



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.

April 17, 2013

Dear Colleague,

In the world of education, teacher evaluation has become a hot topic of late. In that vein, California state senator Ron Calderon introduced SB 441 in February. The bill, amended last week, can be read here - http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140SB441 . If you have any thoughts on this proposed legislation, it would be a good idea to make them known to your state legislator.

On the subject of teacher evaluation, the National Council on Teacher Quality is continuing its in-depth study of evaluation policies in various school districts. Its latest report covers Oakland. The report is worth reading no matter what school district you work in because there will undoubtedly be aspects of the report that are similar to your circumstances. Some key findings:

- *Schools have too little say regarding who joins their faculty, meaning that they have no assurance that a teacher will be a good fit. Having this staffing authority is at the top of the wish list of principals we spoke to.*
- *Oakland's teacher evaluation system is confusing, unhelpful to both teachers and the district, and is in dire need of an overhaul. It identifies only a few teachers a year for extra support and does nothing to identify the district's superstars.*
- *The school day for elementary teachers is woefully short at 6-3/4 hours, leaving little time for Oakland's elementary teachers to meet with their colleagues.*

To read the report, go to <http://www.nctq.org/tr3/districtStudies/viewStudy.jsp?id=10>

The yearly California dropout report was released last week and the news would appear to be good. According to the press release (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr13/yr13rel42.asp>),

Graduation rates among California's public school students are climbing and dropout rates are falling, with the biggest gains being made among African-American and Hispanic students, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson announced today.

Overall, nearly eight out of 10 students, or 78.5 percent, who started high school in 2008-09 graduated with their class in 2012. That is up 1.4 percentage points from the year before (Table 1). Among African-American students, 65.7 percent graduated with their class in 2012, up 2.9 percentage points from the year before. Among Hispanic students, 73.2 percent graduated with their class, up 1.8 percentage points from the year before (Tables 2 and 3).

But is the news really good? Whereas middle school dropouts have been ignored in the past, they are acknowledged in the press release, but not included in the dropout report. Also, there was no mention anywhere about those students who leave their district school for a county school and drop out from there. Bottom line: don't take the report's numbers too seriously.

Our website has a lot of information about agency fee logistics as they pertain to NEA/CTA, but we don't have information about AFT/CFT. If you who are an agency fee payer in an AFT/CFT district, I would appreciate your contacting CTEN and letting us know how your district handles union resignation. It would help us assist teachers who want to go the agency fee route.

If you haven't heard of Agenda 21 yet, you certainly will in the near future. People from both sides of the aisle are weighing in and most seem to be against it. For a general description, go to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agenda_21 For an opinion from the left side - <http://www.democratsagainstunagenda21.com/> and from the right - <http://www.eagleforumofcalifornia.com/ExposeAgenda21TaskForce1.html>. Interestingly, there is a defense of Agenda 21 from a conservative former mayor – <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/02/07/gop-ditch-the-agenda-21-tinfoil-hat-brigade.html>

Michelle Rhee's organization, StudentsFirst is looking for candidates for its Transformation Academy.

Formerly known as the Teacher Fellows Program, the Teachers for Transformation Academy is now accepting applications for the 2013-14 cohort.

StudentsFirst is seeking current, high performing teachers who believe all children can succeed despite challenges they face and who regard teaching as a high impact profession that should be structured to match the values of the responsibilities at stake. The program offers teachers the resources and tools to build and lead active networks of educators who want to create meaningful change across the education landscape.

To learn more, go to <http://www.studentsfirst.org/pages/open-jobs?jvi=obUgXfw2.Job> If you have questions, please direct them to teachers@studentsfirst.org

CTEN sent out the results from its Survey Monkey poll a couple of weeks ago. In case you didn't receive that email, the results can be seen here -

https://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=Fo8bQGAY905_2fSULK_2fSc5fB9LL42y9F2I9yNqP5ABstA_3d

Many thanks to those of you who took the time to respond. Not surprisingly, among other things, the results show that not all teachers are in lock-step with teacher union orthodoxy.

Also, in case you missed it, we sent out an email last week concerning a possible lawsuit in California with the subject line, "Lawsuit against teachers' unions' forced collection of non-members' dues." The body of the email:

Dear Colleague,

I have been contacted by attorneys from Washington, D.C., who are interested in bringing a lawsuit against teachers' unions' forced collection of non-members' dues. The basic theory of the lawsuit would be that the First Amendment prohibits the unions from forcing non-member teachers to subsidize their activities because those activities are inherently political. If they win the lawsuit, it would eliminate any obligation of public school teachers to pay dues to teacher unions if you don't want to. To help bring this lawsuit, the attorneys are looking for individual teachers who would be willing to participate. Participation would be completely free.

If you are interested, the best way to get involved would be as a plaintiff in the lawsuit. This would mean that when they file the lawsuit, you would be named as one of the people challenging the unions' legal authority to deduct dues from your paycheck. While the attorneys do not anticipate this taking much of your time, it is possible that, at some point, you would have to provide some information about your employment status and your school's collective bargaining agreement. It is also possible that you would someday be deposed about these issues (basically interviewed by lawyers for the other side).

I am told that participation in this lawsuit is unlikely to require a major time commitment. Because the success of this suit would be a major benefit to all of you who object to subsidizing the teachers' unions, we encourage you to get involved. If you are interested, please let me know and I will pass your name along to the attorneys organizing the case.

Thank you very much.

Larry Sand

We have received emails from a few teachers interested in becoming plaintiffs, but the lawyers would like to have more. So please shoot me an email if you are interested. Also, the lawyers would like to have a copy of an agency fee rebate letter. If you any of you have one, and are willing to share it, please scan and send a copy to cteninfo@ctenhome.org Thanks.

As mentioned in last month's newsletter, I was on a panel discussing education reform with Terry Moe, Gloria Romero and CTA president Dean Vogel. Before the panel discussion I taped a program called "The Right Side" which aired in northern California in March and is now available on YouTube.

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHT1HYAC6w>) Gloria Romero also taped a segment, which can be seen here - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mck1CIqHy-I>

CTEN 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.

Sincerely,

Larry Sand
CTEN President