of LAUSD students failed to meet state academic standards in math, and 60 percent failed to meet standards in English. Only 56 percent of LAUSD kids graduated eligible to even apply to a state four-year college. Clearly, our students cannot afford to lose more school days during a strike and fall even farther behind.*

To continue reading Braude's article, go [here](#). To learn more about Speak Up, go [here](#).

As recent events have shown, we live in very politically polarized times. So the question on many minds becomes, "How should teachers bring up controversial subjects in the classroom?" History professor John Muresianu writes, "Civics Education Should Focus On Critical Thinking, Not Activism." He writes,

*... there has been a revival in civics courses in middle and high school over the past year and a half. For someone passionate about civics education, this should be a source of optimism. But the subject matter of these civics courses is what matters, and a significant share of these new classes have been focused on increasing civic activism. "Getting out the vote" and engaging in activism should only come after students have weighed the arguments on every side of each issue.*

He goes on to say that civics education needs to be taught in elementary school.

*Learning civics, like learning a second language, requires constant thinking, speaking, and writing. In order to train the next generation of citizens and voters, we need a serious approach to civics education that focuses on critical thinking before action.*

To read Muresianu's thought-provoking piece, go [here](#).

CTEN has received many emails from teachers who have tried to quit their union but were told that they couldn't because they missed their window of opportunity. For example, in San Francisco a teacher can resign from her union only between 30 and 45 days before the anniversary of the date she signed the membership form. If she misses that window, she is on the hook for another year's worth of dues. (A teacher who signed up to be a union member 10, 20 or 30 years ago probably has no clue what her anniversary is and her union just may decide not to give her that information.) In Las Vegas, you must part ways between July 1<sup>st</sup> and July 15<sup>th</sup>, or you are trapped paying dues for another year.

The unions' actions are legally tenuous, to say the least, and lawsuits have been initiated. A couple of weeks ago the [Mackinac Center for Public Policy filed suit](#) against New Jersey's governor and attorney general, challenging the constitutionality of Assembly Bill A3686 – which was signed into law on May 17<sup>th</sup>. The issue is with that part of the law that limits a union member's ability to resign "the 10 days following each anniversary date of their employment."

The Mackinac suit is actually the second; it follows similar litigation by the Freedom Foundation in Washington state in August.

To learn more about the two lawsuits, go [here](#) and [here](#).

Also, on unions, CTEN board member, former teacher and Supreme Court plaintiff Rebecca Friedrichs' excellent new book, *Standing Up to Goliath: Battling State and National Teachers' Unions for the Heart and Soul of Our Kids and Country* is due out next month. To learn more and pre-order it, go [here](#).

Also, CTEN will continue to keep up with post-*Janus* doings in addition to any other issues pertinent to education and teachers, and inform you as things happen. If you have any questions, or have experienced any problems because of your decision to leave your union, please let us know, and we will do our best to help you in a timely manner. We will also be able to share your concerns with other teachers across the state. And speaking of sharing, please pass this email 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