



# 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.*

December 21, 2016

Dear Colleague,

Undoubtedly the biggest national education story of the last few weeks is President-elect Donald Trump's nomination of Betsy DeVos to be the Secretary of Education. The reform-minded crowd by-and-large lauded the pick, while the teachers unions have been in a state of grief. The NEA has been pillorying DeVos every chance it gets on its website, asserting that she is an "ardent supporter of 'school choice' privatization schemes, despite a complete lack of evidence that privatizing public schools produces better education." The union also claims that she has "invested millions lobbying for laws that drain resources from public schools...fought against the regulation of charter schools...and is not a good fit for a position overseeing the civil rights of all students."

Responding to the charges, Arkansas writer Paul Greenberg delivers an op-ed in which he states that "Betsy DeVos is a fighter and a winner." I threw in my two cents, responding to the union's charges and think that she – with a few caveats – is a good choice for the job.

To read the NEA statement, go here - <http://educationvotes.nea.org/2016/11/30/5-reasons-trump-pick-betsy-devos-wrong-secretary-education/> For Greenberg's counterarguments, go to <http://townhall.com/columnists/paulgreenberg/2016/12/13/betsy-devos-is-a-fighter-and-a-winner-n2259074> For my thoughts, go here - <http://amgreatness.com/2016/12/13/desperately-demeaning-devos/>

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests reading, mathematics and science and is administered every three years to 15 year-olds in 72 countries by the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The latest results were announced a couple of weeks ago, and the news wasn't good. U.S. students performed in the middle of the pack in reading and science, but well below average in mathematics. Many make excuses for our poor showing by claiming that the U.S., unlike other countries, tests all its children, not just the elite, has large proportions of immigrants and English-language learners, and has a huge proportion of children in poverty. But Robert Rothman, writing in the *Hechinger Report*, disagrees.

*The fact is that these criticisms are inaccurate. Nearly every country enrolls nearly all 15-year-olds in school, and the U.S. is on the low side, with 84 percent of 15-year-olds in school. Many countries have higher immigrant populations than the United States, and in some, such as Singapore, immigrant students outperform native-born students.*

*And poverty does not explain the U.S. results. Yes, child poverty rates in the U.S. are high, but they are about at the average for OECD countries. Some high-performing regions, like Hong Kong, have much higher poverty rates. And some, like Hong Kong, have managed to break the connection between socioeconomic status and achievement. In Estonia, for example, 48 percent of low-income students are “resilient”; that is, they score at top levels. In Canada, the resiliency rate is 39 percent. In the U.S., it is 32 percent—and the good news is the rate has gone up over the past decade.*

To read more of Rothman’s critique and see the scores, go to <http://hechingerreport.org/america-care-students-lackluster-performance-global-pisa-tests/>

On December 8<sup>th</sup>, the National Council on Teacher Quality released new ratings for 875 undergraduate elementary teacher preparation programs. One of NCTQ’s findings is that these programs “still have far to go, particularly in preparing elementary teachers in mathematics.... The new findings do little to quell the notion that teaching is an ‘easy major,’ open to anyone who applies in many institutions. Only one quarter of the programs (26 percent) are sufficiently selective, generally admitting only the top half of college goers.” To access the NCTQ report, go to <http://us1.campaign-archive1.com/?u=c9b11da2ceffae94e1dc196f6&id=5e42db5a3d&e=9dc9a1baf8>

The same day NCTQ came out with its teacher prep analysis, the Fordham Institute released a report on the difficulty of removing ineffective teachers from public school classrooms. The results of the study showed that in some school districts it is virtually impossible to get rid of an under-performer. The Fordham analysts used a ten point metric based on three simple questions:

- Does tenure protect veteran teachers from performance-based dismissal?
- How long does it take to dismiss an ineffective veteran teacher?
- How vulnerable is an ineffective veteran teacher’s dismissal to challenge?

