



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.

Sept 19, 2013

Dear Colleague,

Welcome back! By now all school districts in California are in session, and we hope that the start of the school year has gone well for all of you.

We also hope that you enjoyed your time off, because according to Brookings Institution fellow Matthew M. Chingos, the long summer break is an anachronism that needs to go.

Summer is a popular time to write opinion pieces calling for the end of summer vacation as an anachronism that widens achievement gaps between rich and poor students. The details of the argument vary, but the basic premise rests on research indicating that students from disadvantaged backgrounds experience learning loss over the summer while their more affluent peers often make learning gains.

There's clearly a slam-dunk case for eliminating (or at least dramatically shortening) summer vacation, which fits into a broader push to lengthen the school year beyond the 180 days that is typical in the United States.

To continue reading, go to http://www.ncpa.org/sub/dpd/index.php?Article_ID=23490

The new year holds many changes for teachers and students in California. As of this writing, testing is in the news. AB 484 is a bill that would suspend standardized school testing for a year. While the suspension seems to be popular here, Arne Duncan is not happy with it.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said California's request for a one-year reprieve from using STAR tests in math and English for the current school year is unacceptable and may force his department to "take action."

To read more, go to <http://www.sacbee.com/2013/09/11/5725597/jerry-brown-pushes-school-testing.html>

"Better Pay, Fairer Pensions for Los Angeles Teachers?" Too good to be true? Maybe not. A Manhattan Institute report by Marcus Winters and Josh McGee tells us that they have developed a plan that would allow the Los Angeles Unified School District to give teachers

a more desirable compensation package with considerably higher take-home salaries and improved retirement benefits — all without costing taxpayers a penny more. Making these changes would not only reward teachers, but would also positively affect student achievement by improving the district's ability to recruit and retain the best teachers on the market.

While specifically addressing Los Angeles, their ideas could certainly be implemented elsewhere. To learn more go to <http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/miarticle.htm?id=9595#.UjHkHj83aup>

If your politics don't happen to jibe with CTA's, or you don't think that a teachers union should be spending money on issues that have nothing to do with teaching or education, you might want to consider not giving them the 30+ percent of your dues that go toward politics. If you'd like more information about your options, please go to <http://www.ctenhome.org/know.htm>

If you do decide to make this move, it is a two-step process. First, you must resign from the union, thus becoming an agency fee payer, and then request that the political part of your dues be returned to you. Sample letters for both steps are available here -

<http://www.ctenhome.org/knowMembership.htm#exoptions> If you already are an agency fee payer, **you must request your rebate this year (and every year!) by November 15th**. If you are as much as one day late, you will not get a penny. Also, because liability insurance is important for teachers, we suggest joining the Association of American Educators <http://www.aetteachers.org/> or Christian Educators Association <http://www.ceai.org/> Both AAE and CEAI are professional organizations, not unions, and are apolitical. (Also, teachers who mention CTEN when they sign up with AAE for the first time will get a \$30 discount off the regular \$180 first year membership.)

Last week, we sent you an email regarding the possibility of setting up your own local teachers union and not having to pay dues to a state and national affiliate. If you missed that email, its contents will be pasted in at the end of this letter.

Whatever you may think of our teachers unions, Mexico's are even more powerful ... or at least they were. Among other things, teachers, until now, have been able sell their jobs or give them to a family member. But the people are fighting back. *The Wall Street Journal's* Mary Anastasia O'Grady gives details in "Mexicans Take On the Teachers Unions." To read the story, go to <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324123004579057310467988616.html>

Think we need to use more data in education? Or maybe you think the push for more data is harming the education process? A provocative piece in the *New York Times* makes a strong case for the latter.

What works in science and math education? Until recently, there had been few solid answers — just guesses and hunches, marketing hype and extrapolations from small pilot studies.

But now, a little-known office in the Education Department is starting to get some real data, using a method that has transformed medicine: the randomized clinical trial, in which groups of subjects are randomly assigned to get either an experimental therapy, the standard therapy, a placebo or nothing.

To read more, go to <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/03/science/applying-new-rigor-in-studying-education.html?pagewanted=all&r=2&>

And speaking of data, Erik Hanushek et al have written a book that sounds several alarm bells. *Endangering Prosperity: A Global View of the American School* delivers five main points:

1. We are not competitive internationally in terms of our schools and the skills of our population.
2. Other countries have shown that it is possible to improve. Indeed some of our states have shown the same thing: Maryland, Delaware, Florida, and Massachusetts,
3. If we can improve, the potential economic gains are huge. If we do not improve, we will be seriously hurt in the future – and the era of the “American Century” could come to an end.
4. A number of people – particularly those currently working in the schools – resist the fundamental changes that are needed, but we must find a way to improve our schools.
5. Improving our schools is not a partisan issue but one that faces all of our citizens.

