



# 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.*

November 18, 2015

Dear Colleague,

An issue that can't seem to keep itself out of the news these days is standardized testing – it has even made its way to the White House where President Obama has officially weighed in.

*Faced with mounting and bipartisan opposition to increased and often high-stakes testing in the nation's public schools, the Obama administration declared Saturday that the push had gone too far, acknowledged its own role in the proliferation of tests, and urged schools to step back and make exams less onerous and more purposeful.*

*Specifically, the administration called for a cap on assessment so that no child would spend more than 2 percent of classroom instruction time taking tests. It called on Congress to “reduce over-testing” as it reauthorizes the federal legislation governing the nation's public elementary and secondary schools.*

However, edu-pundit Robert Pondiscio has a very different opinion. Writing in *U.S News & World Report*, he claims the problem is not with over-testing, but rather with test-prep.

*When parents complain, rightfully so, about over-testing, what they are almost certainly responding to is not the tests themselves, which take up a vanishingly small amount of class time, but the effects of test-and-prep culture, which has fundamentally changed the experience of schooling for our children, and not always for the better.*

To read more about Obama's position, go to <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/25/us/obama-administration-calls-for-limits-on-testing-in-schools.html> To get Pondiscio's take, go here - <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/knowledge-bank/2015/10/26/obamas-school-testing-talk-is-meaningless>

While testing has become the education story-du-jour, the Common Core controversy isn't far behind. The political battles over the standards have been well documented, but a recent piece in the *Wall Street Journal* “Financial Woes Plague Common-Core Rollout” gets into its costliness.

*The total cost of implementing Common Core is difficult to determine because the country's education spending is fragmented among thousands of districts. The Wall Street Journal looked at spending by states and large school districts and found that more than \$7 billion had been spent or committed in connection with the new standards. To come up with that number, the Journal examined contracts, email and other data provided under public-records requests by nearly 70 state education departments and school districts.*

*The analysis didn't account for what would have been spent anyway—even without Common Core—on testing, instructional materials, technology and training. Education officials say, however, that the new standards required more training and teaching materials than they would otherwise have needed, and that Common Core prompted them to speed up computer purchases and network upgrades.*

To continue reading this sobering piece, go to <http://www.wsj.com/articles/financial-woes-plague-common-core-rollout-1446514250?alg=y>

As some of you know, CTEN has been working with Rafael Ruano, a lawyer who helps teachers establish an alternative model to the traditional teachers unions. Here is a message from Mr. Ruano detailing his plan:

*Many California teachers are completely unaware that they can opt out of part of their CTA dues every year. Even fewer know that they, in conjunction with a majority of their fellow teachers in their school district, can actually choose to cast CTA aside and adopt an independent model of teacher representation. While still a small minority, in the past few years, a small set of independent teacher associations have navigated the process of decertification to gain recognition as the exclusive bargaining representative for the teachers and other certificated employees of their school districts.*

*In 2013, the Corning Union High School District certificated employees gathered the necessary signatures to submit a petition to decertify their CTA local chapter and replace it with their newly created Corning Independent Teachers Association. After overcoming the expected dirty tricks and scaremongering from CTA, the Corning teachers voted for the alternative model. Two years later, CITA is thriving, providing professional representation to its members, charging dues about one fourth of the old CTA fees (saving teachers approximately \$650 per year), and managing to avoid all of the dismal predictions made by CTA should Corning teachers make the change.*

If you are a California teacher who is dissatisfied with the status quo and want to learn about a different model, go to [www.caindependentteachers.com](http://www.caindependentteachers.com)

A comprehensive analysis by the National Council on Teacher Quality shows 42 states and Washington, D.C. require that student growth and achievement must be considered in teacher evaluations. Just six years ago only 15 states did so. From the NCTQ website:

*This report presents the most comprehensive and up-to-date policy trends on how states are evaluating teachers. It also breaks new ground by providing a look at the policy landscape on principal effectiveness. Finally, this report examines state efforts to connect the dots – that is,*

*use the results of evaluations to better inform practice and make decisions of consequence for teachers in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.*

California is one of the eight that does not, despite the fact that it has been the law to do so since 1971 when the Stull Act was passed. In 1999, the state legislature amended the law, requiring that the governing board of each school district “shall evaluate and assess certificated employee performance as it reasonably relates to: the progress of pupils toward the standards established pursuant to subdivision (a) and, if applicable, the state adopted academic content standards as measured by state adopted criterion referenced assessments.” In other words, a teacher’s evaluation must be based at least in part on how well her students perform on state tests. But school districts still turned a blind eye to the law.

Then in 2012, per a suit brought by Sacramento-based nonprofit EdVoice, a judge ordered the inclusion of test scores to be part of a teacher’s evaluation. However, in a report released earlier this year that sampled 26 districts’ compliance with the decision, EdVoice found that half of them were ignoring that court-ordered requirement to use the test scores.

To learn more about the NCTQ report, go to <http://www.nctq.org/dmsStage/StateofStates2015>

Former San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed has twice rolled out statewide pension reform initiatives for public employees, but both times Attorney General Kamala Harris, using “slanted” language, killed the measures before Reed could get them off the ground. But Reed is back, and along with former San Diego Councilman Carl DeMaio, he submitted two new initiative proposals. As *Contra Costa Times* writer Daniel Borenstein explains, the measures are directed at new workers. Each would slow mounting retirement costs for state and local governments but in slightly different ways:

*The Voter Empowerment Act would require voter approval to offer traditional pensions to employees hired after 2018. The balloting would be among residents of the affected jurisdiction, such as a city, county or, for state employees, the entire state.*

*The measure would also limit the government to paying no more than half the cost of pensions and other retirement benefits, with employees responsible for the rest. That 50 percent government share could only be increased with voter approval.*

*The Government Pension Cap Act would continue allowing traditional pensions for public employees hired after 2018 without voter approval.*

To read the rest of Borenstein’s article, go here - [http://www.contracostatimes.com/daniel-borenstein/ci\\_28941163/daniel-borenstein-latest-chuck-reed-pension-initiatives-address](http://www.contracostatimes.com/daniel-borenstein/ci_28941163/daniel-borenstein-latest-chuck-reed-pension-initiatives-address)

For a little more detail on the initiatives, go to <https://calwatchdog.com/2015/11/10/chuck-reed-reform-measure-will-bite-pension-liability-elephant/>

The event sponsored by CTEN and the Association of American Educators in September, in which we examined the *Friedrichs* and *Bain* lawsuits and their possible ramifications for

teachers and the general public, will soon be available on YouTube. When it is posted, we will send you the link.

For CTA agency fee payers, the November 15th deadline has passed, so we hope you have already submitted your 2015 rebate form. However, if you are a first time filer, you may resign from the union after the 15th. You will not get the full amount, but rather a prorated one depending on how long after the 15th you file. For more information, please visit <http://www.ctenhome.org/know.htm>

As always, we at CTEN want to thank you for your ongoing support and invite you to visit us regularly at [www.ctenhome.org](http://www.ctenhome.org) If you need any information that you can't find there, just send us an email at [cteninfo@ctenhome.org](mailto:cteninfo@ctenhome.org) or call us at 888-290-8471 and we will get back to you in short order.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Sincerely,  
Larry Sand  
CTEN President