



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 18, 2015

Dear Colleague,

Earlier this month, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a story that all teachers and taxpayers in the state need to be aware of. "Health benefits are a promise school districts find hard to keep" advises us that school districts "aren't prepared to absorb the cost of retiree health insurance they've promised employees." The article begins,

California school districts once viewed lifetime healthcare coverage for employees as a cheap alternative to pay raises. That decision is coming back to haunt school leaders, and districts are scrambling to limit the lucrative benefit promised decades ago.

The price tag for retiree healthcare obligations has reached about \$20 billion statewide — an amount systems are not prepared to absorb.

Many districts failed to set aside money to pay for those increasingly expensive benefits for thousands of employees. Now, the financial burden threatens to drag down credit ratings and crowd out other budget priorities.

The warnings are dire. Martin Tokunaga, a financial consultant who works with the California School Boards Association says, "It's a train wreck that is going to have to be dealt with in the future. It's going to cause so much financial distress to public agencies that, in my mind, I can't see how any agency will be able to keep its promises." To read the rest of this important piece, go to <http://www.latimes.com/local/education/la-me-schools-health-benefits-20150308-story.html#page=1>

Los Angeles seems to be more affected by rising healthcare costs than other districts, and adding to the problem are mounting pension costs that LA (and in fact all school districts in CA) will now be burdened with due to new state legislation. As such, this may not be the best time for the LA teachers union to be insisting on a big raise, but it is. The district is offering a 5 percent salary increase but the union is insisting on 8.5 percent. The negotiations are in the mediation stage and a strike is certainly possible. For more information, go to <http://www.dailynews.com/social-affairs/20150218/lausd-teachers-union-moves-closer-toward-a-strike>

For those of you following the *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association* case, nine *amicus* briefs were filed earlier this month. The briefs represent “a cross section of individuals and groups, including a bipartisan group of former California public officials, a group of California scholars and educators [including several CTENers], nine states, four public policy and public interest law organizations (Cato Institute, National Right to Work Foundation, Pacific Legal Foundation, Pacific Research Institute), a group of constitutional law professors, and a group of Illinois school administrators.” To learn more about this right-to-work case which is headed to the Supreme Court, go here - <https://www.cir-usa.org/cases/friedrichs-v-california-teachers-association-et-al/>

And talking about RTW, the week after the *Friedrichs* briefs were filed, Wisconsin became the 25th right-to-work state, leaving foes – including President Obama – in a state of fury. The president blasted as “inexcusable” Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker's decision to sign the bill into law. To read more, go to http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/09/obama-scott-walker-right-to-work_n_6836008.html

Another major lawsuit involving CTA, *Vergara v California, CTA et al* is still in the appeal stage. While a decision has yet to be rendered, some lawmakers are forging ahead. A group of Republicans calling itself “GreatSchools4CA,” has come up with seven proposed pieces of legislation. They include reforming tenure and seniority, establishing improved teacher evaluations and supporting teachers by providing them with “annual, meaningful feedback that helps fine-tune their professional skills, thereby improving both job satisfaction and student academic performance.”

Not surprisingly, CTA is not happy about the legislation and slammed the package. “These bills are ill-conceived and premature,” union spokesman Frank Wells complained. For more info, go to <http://asmrc.org/sites/default/files/districts/asmrc.org/files/Great-Schools-4-CA-Brief-Summary.pdf>

On the cusp of No Child Left Behind reauthorization, there has been no sparing of ink and electrons on the matter. Everyone – right, left and otherwise – has weighed in on the subject, but one piece stands out. David Davenport makes the case in *Forbes* that it’s “Time to Leave Federalizing of Education Behind.” He writes,

It’s time to admit a federal failure here. Unrealistic goals were set and federal officials have done unconstitutional hand-stands to mitigate the damage. Hundreds of billions of dollars have been spent. Teachers and students spend countless hours teaching to the new federal tests. Plenty of children have been left behind. Enough already.

Let’s return educational policy and authority close to home, to school districts and ultimately the states. Let’s not reauthorize No Child Left Behind and instead begin the painful and difficult shifting of both money and authority home to districts and states.

To read the rest of this provocative piece, go to <http://www.forbes.com/sites/daviddavenport/2015/02/10/time-to-leave-federalizing-of-education-behind/>

Our friends at the Association of American Educators have released their yearly member survey and the results are most interesting. Whereas the teachers unions act as if they speak for all teachers when they rail against charter schools, school choice, using student growth as part of

teacher evaluations, etc., they clearly don't speak for independent-minded AAE teachers. For example, 97 percent of the surveyed teachers support public charter schools and 94 percent support "course choice," allowing students to craft custom educational plans via different providers. Also, when asked what criteria should be considered when labeling a teacher "effective," 80 percent responded that student growth should be a factor.

To learn more about the survey, go here - <http://www.aateachers.org/index.php/blog/1442-aes-2015-national-member-survey>

And finally, it's no secret that information is frequently used to score political points and make cases for various causes. To that end, CTEN has a "cheat sheet" on our website – with original sources – that we have just updated. To see it, go to <http://www.ctenhome.org/cheatsheet.html> If you have information that counters what's there or would like to see something added, please let us know.

Anyone wishing to make a 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 others.

Sincerely,
Larry Sand
CTEN President