



# 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.*

February 20, 2014

Dear Colleague,

The Students Matter case is continuing and will go beyond its four week allotted time. And whichever side loses is sure to appeal the decision. As we have mentioned in previous letters, every public school teacher in California could be affected by the outcome of this case, as tenure, seniority and the state's dismissal statutes as we know them could conceivably be eliminated. For more, up-to-date information, go to <http://studentsmatter.org/>

And on the topic of reform, the Association of American Educators has come out with its 2014 national membership survey. The alternative teachers' organization posted some very interesting results. For example, on Common Core,

- *51% of survey respondents have an unfavorable opinion of CCSS.*
- *30% of teachers believe the Common Core will make the U.S. more competitive on a global scale. 47% of teachers believe they would have no effect, and 22% assert that CCSS would have an adverse effect.*

On technology in the classroom:

- *93% of AAE members incorporate technology in their daily lessons.*
- *65% of teachers would support a blended learning environment where students spend part of their day with a teacher and part of their day on a computer.*

And in spite of the fact that the teachers unions are constantly railing against any kind of school choice, the teachers polled came down in favor of various types of parental options:

- *82% of members support public school open enrollment.*
- *59% of teachers agree with Wisconsin's Parental Choice Program, allowing low-income students public funds to attend a school of their choice.*
- *72% of AAE members support Arizona's Empowerment Scholarship Accounts (ESAs), which enable students to leave their assigned public schools, taking 90% of the state*

*dollars with them. That money, deposited into ESAs, can then be used to access a multitude of education options that better meet their children's needs.*

For more on the AAE poll, go to <http://www.aateachers.org/images/em/2014febnews.pdf>

Regarding school choice, on January 31<sup>st</sup> I was on a panel with Lisa Keegan, Lance Izumi and Lisa Snell on the National School Choice Week train as it rumbled up the coast from Los Angeles to Oakland. Moderated by NSCW president Andrew Campanella, we covered various aspects of choice. To view the video go to [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMyQOaT\\_MQI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMyQOaT_MQI)

The Center for Education Reform has come out with its latest charter school survey. As the charter movement has been expanding – there are over 6,000 in the U.S. and over 1,100 in CA alone – it is important for teachers to learn more about them. Just a few findings from the survey:

- *Charter sector growth is proportionately higher in states with stronger laws. 335 charter schools opened in states rated “A” and “B,” while only 13 campuses opened in states rated “D” or “F.”*
- *The average number of students on charter school wait lists has increased by 44 students since 2009. Put into context, districts like New York City calculate upwards of 50,000 students on charter school waiting lists.*
- *Over half of America’s charter schools (61%) serve a student population where over 60% are considered low-income or disadvantaged.*

To see the rest of the study, go to <http://www.edreform.com/2014/01/survey-of-americas-charter-schools/>

Choice advocates are pushing for laws on the national level. Senators Tim Scott (SC) and Lamar Alexander (TN) have unveiled new federal legislation “that intends to encourage innovative state efforts to expand school choice and educational opportunity without imposing new federal mandates.” Scott’s bill deals with kids with disabilities, while Alexander’s focuses on low-income students. To learn more about the two choice bills, go here - <http://www.aei.org/events/2014/01/28/senators-lamar-alexander-and-tim-scott-unveil-ambitious-proposals-to-expand-school-choice/>

Bullying is a subject that has permeated the everyday discourse in schools. The fixes usually revolve around teaching empathy and tolerance. But a very interesting take on bullying comes from New Zealand. The provocatively titled “School ditches rules and loses bullies” goes into detail about a school that tried a very different kind of policy.

*Instead of a playground, children used their imagination to play in a "loose parts pit" which contained junk such as wood, tyres and an old fire hose.*

*"The kids were motivated, busy and engaged. In my experience, the time children get into trouble is when they are not busy, motivated and engaged. It's during that time they bully other kids, graffiti or wreck things around the school."*

*Parents were happy too because their children were happy, he said.*

*But this wasn't a playtime revolution, it was just a return to the days before health and safety policies came to rule.*

*AUT professor of public health Grant Schofield, who worked on the research project, said there are too many rules in modern playgrounds.*

*"The great paradox of cotton-woolling children is it's more dangerous in the long-run."*

*Society's obsession with protecting children ignores the benefits of risk-taking, he said.*

To read more about what some might see as unorthodox but others see as common sense, go to <http://tvnz.co.nz/national-news/school-ditches-rules-and-loses-bullies-5807957>

On January 30<sup>th</sup> the National Council on Teacher Quality released its seventh annual *State Teacher Policy Yearbook*, which includes a “360-degree analysis of every state law, rule and regulation that shapes the effectiveness of the teaching profession in California.”

*California has consistently earned low grades in the Yearbook, with its grade of "D+" unchanged since 2009. The average grade across all 50 states and the District of Columbia is an improving "C-".*

To learn more about this disturbing report and see what other states are doing better, go to <http://www.nctq.org/statePolicy/statePolicyNationalSummary.do>

On the Common Core front, while the national teachers unions have been touting it, New York State United Teachers have come out against it. Hard to know how all this will play out, because the unions typically disdain any kind of public internal discord. To read more about NYSUT's apostasy, go to <http://www.politico.com/story/2014/01/new-york-common-core-teachers-schools-education-102614.html>

For all you high school history teachers and anyone who teaches current events, *Student News Daily* is an excellent website that you should be aware of. Its goal is to

*build students' knowledge of current events and strengthen their critical thinking skills. This is done by providing comprehension and critical thinking questions along with published news articles and other current events items from established news organizations. We provide resources that will enable students to become informed viewers and readers of the news.*

*StudentNewsDaily.com was launched in 2005. The content is created with the belief that all students can think critically about the news when it is presented in a manageable format.*

Apolitically balanced and fair-minded website, it includes quizzes on the stories that are posted on a daily basis. To learn more and download *Student News Daily* apps for iPhone, iPad and Android, go to <http://www.studentnewsdaily.com/>

The CTEN website is in the process of being updated! It will be more organized and much easier to navigate. Please visit us at [www.ctenhome.org](http://www.ctenhome.org) If you have any questions or suggestions, please let us know.

CTEN also has two Facebook pages. If you have a Facebook account, we urge you to visit ours and let us know your thoughts. Having a dialogue among teachers is an effective way to spread information and experiences and to share ideas. Our original Facebook page can be found here <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/group.php?gid=125866159932&ref=ts> Our second page, which deals with teacher evaluation and transparency, can be accessed here - <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/group.php?gid=126900987357825&ref=ts>

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.

Thanks for your continuing support and interest.

Larry Sand  
CTEN President