To read an interview with Hanushek and learn more about the book, go to <http://educationviews.org/an-interview-with-eric-hanushek-endangering-prosperity/>

If you are a charter school teacher or thinking about working in one, AB 917, awaiting Governor Jerry Brown’s signature, may be of interest. Should it become law, this bill:

would amend the state’s education code to require that at least half of unionized teachers and nonteaching staff at a school considering conversion to charter status sign a petition in order to make the switch. Existing law requires only that 50 percent of teachers or parents sign a petition, either for a new charter or a charter conversion.

To read more about AB 917 and charter schools’ relationship with teachers unions, go to <http://www.city-journal.org/2013/cjc0906ls.html>

If you were away over the summer and did not read the July and August letters, we encourage you to get caught up. Please visit <http://www.ctenhome.org/newsletters.htm> to do so.

Are you still using your school email address to receive these emails? If so, we suggest that you switch to your personal email address. More and more school email programs are blocking us.

Finally, despite the many changes that are taking place in California, we hope that 2013-2014 will be a great one for you and your students. As always, sincere thanks for your continued interest and support.

Sincerely,

Larry Sand
CTEN President

Here is a copy of the stand-alone email we sent you last week:

Last year, we sent you information about how California teachers could set up independent teachers associations and decertify or break away from CTA.

In the weeks and months following that article, many teachers from across the state contacted Rafael Ruano, an attorney with Goyette& Associates, and discussed their dissatisfaction with CTA and their desire to decertify their local chapter of CTA. A few of these teachers had the right combination of timing and support from their peers to move ahead and actually buck the system.

Here is an update from Mr. Ruano:

There are three CTA decertification elections scheduled to take place this fall (two of those elections will see the ballots counted on September 10 (Millville Elementary School District) and September 19 (Corning Union High School District) and in each of those school districts an overwhelming percentage of the teachers signed the petition to decertify (95%, 100%, and 75%) and there are high hopes that all elections will result in independent teachers association unaffiliated with CTA. When votes for the two elections are counted at the PERB (Public Employment Relations Board) offices in the coming days, CTEN will be the first to share the news.

What these teachers are deciding is whether to continue to pay CTA for representation that is very expensive and often nonresponsive, or transfer the collective bargaining rights of the teacher unit to their own employee organization. They will also lower dues by half or more, and retain professional representation that the teachers can contact whenever they have a need and whom the teachers control.

For many of you reading this, such an option may seem like a fantasy, but the reality is that tens of thousands of California public employees, including some teachers, belong to independent local employee associations and are not affiliated to large, statewide or national unions (such as CTA, SEIU, etc.) In the newly unified Washington Unified School District in Fresno, the Washington Unified Faculty Association (WUFA) has successfully negotiated a new agreement with the District that merged the contract language of three old, pre-district unification agreements. WUFA is moving forward in an independent manner, with all decisions being made by and for the teachers themselves. This “Better Model” (<http://caindependentteachers.com/independent-teacher-association-model-representation/>) works and teachers are slowly coming to this realization after years of paying millions of dollars to CTA with very little of that coming back to the teachers who paid it. To be totally up front, decertifying a local CTA chapter is not automatically going to happen everywhere. For one, there are statutory timing issues that only allow a decertification petition to be filed within a 30 day window period that is 90 to 120 days from the end of the existing MOU. (If your District is currently working without an MOU, it is considered “open” to decertification until a new MOU is adopted.) Also, if a school district is very large, there are practical difficulties in obtaining signatures of at least 30%

of the teachers in the unit to support the petition; decertifying a district with 200 teachers is less difficult than one with 2,000 teachers. Lastly, each district and local CTA chapter has its own history and issues; there are some CTA chapters that have very good local leadership or that have seen very heavy CTA involvement in recent years, which do not make them good candidates for a decertification effort.

If you are a California teacher who is looking for an alternative way to provide representation to your district's teachers without having to pay CTA and NEA dues, contact Rafael Ruano at Goyette& Associates at rruano@goyette-assoc.com or (888) 993-1600. Thanks.