



# 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.*

January 16, 2019

Dear Colleague,

The big news in California and elsewhere is the teachers' strike in Los Angeles, where 20 months of negotiating have done little to bring the union and the school district together. UTLA contends that the district is hoarding money that could be used to give teachers raises and shrink class sizes. But in reality, over the years, too many spendthrift school board members have used the taxpayer as an ATM with no consideration given to the bottom line. So now the school district is rapidly careening down the road to insolvency so fast that unless something changes, the district will be broke by 2021. The superintendent has pointed to a visit by county and state officials who warned the school board that the district's budget situation is serious. There have also been independent reviews of the district's finances that have reached similar conclusions.

Government finance expert David Crane has suggested a way out. He says that LAUSD spends more than \$300 million a year on healthcare subsidies for retired employees, including retirees who are already entitled to Medicare and other subsidies funded by the federal government. If the district were to cut the unnecessary insurance, the money could be put back into the classroom. But the union-dominated Health Benefits Committee, which determines employee and retiree health plans, has nixed that idea.

Additionally, either as a distraction or as a way to send a message to new governor Gavin Newsom – UTLA President Caputo-Pearl has become obsessed with charter schools, claiming that they are growing too fast in LA. Of course, they grow as the need and demands arise; no one forces a family to send their kid to a charter school. Anti-charter sentiment was also brought home by UTLA Secretary Arlene Inouye, who sat for a lengthy interview with *Jacobin*, a magazine that offers “socialist perspectives on politics, economics, and culture.” In addition to blasting “unregulated charter schools,” she avows, “It doesn't matter whether you're in a red state or a blue state, we're facing the same attacks on public education. Corporate Democrats are getting money from the same billionaires and corporations as the Republicans, so essentially all public educators in this country are targets.”

To read more on UTLA leadership and charters, go [here](#) and [here](#).

The strike is now in its third day and it remains to be seen how and when this will end up. For the union's perspective, go [here](#). For an objective perspective, go [here](#) and [here](#). For my take, go [here](#).

Brand new to California is the new state health education framework, which parents and educators need to be aware of. The framework, which creates guidelines for curriculum in California's K-12 schools, is loaded with very controversial material. As Orange County teacher and school board member Brenda Lebsack writes,

*In [Chapter 3](#), Line 1847, the draft recommends the book [Who Are You?](#) for pre-K–3rd graders as a “guide” to develop their gender identity. This book introduces young children to the idea that gender is a spectrum. This means genders are unlimited and ever-expanding, rather than confined to two biological genders. In the book, gender is described as, “boy, girl, both, neither, trans, genderqueer, non-binary, gender fluid, transgender, gender neutral, agender, neutrois, bigender, third gender, two spirit...” In [Chapter 5](#), Line 643, the draft introduces sexual orientations as a spectrum as well. LGBTQ+ is defined as an ever-changing spectrum with expanding concepts to include “queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, allies and alternative identities (LGBTQQIAA).” Other sexual orientations introduced in [Chapter 6](#), Line 938 include “pansexual and polysexual.”*

The period for parental and teacher input is over, so the final version is not known at this time. But this is a very controversial issue – one that certainly bears vigilance for all teachers and parents.

To read Lebsack's piece, which includes a link to the proposed framework, go [here](#).

According to the new California state report card, one in three schools statewide has been targeted for special assistance. As Ricardo Cano writes in *Calmatters*,

*The state identified 374 school districts out of roughly 1,000 that qualify for additional help—more than 60 percent more than last year, when the state issued its first set of ratings under the new “school dashboard” system.*

*School districts that qualify for the so-called “State System of Support” show such low performance or so little progress among student groups that they fall into a “red zone” on two or more educational indicators, from test scores to suspension rates and chronic absenteeism. Last year, the state identified 228 such districts, but critics questioned the numbers, noting that test scores pointed to a far more widespread need for assistance. Since then, the dashboard has been tweaked.*

To learn more, go [here](#).

