



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.

December 18, 2019

Dear Colleague,

The ongoing discussion about whether or not we really need to spend more money on education has taken an interesting turn here in California. As an editorial in *The Mercury News* explains,

It's been six years since California lawmakers revamped the state funding formula for local schools.

It was heralded by then-Gov. Jerry Brown as a way to simplify K-12 education spending and close the state's achievement gap by giving more money to districts that disproportionately serve needy kids.

Since then, state spending on schools has increased about 50%. But, as state Auditor Elaine Howle explained in a troubling report last month, there is no way to track whether money is being spent as it should.

School officials across California have co-mingled billions of dollars of state money that was supposed to be used for children who fall into one of three categories: English learners, low-income or in foster care.

Howle's findings confirm what critics have been saying for years: Rather than specifically helping needy kids, the money has simply been used to boost general spending.

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

And on the subject of money, American Enterprise Institute scholar Andrew Biggs has some thoughts on teacher pay – specifically the gap between the salaries of teachers in the public v. private sector.

On top of public-school teachers' salary advantage, Bureau of Labor Statistics data indicate that public-school teachers receive more than twice as much in benefits as those in private schools, with private-school teachers getting less-generous health coverage and 401(k)-type retirement

accounts rather than traditional pensions, whose rising costs are squeezing public-school districts nationwide.

The question is why parents with money to spend on education aren't spending it on their children's teachers. If higher teacher pay produced significantly better educational outcomes, private schools would pay teachers much more than public schools, rather than much less. These are the same parents who pay for tutors, after-school enrichment programs, and summer internships, but better-paid — and presumably better-qualified — teachers don't seem to be a priority.

To continue reading this provocative piece, go [here](#).

Senate Bill 673 is still alive in California. The bill would make it easier for parents to access the sex ed curriculum and give them the opportunity to opt their child out of lessons they find objectionable. The bill has two main provisions:

It requires school districts that teach elementary-age comprehensive sexual health and HIV prevention to put that curriculum online for parental review.

It restores the right of parents of elementary-age students (TK-6th grade) to opt their children into comprehensive sexual health and HIV prevention education courses, rather than passively opt their children out.

SB 673 next has to clear the Senate Education Committee, which will hear the bill in January.

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

On the political front, the Democratic candidates continue to align their education positions with the teachers unions. After trashing charter schools, Elizabeth Warren went after vouchers, but got caught in a lie. She maintained that her own kids went to a public schools, but an exposé by Cato Institute scholar Corey DeAngelis revealed that Warren sent her son Alex to an expensive private school in the 1980s. Warren also used to be ardently pro-school choice. “Fully funded vouchers would relieve parents from the terrible choice of leaving their kids in lousy schools or bankrupting themselves to escape those schools,” Warren wrote in her 2004 book, “The Two Income Trap: Why Middle-Class Parents are Going Broke.”

Cory Booker is no different. As a sop to the unions, he began hedging on charters in May, and railed against vouchers in an interview with *The Washington Post* in September. In fact, as Newark mayor, Booker was famously pro-charter. Moreover, he once served on the board of Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos's pro-voucher group, the American Federation for Children, which he deemed an “incredible organization.”

So maybe he evolved, right? Well, not exactly. He is currently a co-sponsor of a Senate bill to reauthorize Washington D.C.'s school voucher program, legislation he signed onto in February after announcing his bid for president.

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

Also, on school choice, a new poll by Real Clear Opinion Research posed the question:

School choice gives parents the right to use the tax dollars designated for their child's education to send their child to the public or private school which best serves their needs. Generally speaking, would you say you support or oppose the concept of school choice?

A whopping 68% said they support school choice and just 22% were against. Importantly, the numbers varied little across sub-groups: 69% of 18-24 year-olds were in favor as were 68% of 55-64 year-olds; 68% of whites were in favor, while 71% of blacks supported the concept.

A survey conducted by Beck Research, a Democratic polling firm, found very similar results. Released in January, the poll reveals that nationally 73% of Latinos and 67% of African-Americans back “the broad concept of school choice,” as do 75% of millennials.

To see all the results of the poll, go [here](#).

On the union front, Mike Antonucci asks if the recent strike in Chicago really benefitted teachers. He compares the union demands with what was offered by the school district, and then looks at the language in the new contract.

Salaries. *The original offer by Mayor Lori Lightfoot and Chicago Public Schools was for a 14 percent increase over five years. The union wanted 15 percent over three years. In August, an independent fact-finder recommended a 16 percent hike over five years, to which Lightfoot immediately agreed. The union immediately rejected the offer.*

CTU ultimately accepted the fact-finder's recommendation.

Health insurance. *The district had unilaterally raised premiums by 0.8 percent earlier this year, but the union filed an unfair labor practice complaint. Under the agreement, the district rescinded the increase and the union rescinded the complaint. Otherwise, the fact-finder's recommendation for premiums was accepted by both sides: no increases for the first three years, a quarter-percent increase in the fourth year and a half-percent increase in the fifth year.*

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

Also, concerning unions, the so-called “clawback” cases continue to be filed. Perhaps the highest profile litigation comes via Mark Janus, lead plaintiff in the 2018 case that outlawed mandatory union fees for all public employees.

Janus is still locked in a legal battle, seeking to recover the thousands of dollars that the union forcefully collected from his paychecks before the 2018 decision. A panel of judges on the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals recently ruled that unions don't have to refund dues collected in compliance with the pre-Janus legal statutes. Janus has appealed that judgment, asking for an en banc review to be carried out from every judge on the circuit.

"The Supreme Court agrees with me—the union was wrong to take money out of my paycheck without my permission," Janus said in a statement. "The union knew what it was doing was wrong. The union shouldn't get to profit from behavior that the Court recognized as unconstitutional."

The union did not return request for comment about the case.

Janus's current court battle could have significant ramifications on the bottom lines of unions. If AFSCME Council 31 is forced to retroactively return money it took from Janus's paychecks, it would strengthen the cases of dozens of class-action lawsuits filed by workers across the country, according to Patrick Semmens, a spokesperson for the National Right to Work Foundation. The foundation is representing employees in more than a dozen lawsuits that could force labor groups to refund \$120 million of past dues and fees to workers. Workers in several other states and cities across the country filed similar suits.

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

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It has been another exciting year for CTEN, and we look forward to an even more vigorous 2020. We are grateful for your interest and involvement, and wish you and your families the happiest of holidays. See you next year!

Sincerely,
Larry Sand
CTEN President