



California Teachers Empowerment Network

Standing out from the crowd, fully informed on the issues

February 15, 2011

Dear Colleague,

We at CTEN are very happy to announce that we now have a blog! We sincerely hope it will provide a chance for you and other likeminded teachers to commiserate, exchange ideas and learn from each other. The blog page can be accessed here - <http://www.ctenteachers.blogspot.com/> I posted a provocative article there last week and would love to know what you think. "Nobody Deserves Tenure" can be accessed here - <http://educationnext.org/nobody-deserves-tenure/> and on the blog itself.

We are still getting questions from agency fee payers regarding the arbitration part of the form letter posted on our website - <http://tiny.cc/gao2p> Typically, teachers ask if it's necessary to include the last three paragraphs, requesting arbitration. The answer is yes because should the arbitrator rule in favor of the class of Agency Fee Payers and require the union to issue additional monies back, only those who have requested arbitration will get the additional money rebated to them. You do not need to attend the arbitration hearings; you only need to request arbitration when writing your rebate letter. There is no cost to the fee payer in terms of time or money to request arbitration.

As many of you know, education reform is a topic that seems to be on everyone's lips these days. Tenure, seniority, merit pay and teachers unions are hot topics around the country. Perhaps the state least impacted by reform after the elections this past November is California. I had an op-ed published in the February 9th *San Jose Mercury News* - http://www.mercurynews.com/opinion/ci_17331541 which deals with this issue.

While education reform perhaps once was a conservative issue, this is no longer true. Left-of-center reformers are now emerging and making their voices heard. In fact, the Democrats For Education Reform, having started in New York, has recently expanded to the west coast. Former State Senator Gloria Romero, author of the Parent Trigger bill, has been chosen to lead DFER in its California incarnation. For more on DFER, go to - <http://www.dfer.org/>

If you are reform-minded and wondering what you (teachers, parents, all citizens) can do, there is plenty of grist for the mill on the *Waiting For Superman* site - <http://www.waitingforsuperman.com/action/page/what-you-can-do>

Reform has come to a most unusual place: the United Teachers of Los Angeles. The country's second largest local teachers' union has a sizable faction calling itself *NewTLA* that has become a force inside the union itself. I first learned of this group when the *Los Angeles Daily News* published an op-ed by one of the group's founders, Mike Stryer, a teacher at LA's Fairfax High School - http://www.dailynews.com/opinions/ci_17090495 Led by Stryer and Santee High School teacher Jordan Henry, this group has quickly become a force to be reckoned with. In a recent phone conversation, Henry told me that NewTLA has 80 or so members within UTLA's 300 member House of Representatives.

While NewTLA sticks to certain union staples like collective bargaining, they leave the typical union reservation by advocating for an overhaul of the seniority system and developing a real system of accountability for teachers. To learn more about NewTLA, please visit their website - <http://www.newtla.com/index.html>

We have found an excellent new Education Debate website which will be of interest to anyone who is serious about education reform. Editor Matthew Tabor, an independent voice in the national education debate, has done an excellent job bringing together "a diverse community of thought leaders in education policy, teaching, technology, higher education, parenting and the education media. They write about and analyze the important education issues of the day – and then discuss them with you." To access the website, please go to <http://www.onlineschools.org/education-debate/>

With a nod to the dramatic current events, many educators are disturbed by the way Islam is presented in textbooks. For instance, in 7th grade textbooks Judaism and Christianity are presented warts and all while Islam is more sanitized and presented in a more positive light. We have come across two supplements which address this issue; new textbooks will not be issued in California for years to come, so it's either supplements or nothing. If you are interested, send me an email and I will send them along to you. Then, if you think this is a worthwhile endeavor, you can broach the subject with your principal and/or local school board.

What It Takes is a volunteer speaker program created by nationally syndicated columnist Amy Alkon to demystify "making it" for inner-city kids. The program sends in exactly what these kids lack in their lives: role models -- self-made successes with interesting jobs who deconstruct their path, showing that their success wasn't magic, and they aren't geniuses, but ordinary people who made it through perseverance and hard work. They address kids of all aptitudes -- advising kids (college-bound or not) to seek jobs where they can learn from a successful person who can act as a mentor. The program is secular, but includes a message about how teen pregnancy derails the opportunities discussed by the speaker, and likely leads to lives of poverty for teen mothers and their children.

Imagine if kids got this message from the earliest grades on, at least 3-4 times a year, from different speakers. Alkon's experiences at University High in Los Angeles tell her we'll see a noticeable shift away from the easy, tragic answers -- drugs, teen motherhood, unnecessarily wasted lives and opportunities not seized. If interested, you can email Amy Alkon at adviceamy@aol.com for a copy of the program.

Also, if anyone has the latest UTLA Hudson notice and would be able to get me a copy, please contact me at lsand@ctenhome.org

If you are interested in giving CTEN brochures to colleagues, you can print them right from the home page - <http://www.ctenhome.org/index.htm> Or, if you prefer, we will be happy to send you as many as you need. Also, anyone wishing to donate to CTEN can do so very simply through PayPal - <http://www.ctenhome.org/donate.htm> As a non-profit, we exist only through the generosity of like-minded educators and supporters.

In any event, if you enjoy these letters and find them informative, please pass them along to your colleagues. We know that there are many independent-minded teachers in California who are looking for alternative sources of information.

If you would like to see us address certain issues, topics, etc. in these newsletters or on our website – <http://www.ctenhome.org> - please let us know. Thanks.

Sincerely,

Larry Sand
CTEN President