As *Politico* reports, “Trump administration to scrap Obama's school discipline guidance.” This has made some very unhappy. Rep. Bobby Scott (D-Va.), leader of the House education

committee, slammed the commission's work, saying it "promotes a longstanding, conservative agenda to undermine policies that protect students' civil rights" and was not a "serious or good-faith effort" to make schools safer. However, others had a very different take. In "Obama's Racial Preferences Made Schools Dangerous" in the *Wall Street Journal*, Jason Riley writes,

*Put another way, the (Obama) administration was demanding racial parity in school discipline, regardless of who was being disruptive, which is as silly as demanding racial parity in police arrests, regardless of who's committing crimes.*

*The result is that more schools have been disciplining fewer students in order to achieve racial balance in suspension rates and stay out of trouble with the federal government. Civil-rights lawsuits are embarrassing—to be accused of racial discrimination is often tantamount to being found guilty of it. They're also expensive to fight, and the federal government has far more resources than any school district. The easier course for schools is to pretend that students from different racial and ethnic groups misbehave at similar rates. School safety becomes secondary.*

For the *Politico* piece, go [here](#). For Riley's take, go [here](#).

Talking about school safety, the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission released more than 400 pages covering details of the tragic Parkland shooting, identifying security problems and making recommendations. Several recommendations were made. Among them...

*...was the expansion of a program that allows teachers and staff members to carry concealed firearms to defend students in the event of an active shooter. The state teachers union and PTA have voiced their opposition to the plan.*

*"School districts and charter schools should permit the most expansive use of the Guardian Program under existing law to allow personnel — who volunteer, are properly selected, thoroughly screened and extensively trained — to carry concealed firearms on campuses for self-protection and the protection of other staff and students," the report read.*

To learn more and access the full report, go [here](#).

"Looking for an Alternative to College? U.S. Studies German Apprenticeships" read a recent headline in the *Wall Street Journal*.

*Support for increasing hands-on training comes from all corners—Democrats and Republicans, business and labor, the Trump and the Obama administrations. German Chancellor Angela Merkel even offered to support more apprenticeship slots in the U.S. with German companies during trade talks with President Trump.*

*Fascination with Germany's apprenticeship model comes at a time when Germany itself is showing signs of fatigue with its own system and adopting a more-American college-based approach.*

*In 2016, about 52% of German high-school graduates became apprentices, down from roughly two-thirds 20 years ago. At the same time, 57% of high school graduates started college, up from about one-third two decades earlier.*

To learn more, go [here](#).

And speaking of alternative schools, January 20-26 is National School Choice Week, the aim of which is to “raise public awareness of all types of education options for children.” These options include traditional public schools, public charter schools, magnet schools, online learning, private schools, and homeschooling.” There are a record-breaking 40,594 community-based events and activities planned for NSCW in 2019. Events range from open houses at schools to homeschool information sessions, school fairs, parent nights, school tours, and talent shows. Large celebrations and school fairs are also planned in more than 70 cities.

To learn more about National School Choice Week and events near you, go [here](#).

And finally, CTEN has been updating its website. It is still a work in progress and if you have any thoughts or suggestions, we’d love to hear from you. Please check it out [here](#).

CTEN will continue to keep up with post-*Janus* doings in addition to any other issues pertinent to education and teachers, and keep you informed you as they develop. If you have any questions, or have experienced any problems because of your decision to leave your union, please let us know, and we will do our best to help you in a timely manner. We will also be able to share your concerns with other teachers across the state. And speaking of sharing, please pass this email along to your colleagues and encourage them to join us.

Also, anyone wishing to donate to CTEN can do so very simply through check, money order or PayPal - <http://www.ctenhome.org/donate.html> As a non-profit, we exist only through the generosity of others.

Many thanks, as always.

Sincerely,  
Larry Sand  
CTEN President