



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.

June 15, 2016

Dear Colleague,

The California legislature is still dealing with Contra Costa Assemblywoman Susan Bonilla's revamped tenure and seniority bill, AB 934, which we told you about in April's letter. The California Teachers Association has weighed in on it, claiming that the changes "would make education an incredibly insecure profession." On the other hand, Students Matter's Ben Austin doesn't think the bill goes far enough. Among other things, he asserts that "the bill could be strengthened by extending the length of the probationary period to at least four years to allow for tenure decisions to take into account three evaluations." He also writes, "AB 934 respects hardworking and talented teachers by creating a new layoff system that still protects effective senior teachers, while generally prioritizing quality of instruction over years in the classroom. However, the bill still prioritizes seniority instead of effectiveness for rehiring and reassigning teachers after necessary layoff cuts." To read more of Austin's proposed fixes, go here - <http://studentsmatter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/AB-934-Bonilla-Students-Matter-Support-05.23.16.pdf> To see the latest version of Bonilla's bill, go to <http://www.legtrack.com/bill.html?bill=201520160AB934>

Also, there is another push in Sacramento to put together some sort of meaningful and coherent teacher evaluation bill. A new bill from San Diego Assemblywoman Shirley Weber, passed the Assembly in late May and will now be considered by the State Senate. As reported by *Voice of San Diego*, AB 2826 would require that "teachers be evaluated on a periodic basis – the timelines are different depending on a teacher's level of experience – and that a broad set of measures be used. Rather than focusing intensely on test results, the bill encourages the use of portfolios of student work, English proficiency, surveys from parents and students, reports from classroom observations and more to be taken into account when evaluating a teacher." To learn more, go to <http://www.voiceofsandiego.org/topics/government/sacramento-report-webers-latest-push-accountability-schools/> To see the bill itself, go to http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB2826

Weber also has a school accountability bill making the rounds in Sacramento. AB 2548 "would require districts to measure student progress in such 'key variables' as achievement in English, math and science; progress toward proficiency among English-language learners; high school

graduation rates; and absenteeism. This information would be easily available on a state website and would be used to guide decisions on when schools or districts need assistance or intervention.” To read more about the bill, go to

<http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/2016/apr/24/weber-school-accountability-obama-jerry-brown/> To read the actual bill, go here - http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB2548

The transgender bathroom issue is certainly a hot topic these days, with the American Civil Liberty Union, POTUS, state legislatures and think tanks all weighing in on the subject. But I have seen very little from boots-on-the-ground teachers and parents. One story caught my eye, however. In Georgia, an ACLU state leader stepped down from her post “citing her own daughters' ‘frightened’ reaction to biological males using the women's restroom.” Maya Dillard Smith, a self-described “progressive” and “unapologetically black,” said that she cannot go along with the ACLU's transgender legal agenda. To read more about this “mugged by reality” story, go to <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/state-leader-quits-aclu-after-children-were-visibly-frightened-by-transgend> (If any of you have had any experiences with this issue – good, bad or indifferent, please shoot me an email or post it on the CTEN blog - <http://www.ctenteachers.blogspot.com>)

Perhaps a close second to the bathroom kerfuffle in amount of media coverage is the testing issue. Test scores and their validity have been undergoing examination for some time now, and we have two world-class reformers taking different sides. University of Arkansas professor Jay Greene claims that test scores have “weak predictive power.” Fordham Institute’s Mike Petrilli disagrees, maintaining that we should use “reading and math gains as imperfect indicators of effectiveness while working to build better measures.” All six parts of this wonky, in-depth look at testing can be accessed here - <http://educationnext.org/debate-are-math-and-reading-test-scores-reliable-indicators-of-school-quality/>

Education writer RiShawn Biddle is the latest to try to get past the government stranglehold on the path to becoming a teacher. Along with Jeremy Lott, senior fellow at Defense Priorities, Biddle penned an op-ed for the *NY Post*, “Invite all comers to teach in our public schools: It's time for a new bargain to get bright new educators from all backgrounds into our classrooms” They write,

There are plenty of highly-talented men and women, including middle-aged engineers and others with math and science skills, who want to become teachers. Forty-two percent of college-educated adults aged 24-to-60 would consider teaching as a career, according to a 2008 study by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation.

Not everyone with specialized skills and knowledge is cut out to stand in front of a classroom. But the teacher credential systems in this country unnecessarily narrow the field of people who can teach in schools, which directly harms students by making good instruction scarce.

This is harmful because studies have shown that the only two things that really matter when it comes to teaching children are subject-matter competency, and how adults relate to students they teach.

The writers claim that our ed schools don't help with either of these things. To read this provocative piece, go here - <http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/biddle-lott-invite-comers-teach-public-schools-article-1.2664907>

As usual, much has appeared in the edu-press about charter schools over the last month, but one story leaps out. The United Teachers of Los Angeles released a report which claims that independent charter schools drain half a billion dollars from the LA Unified School District. However, the school district did a quick "Huh?!" As written in *LA School Report*, "In January when the Charter Schools Division presented its budget, it showed that the district receives half a million dollars more than they need to pay for the division. That report, presented to the Budget, Facilities and Audit Committee by Charters Division Director Jose Cole-Gutierrez, showed that the 1 percent oversight fee collected from charter schools brings in \$8.89 million while the annual expenses of the division's 47 employees including their benefits total \$8.37 million." Thus, the school district actually makes money from its charters. To read more, go to <http://laschoolreport.com/lausd-makes-money-from-charters-contradicting-utla-funded-study-documents-show/>

Also, regarding charters, does the press do a fair job? No, claims the *Washington Examiner*, writing that according to an American Enterprise report, "about half of articles published by major outlets on charter schools in 2015 was neutral or balanced. But there were twice as many negative pieces than positive." To read the AEI report, go to <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/are-the-media-biased-against-school-choice/article/2591873>

So much has been written about school choice, it is sometimes difficult to separate the baby from the bathwater. Perhaps the best guide to use is a report, updated periodically, from Greg Forster of the Friedman Foundation. In his latest "A Win-Win Solution, the Empirical Evidence on School Choice," a meta-analysis (study of studies), he found that choice improves academic outcomes not only for participants but also for public school students. Summing up the study, [Jay Greene](#) writes that choice "saves taxpayer money, moves students into more integrated classrooms, and strengthens the shared civic values and practices essential to American democracy. A few outlier cases that do not fit this pattern may get a disproportionate amount of attention, but the research consensus in favor of school choice as a general policy is clear and consistent." To read the study, go here - <http://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/2016-5-Win-Win-Solution-WEB.pdf>

If you are still using a school email to receive these newsletters, please consider sending us your personal email address. More and more school districts are blocking CTEN. In any event, if you enjoy these letters and find them to be informative, please pass them along to your colleagues and encourage them to join us.

If you would like to see us address certain issues, topics, etc. in these newsletters or on our website – <http://www.ctenhome.org> – please let us know.

And have a great summer!

Sincerely,
Larry Sand
CTEN President