



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.

May 16, 2019

Dear Colleague,

A new study by Eric Hanushek et al for the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) shows that all the top-down fixes – No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, etc. – have been absolutely useless in shrinking the achievement gap between students from higher and lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The disparity remains as large as it was in 1966, when James Coleman wrote his landmark report and “the nation launched a ‘war on poverty’ that made compensatory education its centerpiece.”

According to the study, school funding quadrupled in real dollars between 1960 and 2015, with a large portion of the money used to reduce pupil-teacher ratios – a school board and teacher union staple. But the researchers conclude that the increased spending has done nothing to lower the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

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

There is a bit of good news from the latest NAEP test, however. As written in *LA School Report*,

American middle schoolers are performing better on a national assessment of technology and engineering, an improvement driven largely by girls.

Overall, students’ average score on the National Assessment of Education Progress in Technology and Engineering Literacy increased two points from 2014, the first time the test was given. Several subgroups showed statistically significant improvements, including white students, black students, students eligible for free and reduced-priced lunch, and students whose parents did not graduate from high school.

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

There is much written about school choice – pro and con – but what are the facts? There’s no one better to set the record straight than researcher Greg Forster, who recently reported the latest data.

Almost from the very beginning of the modern school choice movement in 1990, with the creation of a school voucher program in Milwaukee, proponents and opponents of private-school choice have made competing claims about what the research shows its effects to be. Proponents have asserted that the research favors school choice, while opponents have consistently claimed that the research is “mixed” or else negative.

Even if one study finds a small positive effect while another study finds a large positive effect, the studies are “mixed” with regard to the size of the benefits. However, on the question that counts most—do school choice policies produce positive effects? – the answer is consistently “yes.”

He writes that out of the ten empirical studies which have examined private-school choice programs on segregation, nine found the programs reduced it, while one found no visible difference. Also, Forster writes that out of 34 empirical studies, 32 find that private-school choice actually improves academic outcomes in public schools. One study showed no difference and one did show that government-run education was hurt by privatization.

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

Mike Petrilli, president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, wrote a piece about teacher pay from an unusual perspective.

Which states, if any, have prioritized higher teacher pay over other possible uses for their education funds? To put it another way, as spending rose in recent decades, which states have chosen to put the additional dollars into higher salaries instead of other options, such as smaller classes, employee healthcare and retiree benefits, or additional staff, especially?

Petrilli finds that California is number one in teacher salaries when compared to overall education spending.

To learn more about Petrilli’s research, go [here](#).

At the same time, however, according to a Public Policy Institute of California poll, “most Californians support teacher strikes for higher pay.”

“There were solid majorities saying teacher pay is too low and supporting teacher strikes,” said Mark Baldassare, PPIC president and CEO. “For us it has a lot of meaning attached to it because in our survey last month we found a record number of Californians saying housing prices were a problem in their region and that they were seriously considering moving. It fit in with what we are seeing statewide and there is definitely a consequence to the high cost of housing in California.” The San Francisco-based non-profit carries out independent, non-partisan research on public policy issues.

It is important to note that the study did not ask people if they know what teachers are actually paid. This tends to be a problem with studies like this. As Mike Antonucci writes, “Polling Is Ammunition, Not Information.”

We all like to use survey results to bolster our positions, but their limitations have never been more apparent.

The biggest limitation is that often people are ignorant on the topic being surveyed, but have strong opinions anyway. Another is that you get contrary results when you should get some agreement.

To read more about the PPIC poll, go [here](#). To read Antonucci’s piece on the limitations of polling, go [here](#).

CALmatters Dan Walters also wrote about the PPIC poll, and reports that while those polled in California favor paying teachers more, when asked if they’d vote for “parcel taxes” for their local schools, “fewer than half said they would – a far cry from the two-thirds vote margins such taxes must obtain.” This could be a problem for the Los Angeles Unified School District and the United Teachers of Los Angeles which are banking on a parcel tax measure to help defray the costs incurred by the recent union contract the district signed off on.

Measure EE will be voted on June 4th and the union is spending lots to get it passed. As UTLA president Alex Caputo-Pearl writes,

We’ve spent our careers explaining that public education is chronically underfunded. Enough is enough. For the first time in my career, and in yours, we are on offense against under-funding. Measure EE, on the local ballot on June 4, is our groundbreaking vehicle that would bring \$500 million in new ongoing money to our schools.

However, CityWatch’s Jack Humphreville has a much different take. Instead of a parcel tax, he suggests,

LA Unified should look to the State for additional funding, “right size” its bloated bureaucracy, lease or sell its many surplus properties, reform its pension and other retirement plans, establish an independent oversight committee to monitor the District’s operations and finances, and develop a real strategic plan that benefits the students of both the public and charter schools, all of which were recommended in 2015 by Ramon Cortines and the Independent Financial Review Panel.

To read the Dan Walters piece, go [here](#). Caputo-Pearl’s thoughts on the parcel tax can be accessed [here](#), while Humphreville’s take can be read [here](#).

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten gave a speech to the National Press Club in Washington in late April. Calling her talk “The Freedom to Teach,” she opened by referencing a poster on her office wall which reads, “Teachers inspire, encourage, empower,

nurture, activate, motivate and change the world.” As for the rest of her talk, Mike Antonucci suggests that we shouldn’t “take her version of current circumstances at face value.”

“Teachers and others who work in public schools are leaving the profession at the highest rate on record,” she said during her April 18 appearance.

AFT cited a December 28 Wall Street Journal article that made the same claim. There were a lot of problems with that article, the foremost being the lack of any context. The numbers cited were for all public education employees, not just teachers. Education employees quit at a record rate because everyone in the U.S. economy quit at a record rate. Education employees were still less likely to quit than every other job category in the nation except for federal government employees.

To access Weingarten’s talk, go [here](#). To see Antonucci’s rejoinder, go [here](#).

Harbor Freight Tools for Schools, “is dedicated to the advancement of skilled trades education in America. With a deep respect for the dignity of these fields and for the intelligence and creativity of people who work with their hands, this program was created to foster and shine a light on excellence in skilled trades education in public high schools. Believing that access to quality skilled trades education gives high school students pathways to graduation, opportunity, good jobs, and a workforce our country needs, we aim to stimulate greater understanding, support, and investment by public entities and others in skilled trades education.”

The Harbor Freight “Tools for Schools 2019 Prize for Teaching Excellence” will award \$1 million in prizes to public high school skilled trades teachers and programs.

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

And finally, as you well know, data and solid information are very useful in scoring political points and making cases for various causes. To that end, CTEN has a fact sheet on our website which has been updated – all with original sources. To see it, go [here](#).

If you have information that counters what’s there or would like to see something added, please let us know.

As always, thanks for your continuing interest and support.

Sincerely,
Larry Sand
CTEN President