



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 17, 2016

Dear Colleague,

As many of you are back to work now, we sincerely hope that you had an enjoyable summer and that the always busy start of a new school year has gone well.

CTEN is again participating in National Employee Freedom Week, which began August 14th and runs through August 20th. NEFW is a national campaign whose purpose is to let employees know that they have the freedom to opt out of their union and become agency-fee payers or religious/conscientious objectors. This year, 102 organizations in 42 states are participating. An important objective is to reach those in union households nationwide who are unaware they can opt-out of union membership without losing their job or incur any other penalty. For more information, please visit the NEFW website – <http://employeefreedomweek.com/> For info specific to teachers in California, go to <http://www.ctenhome.org/how-to-opt-out-teachers-union-nea-cta-aft-cft.html>

In addition to the Democratic and Republican conventions, July saw the National Education Association hold its yearly convention followed by the American Federation of Teachers biannual get together. These meetings tend to be especially boisterous in election years, and 2016 was no exception. AFT president Randi Weingarten spoke at length, extolling the virtues of Hillary Clinton.

Hillary understands the most urgent issues confronting our country. Her bold economic plan puts unions front and center. She will level the playing field for the middle class, raising incomes for hardworking families, creating debt-free college for students, and lifting children out of poverty.

In addition to praising Clinton, NEA president Lili Eskelsen García spent time slamming Republican candidate Donald Trump. From the NEA website:

Fear and divisiveness has always been used as a cudgel by politicians, but the ascent of Donald Trump – and his toxic brand of racial demagoguery – has magnified the stakes of the upcoming election.

“I am terrified that this man has made it this far. This unfit, unworthy man will be the Republican nominee for president of the United States of America,” Eskelsen García said during her keynote. But on July 5, delegates were visited by presumptive 2016 Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton, who “believes that as a nation, we’re stronger when we’re together,” Eskelsen García added.

For more on the conventions go to <http://neatoday.org/2016/07/07/ra-wrap-up/> and <http://www.aft.org/news/weingarten-lauds-afts-past-looks-ahead-fall-elections>

On the education reform front, *Doe v. Antioch* is back in the news. This suit is based on a 2012 ruling in which Sacramento-based nonprofit EdVoice maintained that teacher evaluations require, in part, the use of standardized test scores, and the judge promptly ordered their inclusion. However, in a report released in 2015 that sampled 26 districts’ compliance with the decision, EdVoice found that half of them were ignoring the court-ordered requirement to use the test scores. The suit was filed by Students Matter, the same outfit that brought the *Vergara* case. For more info, go here - <https://edsources.org/2015/students-matter-sues-districts-over-teacher-evaluations/83103> and here - http://www.mercurynews.com/bay-area-news/ci_30186475/are-teacher-evaluations-california-shortchanging-kids

Ready for California to start teaching kids about sexual consent? Well, it’s coming.

This school year, the state will be the first in the U.S. to require that high schools teach sexual consent — what it is and how it’s established. While some high schools already taught consent, Gov. Jerry Brown signed a law in October 2015 requiring all schools that mandate health courses to do so beginning in the 2016 school year.

‘Our dedication to a more comprehensive approach to sex ed — principles that are evidenced based, culturally appropriate, nonjudgmental, the whole thing about establishing parameters about not having sex — is really revolutionary, positively revolutionary....’ said Claire Brindis, a pediatrics professor and adolescent health policy researcher at University of California, San Francisco.

To learn more, go to <http://laschoolreport.com/california-sprints-head-class-sex-education-students-year-will-taught-consent/>

Also, bilingual education is back on the ballot 18 years after California voters passed Prop.227 in 1998. The proposition mandated that ESL students be taught in English only, rather than in bilingual programs, which instructed students primarily in their native language while they gradually picked up enough English to enter mainstream classes. Supporters want to “make it easier for schools to establish bilingual programs for both English learners and native English speakers seeking to gain fluency in a foreign language.” But there are forces that maintain that Prop 227 worked, including Latinos who were frustrated that their children were “getting caught in essentially Spanish-only classrooms where they never became adept at English.” To learn more, go here - <http://www.sacbee.com/news/politics-government/capitol-alert/article94068542.html>

Can civic education save America? Robert Pondiscio, Senior Fellow at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, certainly thinks so and he makes a good case for it. He sums up his argument:

I have often observed that the first and most important relationship a child builds with a civic institution is with his or her school... It is not an overstatement to suggest that if we are threatened by intolerance and slouching toward authoritarianism, the civic mission of education is elevated—immediately and urgently—not merely to a priority for education itself, but something very much like a matter of national security.

To read Pondiscio's compelling piece, go to <https://edexcellence.net/articles/how-civic-education-can-save-america>

The problem with our schools of education is an ongoing theme in this newsletter. The latest installment is from our friends at the National Council on Teacher Quality. In a report released in late July, Michigan State University professor William H. Schmidt and his colleagues “look at the mathematics that American middle school teachers took during their teacher preparation and produce some hard evidence of prevailing substandard preparation.”

This latest study looks more closely at US preparation, examining how many US programs deliver this essential content. Even on this basic question, Schmidt finds enormous, inexplicable variations among institutions in what they consider to be essential content. Schmidt estimates that only about a third of America's middle school teachers took coursework addressing this content. For the rest of teachers, a sizeable portion of the content never gets covered. Compare that to some of our international counterparts which include a number of countries where 80 percent of all teachers learned essential content.

To learn more, go to <http://www.nctq.org/commentary/article.do?id=281>

The educational savings account battle rages on in Nevada. On July 29th, both defenders and opponents of a school choice law passed by the 2015 Nevada Legislature “drew equal optimism from the pointed questions... during two state Supreme Court hearings over the controversial measure's constitutionality.”

The seven justices carefully avoided offering a clear indication of how they eventually will rule. But each took their turn grilling attorneys on whether the law illegally diverts money from funds deemed sufficient by the Nevada Legislature to fund public schools, or if it is in conflict with a constitutional prohibition against taxpayer dollars being used for sectarian purposes.

While the rulings will come at a later date, the oral arguments emboldened both proponents and critics of the legislation.

To read more about the legal proceedings, go here - <http://www.reviewjournal.com/news/education/both-sides-school-choice-debate-energized-state-supreme-court-justices-grill> To get background on Nevada's ESA law, go to <https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/programs/nevada-education-savings-accounts/>

CTEN has three 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 share our experiences and ideas. Our original Facebook page can be found here <https://www.facebook.com/groups/125866159932/> Our second page, which deals with teacher

evaluation and transparency, can be accessed here -

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/126900987357825/> Our newest page is Teachers for School Choice and can be accessed here - <https://www.facebook.com/teachersforchoice?fref=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. Many thanks, as always, for your interest and support.

Sincerely,
Larry Sand
CTEN President