



# California Teachers Empowerment Network

*Standing out from the crowd, fully informed on the issues*

April 20, 2010

Dear Colleague,

Has there been a time when education stories have dominated the news as they do now? Race-to-the-Top, national standards, seniority, tenure, teachers' unions, teachers' benefits, rubber rooms, etc., are daily media fare these days. Perhaps due to the recession or President Obama's activism in this area, or just that its time has come – we seem to be having a national discussion about public education.

And in keeping with this trend, there is no shortage of movies dealing with education reform.

Bob Bowdon's excellent public education exposé, *The Cartel* (<http://tinyurl.com/y224uox>) had its opening this past weekend in New York and Los Angeles, and will open all over the country in the following two weeks. *Waiting for Superman*, a film made by David Guggenheim, which was voted best U.S. documentary by moviegoers at the Sundance Film Festival, received this review from Pacific Research Institute scholar, Lance Izumi - <http://tinyurl.com/y4yxtxs> Most recently, Whitney Tilson's *A Right Denied* - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrIs5bkuTBE> opened in New York. And later this month, *The Lottery*, a film about families trying to get their children into charter schools, will be released.

In the area of teacher tenure or permanence, there has been something of a revolutionary wave rolling through the country. Steven Sawchuk at *Education Week* sums it all up well here - [http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/04/07/28tenure\\_ep.h29.html](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/04/07/28tenure_ep.h29.html)

The importance of having national standards is a subject that has many education reformers who usually agree with each other at odds on this subject. Here, <http://article.nationalreview.com/427893/back-to-basics/chester-e-finn-jr> Chester Finn makes the case for national standards. And you get a very different picture from Jay Greene here- <http://jaypgreene.com/2010/03/10/national-standards-nonsense/>

As we all know, some teachers lose their jobs in turbulent economic times. However this time around, there has been an abundance of articles challenging the business-as-usual last hired-first fired policies that most school districts live and die by. Heather Wolpert-Gawron, a middle school teacher with San Gabriel USD near Los Angeles, wrote a

balanced article on the subject in *Teacher Magazine* -  
[http://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2010/03/31/tln\\_wolpertgawron\\_seniority.html](http://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2010/03/31/tln_wolpertgawron_seniority.html)

There is perhaps no topic more contentious than public employee pension plans. Many contend that the plans that now exist are at least partly to blame for states' fiscal woes. In a study from the Manhattan Institute, we get *Underfunded Teacher Pension Plans: It's Worse Than You Think* - [http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr\\_61.htm](http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_61.htm) According to David Crane, the situation is especially bleak in California. He begins his April 6 Los Angeles Times editorial, "The state of California's real unfunded pension (for *all* public employee unions) debt clocks in at more than \$500 billion, nearly eight times greater than officially reported." If the numbers he uses are anywhere near accurate, the state is in very deep trouble. The bottom line for teachers is not to assume that the State Teachers Retirement System will be solvent forever. This is a sobering possibility that must be dealt with.

In this time of upheaval, it seems to us that it is important for teachers and the general public to have at least a fundamental understanding of teacher contracts -- how they are structured, how do different contracts compare, etc. To that end, Andrew Rotherham of *Eduwonk* fame has written the very valuable *Understanding Teacher Contracts*. To learn more, go to [http://www.educationsector.org/research/research\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=1178962](http://www.educationsector.org/research/research_show.htm?doc_id=1178962)

We recently learned of a brand new teachers' organization in New York City. Educators 4 Excellence was started by *Teach For America* graduates, Evan Stone and Sydney Morris, both in their third year of teaching at a Bronx, NY elementary school. From their mission statement, - "Educators 4 Excellence (E4E) is an organization of education professionals who seek to provide an independent voice for educators in the debate surrounding education reform. E4E's mission is to unite the education community around a shared set of goals, principles, beliefs, and actions, which place student achievement first." To learn more about this organization for independent-minded teachers who are frustrated when the loudest voices in the education debate lose sight of students' needs. Their website is <http://www.educators4excellence.org/>

We also recently learned of a website well worth your time. PERDAILY - <http://www.perdaily.com/> - was created and is maintained by Leonard Isenberg. His posts are provocative, to say the least. Mr. Isenberg, no stranger to controversy, was recently removed from his classroom in handcuffs. To learn more about this story, go to <http://www.perdaily.com/2010/02/yesterday-i-was-removed-from-class-in-handcuffs.html>

As odd as the Isenberg case is, we have learned of one that is even more bizarre. Eileen Blagden was a principal at Stowers Elementary School in Cerritos in South Los Angeles County. Her troubles began when she questioned the history of a teacher she was told that she must place at her school. This eventually led to her being removed from her position after seven years on the job. According to Ms. Blagden, she has not been given any reason for her removal. To read more, go to <http://tinyurl.com/y6sp7az> and also <http://tinyurl.com/y48en67> In addition, popular Southern California talk show hosts, John and Ken, reported on the story. To listen to what they had to say, go about seven minutes into this audio file - [http://media.ccomredn.com/media/station\\_content/616/JK0223102P\\_1266980437\\_15905.mp3](http://media.ccomredn.com/media/station_content/616/JK0223102P_1266980437_15905.mp3)

And, as we mentioned a couple of months ago – various districts now block our emails. If you are currently using your school email address, please consider letting us use your personal address. Thanks.

Recently, we sent out several questions to you about current subjects of general interest and the responses have been very illuminating. As such, we will continue to do this kind of polling. The next question will be sent out in a week or so. Also, please let us know if you have a particular question that you would like us to pose to our subscribers.

As always, we at CTEN want to thank you for your ongoing support. Please continue to provide feedback so that we can continue to meet your needs. Thank you very much.

Larry Sand  
CTEN President