



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.

March 19, 2014

Dear Colleague,

Perhaps the biggest education story of the month is the SAT makeover. Most who have written about the changes are not happy with them. As Peter Wood, president of the National Association of Scholars, explains,

The essay is now optional, ending a decade-long experiment in awarding points for sloppy writing graded by mindless formulae.

The parts of the test that explored the range and richness of a student's vocabulary have been etiolated. The test now will look for evidence that students are familiar with academic buzzwords and jargon. The College Board calls this "Relevant Words in Context." Test-takers won't have to "memorize obscure words" but instead "will be asked to interpret the meaning of words based on the context of the passage in which they appear."

The deductions for guessing wrong are gone. Literally, there will be no harm in guessing. Math will narrow to linear equations, functions, and proportions.

The scale on which scores are recorded will revert to the old 800 each on two sections, from the current 2,400 on three sections. (Goodbye essay points.)

To read more of "The SAT Upgrade Is a Big Mistake," go to http://www.mindingthecampus.com/originals/2014/03/the_sat_upgrade_is_a_big_mista.html

Not everyone thinks it's a bad idea however. The Los Angeles Times reports, "Students, area school staff embrace changes to SAT." The essence here is that the SAT's structure and content will be beneficial to students' "aspirations of attending college in the coming years." To learn more, go to <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-students-changes-to-sat-20140305,0,2986099,print.story>

Not to be missed is Jay Greene's satirical take on the changes- <http://jaypgreene.com/2014/03/11/the-new-sat/>

And talking about testing ... the subject has become a major source of contention with educators, parents and just about everyone else. In fact, things have become so polarized that, with teacher union backing, teachers are organizing to boycott tests in Seattle (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2013/01/26/teacher-boycott-of-standardized-test-in-seattle-spreads/>) and Chicago (<http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/the-stream/the-stream-officialblog/2014/3/4/chicago-teachersboycottstandardizedtests.html>)

However, putting the testing controversy into perspective, high school math teacher Darren Miller posted a common sense scenario on his blog site. Written in 2007, it is timelier than ever. He starts off by writing,

Over at the Department of Motor Vehicles, an interesting -- and, for some, scary -- experiment is in progress.

Officials are trying out some new eye charts and reaction-time tests on drivers renewing their licenses...

At first glance, those eye charts are downright spooky. There are six lines of letters. The first line looks like it's fading away in tule fog. The second is worse. The sixth? Forget about it....

Before you even take the eye test, DMV workers will ask you to write your social security number by memory down on a piece of paper. They say there is a correlation between memory loss on rote numbers, like a Social Security number, and crashes.

How does this relate to student testing? To find out, go to <http://rightontheleftcoast.blogspot.com/2007/05/why-im-against-new-dmv-driver-test.html>

While a lot of talk these days is focused on teacher effectiveness and quality, there has been little mention of administrative competence. But now the Commission on Teacher Credentialing has adopted new standards for school principals.

Known as the California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, the management protocols were originally adopted by the CTC in 2001, based largely on conduct goals developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers only a few years earlier.

In the time since, the work of a school principal has changed dramatically and is set to change again as the state transitions to new Common Core standards, new accountability measures and a new budgeting system where more spending decisions will be made locally.

Toward that end, the new school leader standards include a long section on goals surrounding family and community engagement – requirements that schools must meet as a condition of receiving billions in additional state support under the governor's Local Control Funding Formula.

To learn more, go to <https://cabinetreport.com/human-resources/new-professional-standards-for-ca-principals-approved>

CTEN continues to work with a law firm that promotes what it calls “The Better Model,” an independent teacher association that controls its own destiny. By contracting out for expert legal and labor representation, but retaining for its members all policy and decision-making authority, teachers can easily save half of their current dues and get better and more responsive representation than the big union model.

Thus far, about 400 teachers in five districts have signed on. These teachers are disengaged from the state and national unions, but still have a local teachers association that handles collective bargaining. These teachers’ dues have gone from \$1,000 or more to less than \$500 a year. To learn more, go to <http://www.ctenhome.org/bettermodel.html>

The American Federation of Teachers continues the union assault against charter schools. Along with “In the Public Interest,” it has started a website called “Cashing in on Kids” which claims that “for-profit charter school operators aren't held to the same accountability standards as public schools.” (<http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/02/26/teachers-union-advocacy-group-call-for-more-charter-school-accountability>)

However, Center for Education Reform president Kara Kerwin, shoots down the union line. She claims,

Performance-based accountability is the hallmark of charter schools and reforms aimed at improving student learning. It’s quite galling for the American Federation of Teachers and In the Public Interest to trumpet accountability and transparency in the charter sector when it is those same players that fight so hard and spend millions of taxpayer dollars on politics to maintain the status quo in education.

Unlike all other public schools, charters must be proactive in their efforts to stay open. They must set and meet rigorous academic goals, and actually meet or exceed their state’s proficiency standards. Unlike the conventional public schools that intentionally remain under the radar, charter schools operate under intense scrutiny from teachers unions, the media, and lawmakers. In states with strong charter school laws that allow for objective oversight, it is clear that performance-based accountability is working.

To continue reading Kerwin’s rejoinder, go to <http://www.edreform.com/2014/02/education-can-be-for-students-and-for-profit/> To visit the Cashing in on Kids website, go here - <http://cashinginonkids.com/>

Student expulsion and detention continue to be controversial. The latest news comes from San Francisco, where administrators will no longer be able to use “willful defiance” as a reason to suspend or expel a student beginning in the 2014-15 school year.

San Francisco’s school board voted unanimously Tuesday to eliminate the controversial category, which has been used disproportionately to suspend African American students in that district and also statewide.

San Francisco joins Los Angeles Unified, which eliminated the category of willful defiance of school authorities or disruptive behavior as a reason to expel or suspend students beginning this school year.

Statewide, willful defiance accounted for 43 percent of all suspensions in 2012-13. African American students, who make up 6 percent of statewide enrollment, accounted for 19 percent of willful defiance suspensions.

To read more about this very contentious subject, go to <http://edsources.org/2014/san-francisco-unified-eliminates-willful-defiance-as-a-reason-to-expel-or-suspend-students#.UyHcGoWBpL5>

We were hoping that the CTEN website would be completed by now – well, almost, but we’re not quite there yet. But please visit www.ctenhome.org and let us know what you think of what we have done so far.

And finally, we still have a limited number of t-shirts available. They are navy blue with the CTEN logo on front and “A resource for all who care about education” printed on the back. They come preshrunk, in small, medium, large and XL. If you would like one, all you have to do is make a \$15 donation to CTEN via PayPal - <http://www.ctenhome.org/donate.htm> - and let us know what size and where to send it and we will get it out to you promptly.

As always, thanks for your continued interest and support of CTEN.

Larry Sand
CTEN President