



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 15, 2020

Dear Colleague,

It has now been six years since California lawmakers revamped the state funding formula for local schools, but there are allocation issues. As the *Mercury News* informs us, it was touted 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.

That partially explains why California students’ test scores continue lagging the national average and the state has failed to close the achievement gap that divides along racial and economic lines.

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

In the same vein, The *Los Angeles Times* ponders, “California’s education funding is at a record high. So why are schools short on cash?”

California’s economy has steadily grown since 2010, and voters approved tax increases on the wealthy in 2012 and 2016 to help fund education.

But at the same time, a few important things have complicated the flow of dollars to the classroom. One is the rapid growth in expenses for special education. More children are

qualifying for additional services, particularly those diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. Even preschool-age kids are entitled to services funded by existing school budgets.

The state government's special education expenses are projected to rise 21% next year, according to the governor's new budget. The impact on local dollars is even bigger — those funds pay for 61% of special education expenses, according to a legislative analysis.

School districts are being squeezed, too, by the rising costs of employee healthcare and pensions.

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

In fact, a large chunk of education dollars go for public employee pension and healthcare perks. In a paper published by the Brookings Institution in May, University of Missouri economics professor Cory Koedel writes, “California’s pension debt is harming teachers and students now—and it’s going to get worse.” He explains that the California State Teachers Retirement System’s total unfunded liability is over \$100 billion, “which is greater than the total amount of money spent to educate all of California’s public K-12 students for a year (\$97.2 billion).”

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

But whatever the reason, the state wants more. As such, there will be a school bond on the March 3rd ballot. The ironically named Prop. 13, a “School and College Facilities Bond,” would authorize \$15 billion in general obligation bonds for school and college facilities. However, the prop is no friend to taxpayers. As Howard Jarvis Taxpayer Association president Jon Coupal notes, the \$15 billion figure “reflects typical credit card math” because the money would be borrowed from Wall Street, and taxpayers would pay it back plus 80 percent in total interest costs. So the stated \$15 billion is actually \$27 billion.

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

An interesting piece in the *Los Angeles Times* asks the question, “Grades vs. SAT scores: Which is a better predictor of college success?”

Pressure is growing on the University of California and California State University to drop the SAT and ACT exams as admission requirements because of their perceived bias against disadvantaged students and underrepresented minorities. As part of the debate, policymakers are considering increasing the weight of high school grades in the admissions process.

Research has shown that grades are the best single predictor of college performance and aren't as heavily influenced as the standardized exams by income, parent education levels and race.

But the ACT and College Board, which owns the SAT, argue that a combination of grades and test scores is the best overall guide to selecting students who are likely to succeed in college. Using grades without test scores could exacerbate inequities, test officials say, because grade inflation is worse in affluent schools, according to research they have reviewed.

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

On January 22nd, just three days before the start of National School Choice Week, the U.S. Supreme Court will hear oral arguments in *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue*. In December 2018, the Montana Supreme Court struck down the state's tax credit program that allowed poor kids to use donated pre-tax money to attend private schools, including religious ones. (Very simply, tax-credit scholarships allow taxpayers to receive full or partial tax credits when they donate to nonprofits that provide private school scholarships for kids. Currently 250,000 students benefit from private-school choice through education tax credits nationwide.)

As Matthew Vadum explains, the Montana program “provided a dollar-for-dollar tax credit up to \$150 matching an individual's or a corporation's donations to nonprofit student scholarship organizations.” But according to the state court, it allowed the legislature to “indirectly pay tuition at private, religiously-affiliated schools,” which is contrary to Montana law. The ruling comes to us courtesy of Montana's anti-Catholic Blaine Amendment, a variety of which exists in 36 other states, and is supported by the education establishment, notably the teachers unions.

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

On the union front, one of the big stories of 2019 was the growth of #RedForEd. It began as a grassroots teachers' movement that was organized on Facebook in early 2018 by Noah Karvelis, a 24-year-old music teacher and socialist from Arizona, but was promptly co-opted by the teachers unions. Over at *Breitbart*, Michael Patrick Leahy outlines the top 10 #RedforEd political power plays in 2019. For example,

The #RedforEd teachers movement flexed its political muscle in the Kentucky gubernatorial race on Tuesday, powering the campaign of Democrat Attorney General Andy Beshear against incumbent Republican Gov. Matt Bevin.

With 100 percent of precincts reporting as of 9:55 p.m. EST, Beshear had a narrow 0.3 point lead, with 49.2 percent of the vote to Bevin's 48.9 percent. Libertarian candidate John Hicks had two percent of the vote. . .

Bevin's handling of a series of unauthorized teachers strikes organized by the local Kentucky #RedforEd teachers group this past spring created great anger among many of the state's teachers, and they vowed to defeat him in November.

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

Going forward, the next event for #RedforED – and all teacher union activists – is flipping purple states in 2020, and ousting Donald Trump from office. In 2016, Trump eked out victories in Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, and the union activists plan to concentrate their efforts in those and other battleground states to make sure that Trump is just a one-term president. It is worth noting that “teacher” was the most common occupation listed for donors to socialist presidential candidate Bernie Sanders in the fourth-quarter of 2019.

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

Speaking of Trump, the teachers unions are already doing what they can to kill his presidency. American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten weighed in on the impeachment imbroglio, accusing the president of “betraying American democracy.”

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

Due to union “opt-out windows,” which are very possibly illegal, this may be the time to quit if you are planning to do so. If you have any questions about the process, 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 – possibly getting you legal assistance, if necessary. We will also be able to share your concerns with other teachers across the state. And talking about 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. Thanks, as always.

Sincerely,
Larry Sand
CTEN President