



# 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 20, 2017

Dear Colleague,

The past month has not been kind to the California education establishment. A Public Policy of California report finds that just 30 percent of all California 9<sup>th</sup> graders are expected to earn a bachelor's degree. Also, only 45 percent of the graduating class of 2016 completed college preparatory courses, which are required to be considered for admission to any state school. The report analyzes when students leave the path to college, which students leave, and the major impediments to success. It is based on a large longitudinal sample of high school students, as well as statewide data.

In San Francisco, the statistics for black students are especially grim. In fact, SF NAACP President Amos Brown told the local school board that it should declare a state of emergency, because just 19 percent of black students are proficient in English, compared to 31 percent of black students statewide. San Francisco has the worst black student achievement of any county in California.

Then, in an attempt to force California to address its education failings, a group of lawyers representing teachers and students from poor performing schools is suing the state, arguing that it "has done nothing about a high number of schoolchildren who do not know how to read."

*The advocacy law firm, Public Counsel, filed the lawsuit in Los Angeles Superior Court to demand the California Department of Education address its "literacy crisis." The state has not followed suggestions from its own report on the problem five years ago, the lawsuit said.*

*"When it comes to literacy and the delivery of basic education, California is dragging down the nation," said Public Counsel lawyer Mark Rosenbaum, who sued along with the law firm Morrison & Foerster.*

*Of the 26 lowest-performing districts in the nation, 11 are in California, according to the lawsuit. Texas, the largest state after California, has only one district among the 26.*

To access the PPIC report, go to <http://www.ppic.org/press-release/less-than-a-third-of-states-9th-graders-likely-to-earn-a-bachelors-degree/> To learn more about San Francisco's problems, go to <http://www.sacbee.com/news/local/education/article181525146.html> For more on the lawsuit, go here - <http://www.sacbee.com/news/state/california/article188153344.html>

And the bad news is not limited to California. The results of an international reading test reveal that U.S. 4<sup>th</sup>-Graders lag behind other countries in reading.

*When it comes to the standing of U.S. students, fourth grade reading comprehension has slipped since 2011 – though not statistically significantly – lowering its position in the international ranking to 16th place. In 2011, four education systems scored higher than the average reading score of U.S. students, while in 2016, 12 education systems scored higher.*

*"We seem to be declining as other education systems make larger gains on assessments," Peggy Carr, acting commissioner for the National Center for Education Statistics, the research arm of the U.S. Department of Education, said in a press call last week. "Countries that were our peers have surpassed us while some that used to do worse than us are now our peers."*

To read more about the results, go to <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2017-12-05/other-countries-surpass-us-students-in-international-reading-comprehension-test>

The yearly EdChoice "Schooling in America" report has been released and, as usual, the pro-choice outfit has done a thorough job of digging into various education crevices. From the executive summary:

*The national nomenclature surrounding education has shifted dramatically in the past year. Terms like "vouchers," "charter schools," and "tax-credit scholarships"—all educational options—have entered the mainstream dialogue as a result of a political embrace by the executive administration. This emergence has fueled the ongoing debate on what is and should be considered public education in the United States.*

*Often in this political climate, the loudest voices garner the most attention. That has certainly been true in education, where distinct stakeholders of parents, teachers, administrators, boards, and governments often struggle to align their goals. Yet the voices of everyday citizens as a whole also should be examined for this most important public good.*

To access the report, go to <https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2017-Schooling-In-America-by-Paul-DiPerna-Michael-Shaw-and-Andrew-D-Catt-1.pdf>

Also, on the school choice front, the Associated Press has just issued a report that claims that "US charter schools put growing numbers in racial isolation."

Just one of the many of the report's odd assertions is that charters are "segregated." which is patently untrue. Segregation is forced separation. No charter in the country has adopted an apartheid policy. Parents of all races send their kids to these schools voluntarily. The more popular ones hold a colorblind lottery to determine admission.

Education reformers' responses to the AP analysis were quick and pointed. Democrats for Education Reform President Shavar Jeffries wrote that AP "ignores the blatantly obvious fact that charter schools are concentrated in neighborhoods with high proportions of students of color to provide them an alternative to the low-performing traditional public schools they previously had no choice but to attend."

Howard Fuller, civil rights activist and veteran education reform advocate, tweeted, "The issue for low income Black children is how to get an effective education. I don't oppose integration. I support excellent education for poor Black children wherever they can find it. Blaming charter schools for the lack of integration is bogus."

To read more about the AP report and reactions to it, go here - <https://www.the74million.org/education-reform-groups-decry-associated-press-analysis-of-charter-school-segregation/>

Mike Antonucci has written "Five Common Teachers Union Arguments – That Rely on Half-Truths." This valuable post provides excellent rejoinders to several union arguments. So for example, when your strident Uncle Don, a union organizer, is chomping away at his Christmas goose and spitting out things like, "Union dues are not used for politics," you can quote Antonucci:

*The problem is that most people broadly define politics to include lobbying, independent expenditures, issue advertising, ballot initiative campaigns, rallies, protests, and endorsements. All of those things are paid for with dues money, which every union member, regardless of his or her political views, contributes. Virtually every other type of political spending other than direct contributions to candidates and parties is made with dues money.*

*If you are a Republican union member, you have paid, do pay, and will pay to help elect Democrats to office.*

To read all of Antonucci's valuable rejoinders, go here - <https://www.the74million.org/article/analysis-five-common-teacher-union-arguments-that-rely-on-half-truths/>

If you have any questions about where your dues dollars are going, the latest NEA U.S. Department of Labor report will answer many of them. As reported by RiShawn Biddle, "...it is clear that the nation's largest teachers' union is spending even more to maintain its influence in education policy. Whether or not it benefits the teachers who are often forced to pay into its coffers is a different story."

He adds that the union "spent \$151 million on lobbying and contributions to supposedly likeminded organizations during its last fiscal year. That's a 9.4 increase over influence-buying levels in 2015-2016. This, by the way, doesn't include another \$43.7 million in spending on so-called representational activities in 2016-2017, which almost always tend to be political in nature; that's six percent less than in the previous period."

To access the spending report, go to <http://dropoutnation.net/2017/11/30/neas-151-million-influence-spree/>

And just how do teachers, collectively, lean politically? A new poll by *Education Week* provides some answers. Not surprisingly, teachers are quite mixed. When asked to describe their political orientation, teachers responded:

5% - very liberal  
4% - very conservative  
24% - liberal  
23% conservative  
43% moderate

Just about as even a breakdown as you can get, but obviously the unions don't spend their members' dues money accordingly. Also importantly, *Ed Week* stresses that, en masse, teachers do their best to keep their political views to themselves when dealing with their students.

To read more about teachers' political leanings, go here - <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2017/12/13/survey-paints-political-portrait-of-americas-k-12.html>

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 2018. We are 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