They then used this framework to gauge the difficulty of dismissing ineffective veteran teachers in 25 diverse school districts across the country and found three major obstacles. In 17 of the 25 districts, state law allows teachers to achieve tenure and never relinquish it, even if poor performance reviews follow. Also, it takes forever to cut through the red tape involved in a teacher dismissal. In Los Angeles and San Francisco, it can take five or more years to complete the process. And finally, teachers have multiple appeals to their dismissal in many districts.

To read more about the Fordham Institute report, go to <https://edexcellence.net/publications/undue-process>

Robert Pondiscio, Vice President for External Affairs at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, has written a forceful piece for *U.S News & World Report* in which he suggests that we “Let Poor Parents Choose Too.” Making the case for parent power in the current political climate, he writes,

*If it's education reform technocrats and accountability hawks versus parents this time, the mood, the moment and the moral argument would seem to favor parents. If this year has taught us nothing else, it's that Americans have had just about enough of their betters deciding what's best for them and expecting them to play gratefully along. Reformers might have to start accepting that our greatest point of leverage is to help parents choose wisely, rather than trying to police their choices by means of aggressive accountability schemes.*

To read more of this provocative article, go here - <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/knowledge-bank/articles/2016-12-02/stop-policing-poor-parents-on-school-and-education-choice>

While school choice is on the move in other states, California is lagging. *EdSource's* Louis Freedberg suggests, "Trump school voucher plan would face huge obstacles in California." There are many questions: Would a voucher program be legal in California? Where would the federal funds come from? How much would the plan as proposed by Trump cost in California? Where would students be able to use the vouchers? To see how Freedberg answers these and other questions, go to <https://edsources.org/2016/trump-school-voucher-plan-would-face-huge-obstacles-in-california/573691>

When Antonin Scalia died in February, the *Friedrichs* case went with him. But there is another case on the horizon that is trying to accomplish the same end: giving workers a choice whether or not to pay dues to a public employee union as a condition of employment. According to *Choice Media*,

*Enter Illinois plaintiffs Mark Janus and Brian Trygg and a case called Janus v. AFSCME. With the legal counsel of Jacob Huebert of the Liberty Justice Center, they are suing Illinois public sector unions for the same reason as the Friedrichs plaintiffs — forced union fees. The plaintiffs are employees of the state of Illinois; Mark Janus is a child support services worker at the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services, and Brian Trygg is a transportation engineer. Attorney Huebert told Choice Media that if they win their case, the precedent would apply to public school teachers as well.*

*"If the court were to rule in their favor [Janus and Trygg's], it would extend to all government workers who've been forced to pay union fees as a condition of employment," Huebert said. "That's really the issue at the heart of the case: Can the government force its employees to pay union fees as a condition of employment? If it can't force Illinois state workers to do that, it's not clear how it can force any other kind of government worker to do that."*

To learn more about *Janus v. AFSCME*, go to <http://choicemedia.tv/2016/11/23/friedrichs-2-0-new-lawsuit-trump-scotus-justice-end-compulsory-union-fees/>

And speaking of unions, the new NEA LM-2 has been released. *Dropout Nation's* RiShawn Biddle writes about it here - <http://dropoutnation.net/2016/12/05/neas-big-ballot-plays/> To read specifically where NEA spends the \$366,881,800 it collected from educators this past year, go to [http://rishawnbiddle.org/outsidereports/nea\\_dol\\_filing\\_2016.htm](http://rishawnbiddle.org/outsidereports/nea_dol_filing_2016.htm)

Anyone wishing to make a year-end donation to CTEN can do so very simply through a personal check or PayPal - <http://www.ctenhome.org/donate.html> As a non-profit, we exist and operate only

through the generosity and support of people like you. (And to those of you who already regularly donate – our heartfelt thanks!)

It has been another exciting year for CTEN - [www.ctenhome.org/](http://www.ctenhome.org/) and we look forward to an even more vigorous 2017. We remain grateful for your interest and involvement, and wish you and your families the happiest of holidays. See you next year!

Sincerely,  
Larry Sand  
CTEN President