



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.

May 21, 2013

Dear Colleague,

There has been no shortage of education legislation in Sacramento over the past month. Perhaps the most contentious was SB 441, a tame bill that would have made slight adjustments to the current teacher evaluation system. (<http://unionwatch.org/parents-students-businessmen-mayors-reformers-civil-rights-groups-conservatives-liberals-et-al-vs-teachers-unions/>) Reform groups like StudentsFirst, EdVoice, National Action Network Los Angeles and many others were in favor of it, with only the teachers unions opposing. Not surprisingly, the legislators, not wanting to run afoul of CTA, killed the bill.

At the same time, Bhavini Bhakta, a former teacher of the year, wrote an eloquent blog post about teacher quality, tenure, LIFO, etc. on the StudentsFirst website. Currently teaching in Arcadia, she has been bounced from school to school because of our state-mandated seniority rules.

Despite receiving the Teacher of the Year Golden Apple Award and making incredible achievement gains with my students, I would get laid off at the end of every year because of a law called "Last In First Out," or LIFO. This law requires layoff decisions to be based solely on a teacher's hiring date, rather than how well they teach.

In my 9 years of teaching, I have worked alongside teachers who go above and beyond to ensure the success of their students. For these teachers, it doesn't matter how many hours it takes, or how many supplies they have to purchase – they are committed to delivering an effective and engaging lesson everyday.

What bothers me about my profession is that we operate under the notion that all teachers are the same. We believe that they are all effective, they are all impacting kids positively, and they all work to ensure students learn.

While I've worked alongside phenomenal educators, both veteran and novice, I've also worked alongside ineffective educators, both veteran and novice.

And it breaks my heart to see highly effective teachers receive the same “satisfactory” rating on their evaluations as those that clearly need significant and immediate assistance to improve.

To read the rest of the post, go to <http://www.studentsfirst.org/blog/entry/a-teachers-two-cents>

Talking about the state education code, we sent out a special email last week about the *Students Matter* case. (For a quick refresher on this pending litigation, go here - <http://www.ctenhome.org/PDFdocs/CTENLTL11-12.pdf>) The lawyers are looking for teachers who want to become involved in the case and sent me the following to share with you:

For far too long, the voices of teachers have not been included in the conversation about the future of education and what's best for our students.

The upcoming 20-day trial for *Vergara v. California* will offer teachers the unprecedented opportunity to be heard and make a difference. *Vergara v. California* is sponsored by Students Matter, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to sponsoring impact litigation to promote access to quality education. The groundbreaking statewide education lawsuit, filed by nine California public school students, challenges the state laws that handcuff K-12 administrators from making personnel decisions prioritizing teacher quality and serving the best interests of students.

In May, the court granted the Motion to Intervene filed by the California Teachers Association and the California Federation of Teachers, allowing the state's two largest teachers unions to join the State of California in defending the status quo and keeping the state's harmful and outdated laws in place.

As we gear up for trial, set to begin January 27, 2014, Students Matter is launching a statewide effort to elevate the voices of teachers advocating for change in our public schools. If you would like to join the conversation around the future of education and why having equal access to quality teachers is a key component of giving our children the quality education they deserve, please contact Jackie Matthews at jmatthews@griffinschein.com.

On another reform note, E4E's Ama Nyamekye wrote a compelling op-ed in *Huffington Post* in response to the United Teachers of Los Angeles vote of no confidence in LAUSD chief John Deasy. She criticized the union for missing “a critical opportunity to have a substantive conversation about what could transform Los Angeles schools, instead forcing teachers to simply choose sides.” She went on to say,

Educators 4 Excellence recently interviewed members for their input on this "Vote of No Confidence" process, the approach to engaging teachers in critical conversations about leadership, and how it could be improved. We heard three overarching themes:

- *We need our union to be more transparent and informative*
- *We need our union to be solutions-oriented*
- *We need our union to fight for teachers and students*

We wish Ms. Nyamekye well in her quest, though if past efforts to reform the teachers unions are any indication, it is doubtful that her ideas will be realized. To read her article, go to http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ama-nyamekye/los-angeles-school-reform_b_3088825.html

In fact, if there is any doubt where CTA stands on reform issues and their advocates, the union sponsored a resolution at the state Democratic convention last month in Sacramento.

WHEREAS, the so-called "reform" initiatives of Students First, rely on destructive anti-educator policies that do nothing for students but blame educators and their unions for the ills of society, make testing the goal of education, shatter communities by closing their public schools, and see public schools as potential profit centers and children as measureable commodities; and

WHEREAS, the political action committee, entitled Democrats for Education Reform is funded by corporations, Republican operatives and wealthy individuals dedicated to privatization and anti-educator initiatives, and not grassroots democrats or classroom educators; and

WHEREAS, the billionaires funding Students First and Democrats for Education Reform are supporting candidates and local programs that would dismantle a free public education for every student in California and replace it with company run charter schools, non-credentialed teachers and unproven untested so-called "reforms";

To see a clip of CTA president Dean Vogel's talk at the convention, go to http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Ung8bB71A4U. For my two cents on the resolution, go to <http://www.city-journal.org/2013/cjc0516ls.html>

The lawsuit we wrote about in the April letter is going forth. As the press release states,

The Center for Individual Rights (CIR) today filed a lawsuit in the United States District Court for the Central District of California on behalf of 10 California teachers and the Christian Educators Association International, challenging the constitutionality of California's "agency shop" law, which violates the First Amendment by forcing public school teachers to pay annual fees to support powerful teachers' unions extensively involved in political activity. The suit was filed against the lead defendants, the California Teachers Association (CTA) and the National Education Association (NEA), as well as 10 affiliated local teachers' unions, and local school officials.

To continue reading the press release, go to <http://news.yahoo.com/center-individual-rights-files-suit-behalf-non-union-160000721.html>. To read the actual complaint, go to http://www.cir-usa.org/duel_complaint1.pdf

Confused by common core? You are not alone. Here is a brief video which has six noted education reformers weighing in on the subject -

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1Ev2ceWxSM&list=UUu5zghH1Ohi5kCk-VFjkuVA&index=1>

As California's fiscal future isn't exactly rosy, it would behoove teachers to start looking at other pension options. A recent National Council on Teacher Quality post tells us that teachers aren't as wedded to the "defined benefit" type of plan that many of us have come believe is sacrosanct.

There must be many state policymakers across the land who feel trapped between the fiscal reality that their teacher retirement systems are teetering under huge deficits that only continue to grow and the political perception that teachers are determined to keep their defined benefit pensions.

But is that really how all teachers feel? A new study from Dan Goldhaber and Cyrus Grout adds to the growing evidence that many teachers are quite open to other types of pension plans. Goldhaber and Grout look at data from Washington state, where teachers have been able to choose between a traditional defined benefit plan and a hybrid plan that combines a defined benefit component with a defined contribution component.

To continue reading, go to <http://www.nctq.org/p/tqb/viewStory.jsp?id=33616>

As always, we at CTEN want to thank you for your ongoing support. We value your feedback, which in turn helps us meet your needs by keeping you informed and provoking lively discussion.

Sincerely,

Larry Sand
CTEN President