



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.

August 21, 2013

Dear Colleague,

Now that most districts in California begin the school year in August, many of you are back at work. The post Labor Day starts seem to have disappeared from the landscape. In any event, we hope that the beginning of your school year has been (and will continue to be) a good one.

As you perhaps know, eight school districts in CA received exemptions from the No Child Left Behind law. Those districts are in Los Angeles, Long Beach, Santa Ana, Oakland, Sacramento, San Francisco, Fresno and Sanger. To learn more, go to <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/aug/06/local/la-me-laUSD-20130807> The two state teachers unions were not happy with the waivers, and CFT president Josh Pechthalt issued a statement which can be read here - <http://www.highlandnews.net/articles/2013/08/11/opinion/columns/doc52053a29cc19e546726147.txt>

As we told you in June, AB 1266 would require that a pupil be permitted to participate in sex-segregated school programs, activities, and facilities, including athletic teams and competitions, consistent with his or her perceived gender identity, irrespective of the gender listed on the pupil's records. In other words, if a boy thinks he's a girl, he gets to play on female sports teams, use the girls' bathroom, shower, etc. A bill no more, Jerry Brown has signed the infamous "bathroom bill" into law. For more info, go to <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/aug/12/california-enact-nations-first-law-protecting-tran/>

"How to Make Teacher Evaluations Accurate, Fair, and Consistent" read the headline in a recent post in *Education Week*. Nothing radical here, just some good basic common sense ideas, such as,

Classroom visits. *Let's face it: Teacher evaluation based on infrequent, announced classroom visits is inaccurate, ineffective, and dishonest. To see how teachers are performing day to day, principals need to be in each classroom at least once a month for short, unannounced visits, followed by face-to-face conversations. Superintendents should hold principals accountable for knowing their teachers and continuously coaching (and praising) them.*

To read more, go to <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2013/07/19/37marshall.h32.html>

On the subject of teacher quality, the performance ratings of individual teachers in LA Unified are “matters of keen public interest and should be released to the Los Angeles Times,” a judge ordered earlier this month.

L.A. County Superior Court Judge James C. Chalfant ruled that the public interest in access to the ratings outweighed any teacher expectations of privacy under the California Public Records Act. He rejected arguments by the Los Angeles Unified School District and United Teachers Los Angeles that the records were confidential personnel information that, if released, would create discord, stigma, embarrassment, difficulty in recruiting teachers and other harm.

“The public has an interest in disclosure of the scores because they reflect on both student achievement and teacher performance, as well as on LAUSD’s choices in allocating time and resources,” Chalfant wrote.

While this ruling only affects Los Angeles for now, surely other districts will be affected. To read more, go to <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-teachers-ratings--20130801.0,165579.story>

Math teacher Barry Garelick has written, “Lessons in How Not to Teach Math,” with a subhead that reads “The course I took in math education methods was worse than useless.” In the piece, he blasts some of the squishier modern math teaching techniques.

Specifically, many education theorists hold that when students discover material for themselves, they learn it more deeply than when it is taught directly. In this vein, the prevailing belief in the education establishment is that although direct instruction is effective in helping students learn and use algorithms and mathematical procedures, it is ineffective in helping students develop mathematical thinking.

According to the establishment, students should be “led” to their discovery of the answers. Providing explicit instruction is considered to be “handing it to the student” and prevents them from “constructing their own knowledge.”

“Discovery learning” isn’t bad. Most teachers use some discovery learning and group work in their classes. Also, staging problems so that they vary slightly from the worked example—so that the students are essentially applying prior knowledge in a new situation (called scaffolding)—has the “look and feel” of discovery. The problem is that the reigning education theory focuses mostly on discovery, with only a nod to direct instruction. That’s mistaken.

As one who taught math early in my career and had less than a wonderful experience in my math methods class in ed school, I find Garelick to be a deep breath of fresh air. To read his article, go to <http://www.popecenter.org/commentaries/article.html?id=2887>

CTEN received an email from a group offering free online education classes -- <http://academicearth.org/online-college-courses/education/> I am not familiar with the company and can’t comment on the quality of the courses. But if you are interested, feel free to take a trip around their website. Should you take any of their classes, please let me know so that I can share your experience with other CTENers.

Former Democrat state senator Gloria Romero has written an important article for *U-T San Diego*. “Fixing California: The union chokehold” gives a first person view of what really transpires in Sacramento. Not pretty. If you want to learn how business gets done in the state capital, this is a primer. To read Romero’s piece, go here - <http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2013/aug/10/romero-union-chokehold-california/>

Arlene Inouye, treasurer of the United Teachers of Los Angeles has written “Unionism 101: The growing right-to-work (for less) movement” in the latest edition of the UTLA newspaper. The article is riddled with errors, half-truths and good old-fashioned demagoguery about right-to-work laws. (http://www.utla.net/utla/unitedteacher/2013/UTLA_July%20_2013.pdf) I respond to Ms. Inouye’s multiple inaccuracies here -<http://unionwatch.org/right-to-work-rights-and-wrongs/>

As of now, teachers in Deerfield, Kansas are no longer members of the Kansas National Education Association and the National Education Association. They voted to disaffiliate in June and have instead joined a local-only teacher association. (<http://news.heartland.org/newspaper-article/2013/07/16/kansas-teachers-opt-out-big-unions>)

“Frankly, we didn’t feel like the union was offering anything that we couldn’t provide for ourselves,” said Garry Sigle, executive director of the nonunion Kansas Association of American Educators, which helped the Deerfield teachers decertify.

Deerfield is one of three Kansas districts that have decertified from the KNEA and NEA. Approximately 15 districts have separated from the NEA across the country, according to the Association of American Educators (AAE).

While the above took place in faraway Kansas, it happens in CA too. In a couple of weeks, we will be sending you an email that will explain how to go about starting your “local only” teachers union.

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>

And finally, if any of you are agency fee payers and work for LA Unified, please shoot an email to cteninfo@ctenhome.org I have a couple of quick questions I’d like to ask you.

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.

Sincerely,

Larry Sand
CTEN President