



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 19, 2018

Dear Colleague,

A recent piece in *The 74* asks, “If a child earns a B– in math on his report card, is that a good grade, or does it mean he’s the worst in the class?” Well, the answer mostly depends on whether it’s a teacher or parent who’s responding. According to a recent survey:

...most parents - 6 in 10 - said their children earn As and Bs, which they think means their kids are performing at the level they should be for their grade.

But teachers said report cards are only the third-most important tool for understanding student achievement. For teachers, a report card is a combination of grades, effort, and progress. About one-third of teachers said they feel pressure from administrators or parents to avoid giving too many low grades, and more than half said they are expected to let students redo work for additional credit.

To read more and learn about some recommended fixes to the disparity, go [here](#).

Also on the parent-teacher front, with the United Teachers of Los Angeles looking to strike, many parents are “stuck in the middle” – torn and frustrated – that the two sides can’t resolve the issues.

While parents love and appreciate their teachers, they also don’t want their children’s education to be collateral damage in a fight among adults, they told LA School Report. Their top concerns during a strike are safety and the quality of classroom instruction.

United Teachers Los Angeles plans a January strike if no agreement is reached. More than 30,000 teachers across the district’s 1,100 public schools could participate, affecting more than 480,000 students in the country’s second-largest school district.

“At the end of the day, we don’t feel it’s fair to put parents in the middle,” said parent Kathy Kantner.

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

One of UTLA's demands is for smaller class size. But how important are smaller classes for students? Not very, according to a new report issued by the Danish Centre of Applied Social Science. Researchers examined 127 studies, eliminating many that did not meet strict research requirements, and found that there *may* be tiny benefits to small classes for *some* students when it comes to reading. But in math, it found no benefits at all and the researchers "cannot rule out the possibility that small classes may be counterproductive for some students."

To see the study, go [here](#).

UTLA is also demanding a hefty salary increase for all its teachers. But do all teachers deserve higher pay? The traditional step-and-column method of paying teachers is still *de rigueur*, many would like a more competitive system. As Steven Greenhut writes,

Merit pay is a simple concept. It allows school administrators to pay good, effective teachers more than mediocre or poor-performing teachers. It allows signing bonuses and performance-based rewards. The obvious corollary is that it also allows them to pay bad or incompetent teachers lower salaries. In a truly competitive educational model that goes beyond this simple idea, school officials could even—get this—demote, discipline, or fire teachers who aren't making the grade. That's how it works in almost any private business, and even private schools.

In the current public-school system, however, pay is based on seniority. A school teacher who has been just occupying a chair for decades, must be paid better than a young go-getter.

To read more of Greenhut's piece, go [here](#).

In a lawsuit we wrote about in last month's letter, Los Angeles special education teacher Thomas Few just scored a major victory. With help from the California Policy Center and Liberty Justice Center, he sued UTLA on November 13th, after several requests to be relieved of all union dues went unanswered. Two weeks later, Few received a letter telling him that UTLA still has the right to take his money, but the union will refrain from doing so "rather than expend dues money on litigation." UTLA not only stopped charging him monthly but sent him a check for \$433.31, the amount he had paid since first demanding full separation from the union. Now, since UTLA has honored Few's request, this could open the door for all others in the same position. The California Policy Center is pursuing the lawsuit to ensure that the union's narrow "quit" window will no longer shut in anyone else's face. A hearing is scheduled for February in Los Angeles.

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

Ahead of last month's election, the California Teachers Association released its voter guide for the November 6th general election, and every candidate for statewide office that the union took a position on – governor, attorney general, treasurer, etc. – was a Democrat. In the State Assembly, CTA endorsed 57 candidates, only one of whom was a Republican. In the State Senate, it was 12 Dems and not one Republican. For Congress – 43 D and one R. (They were forced to pick Paul

Cook in CD 8; he was running against Tim Donnelly, also a Republican, but who is to the right of Cook.)

The union has a right to get behind any candidate it so chooses. But now that union dues are optional, 100,000 Republican, libertarian, centrist and apolitical teachers need to think about whether or not they want to pay \$700 a year to an organization that uses their dues to promote candidates and causes they disagree with.

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

One election of note involved school choice. In Florida, Republican pro-choice candidate Ron DeSantis defeated Andrew Gillum who, if elected, would have tried to eliminate Florida's popular tax credit scholarship program. It was a very close race, and as The James Madison Institute's William Mattox writes, about 100,000 African-American women unexpectedly chose DeSantis over the black Democratic candidate. In a close election, "school choice moms" apparently gave the Republican the victory.

The Gillum loss stunned many pundits, but it should not have. The Florida program, which focuses on high-needs students, has a 90 percent parent-approval rating and saves taxpayers money. And choice's popularity is gaining elsewhere. The most recent *Education Next* national survey shows that 54 percent of those polled support "wider choice" for public-school parents by "allowing them to enroll their children in private schools instead, with government helping to pay the tuition." That's a 9 percent increase over last year.

To read more about the Florida gubernatorial election, go [here](#).

Speaking of school choice, the annual EdChoice "Schooling in America" survey is out and is full of information on all things educational. Among the findings:

Public school teachers as a group appear to have reservations about their jobs and the profession. They trust parents less than students and principals. They also have greater concerns about standardized testing than parents and the general public.

Support for school choice remains high. Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) are much more popular than any other program among most groups, including teachers.

People still are largely unaware how much we spend on K-12 education.

To access the study, go [here](#).

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, and we look forward to an even more vigorous 2019. 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