



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 15, 2017

Dear Colleague,

How does California rank in per-pupil spending? Ask three people and you'll get four different answers. That's because it depends on the methodology used to calculate the costs. Hence there is really no one right answer as explained in a detailed report by *EdSource*'s John Fensterwald.

Education Week uses data collected by the federal government, the National Center for Education Statistics. The center publishes 2-year-old data because it waits for states to update their actual spending, and the center takes months scrubbing the information to make sure the state data are comparable. EdWeek then applies a cost-of-living factor, the Comparable Wage Index, which has the effect of lowering the rankings of states with high costs of living.

The National Education Association's data, based on surveys it sends out to states, are more current but depend on states' best estimates of spending. Those can change significantly if, for example, a legislature makes mid-year budget cuts. NEA annually revises data for the two previous years, and it doesn't apply a cost-of-living adjustment, such as a comparable wage index.

The California Budget and Policy Center uses the most recent NEA numbers, but then applies the comparable wage index for its California rankings.

To learn more about school spending and where California fits in, go to <https://edsource.org/2017/how-does-california-rank-in-per-pupil-spending-it-all-depends/577405>

Talking about rankings... on a "State Report Card" issued by *Education Week*, California scored below the national average. Massachusetts ranked at the top, followed by New Jersey, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maryland and Connecticut, all earning a B. As a whole, the nation received a C, but the Golden State came in with a solid C-minus, 10th from the bottom among the 50 states and Washington, D.C.

The state ranked 41st in conditions that help children succeed, 39th in school finance, and 30th in achievement. The report card gave the state a D+ in K-12 achievement and school finance, and a C in chance for success.

To read more go to <http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20170108/california-schools-report-card-c-minus> To see the whole report, go here - <http://www.edweek.org/ew/qc/2017/2017-state-education-grades-map.html?intc=EW-QC17-TOC>

Ask a group of teachers about “test-based accountability” and an argument – perhaps with name-calling – will probably ensue. But perhaps a piece in *Education Week* by the eminently sensible Robert Pondiscio will bring any extreme positions on the subject to a rational middle. He writes:

I'm morally inclined toward (Cato Institute's Jason) Bedrick's "choice purist" argument for its simplicity and clarity. I chose my daughter's (private) school without much official oversight, approval, or fear of sanction. I see no reason to think I've cornered the market on sound parental judgment. That said, (Fordham Institute's Mike) Petrilli and others who favor stronger oversight are on solid ground when they note that when taxpayers are paying for it, the public has a right, even an obligation, to make sure the money's not squandered. But where I part company with them is that I'm increasingly open to exploring other forms of accountability, including letting parents vote with their feet.

To read the rest of Pondiscio's piece, go to <http://educationnext.org/unintended-consequences-of-test-based-accountability/>

Another subject that brings a lot of heat, but not always light is ESSA, the Every Student Succeeds Act, which is the latest incarnation of the convoluted No Child Left Behind law. To bring the subject to a level that we mortals can understand, education policy experts Rick Hess and Max Eden have issued *The Every Student Succeeds Act: A 101 Guide*.

ESSA, heralded as "the largest devolution of federal control to the states in a quarter century," reflects and responds to these political trends. In the new volume The Every Student Succeeds Act: What It Means for Schools, Systems, and States, AEI Education assembled a group of expert scholars and observers to provide a coherent, readable, and in-depth account of where ESSA came from, what it says, what will or will not change, and what it all means for schools. This guide distills selected chapters of that volume into a series of short briefs to help policymakers navigate the new law and its implications for American education.

To read more, go here - <https://www.aei.org/publication/the-every-student-succeeds-act-a-101-guide/>

On the school choice front, things are advancing. Many choice-friendly governors and state legislators were swept into office this past November. An article by *Education Week's* Arianna Prothero examines some of the potential legislation.

Kentucky looks primed to pass legislation allowing charter schools to open—it's one of only seven states that remains a charter holdout... Arizona lawmaker Wants to extend Education Savings Accounts to all students... Texas lawmakers try again for a voucher program.

To learn more, go to

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/charterschoice/2017/02/from_charter_schools_to_vouchers_school_choice_bills_to_watch_this_year.html

Choice is not only making news on a state level but in D.C., where President Trump has been speaking about a national school choice measure. To that end, Thomas Carroll, president of the Invest in Education Coalition based in New York, has a plan which he details in “A Federal Scholarship Tax Credit: The Only Fifty-State School-Choice Option.”

If you pay federal taxes and donate to any eligible, existing scholarship fund—for example, the Children’s Scholarship Fund—you get to reduce your tax bill by the amount of your donation. Any such bill would set an income threshold for who can use the scholarships funded by the tax-credited donations (in the Rubio-Rokita case, up to 2.5 times the poverty level, or about \$60,000 for a family of four), place a cap on what size donation would be eligible for a tax credit, and potentially limit the total combined amount of tax credits allowed for all taxpayers in a calendar year (\$20 billion, for example, the amount of federal funds President Trump has proposed for expanding school choice).

To continue reading this very thoughtful piece, go here - <http://educationnext.org/a-federal-scholarship-tax-credit-the-only-fifty-state-school-choice-option/>

In a contrary piece, The Heritage Foundation’s Lindsey Burke warns against any kind of federal choice program.

Creating a new federal program further entangles Washington in local school policy and private education. Scholarship tax credits (STCs) are great policy at the state level. They enable businesses and individuals to receive a credit against their tax obligations for contributing to non-profit scholarship granting organizations, which in turn provide scholarships to eligible children to attend a private school of choice. It’s a win-win.

Nevertheless, the federal tax code is not the appropriate lever for establishing STCs. First, the U.S. Constitution does not authorize the federal government to enact national education programs, and instead rightly leaves education policy to the states. Moreover, school choice programs produce savings to the taxpayer at the state level because state education spending is tied to enrollment, but this is not true of federal education spending. Reductions in revenue from scholarship tax credits are more than offset by corresponding decreases in state spending. By contrast, a federal STC would provide no corresponding reduction in spending.

To read Burke’s excellent piece, go to <https://edexcellence.net/articles/the-common-core-ification-of-school-choice>

Also, on the policy front, President Trump undid his predecessor’s “bathroom” guidelines which had called on schools nationwide to let transgender students choose “Boys” or “Girls,” depending on how they perceived themselves, and not the old-fashioned way: by body parts. So now, the decision is up to each state and teacher union leaders were not happy about the change. National Education Association president Lily Eskelsen García insisted, “Every student matters, and every student has the right to feel safe, welcomed, and valued in our public schools. This is

our legal, ethical and moral obligation. The Trump administration's plans to reverse protections for transgender students... is dangerous, ill-advised, and unnecessary." Not to be outdone, American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten claimed that reversing the guidelines "tells trans kids that it's OK with the Trump administration and the Department of Education for them to be abused and harassed at school for being trans."

But there is nothing in the new guidelines that "reverses protections" or allows for abuse or harassment. The decisions on bathroom matters will simply be left to states and local education agencies. I weighed in on the subject here - <http://unionwatch.org/trump-undoes-obamas-transgender-bathroom-guidelines/> (If any of you would like to engage in a conversation on this issue – or any other – please post your comments on the CTEN blog - <http://www.ctenteachers.blogspot.com/>)

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 people like you. (And to those of you who already regularly donate – our heartfelt thanks!)

Sincerely,
Larry Sand
CTEN President