



# 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.*

February 19, 2020

Dear Colleague,

With the legislative session in full swing in Sacramento, Golden State legislators are entertaining AB 1922, a bill mandating that climate change education be a “coursework requirement for students in grades 1 through 6, and a graduation requirement for students in grades 7 through 12, starting 2025.” As Sydney Johnson writes,

*Schools are encouraged to teach environmental literacy, which by definition includes climate change, according to state law. The Education Code does not mandate that schools teach it, however. But because climate change is in the state standards, and California’s state science test is aligned to those standards, climate change could appear on the statewide science assessment.*

*To emphasize the importance of these standards and the impact of climate change more broadly, many districts have passed resolutions and policies to commit to environmental education. Some have even included specific actions, such as reducing carbon emissions on campus.*

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

As we mentioned last month, there is an election in California on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. The issue of most interest to many teachers is Prop. 13, the School and College Facilities Bond. As John Fensterwald writes in *EdSource*,

*The state has traditionally shared the cost of construction with school districts, community colleges and universities. Since 2002, voters have approved four bond measures totaling \$45 billion, with 80 percent allocated to K-12. The last bond, in 2016, was for \$7 billion strictly for K-12. All the money from that bond has been allocated or committed to districts that have applied.*

*School districts and community colleges also pass bonds for school construction and repairs not covered by state aid. Local bonds require 55 percent of voter approval to pass. State bonds like Prop. 13 require a simple majority of voters statewide.*

However, the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association (HJTA) disagrees and explains,

*Prop. 13 (2020) is a huge \$15 billion statewide school bond chock full of hidden traps for taxpayers. First, it reflects typical credit card math by Sacramento politicians because it would borrow \$15 billion from Wall Street and then make taxpayers pay it back plus 80% in total interest costs. That's an additional \$12 billion we'll be forced to pay, bringing the entire bill to \$27 billion.*

*While no one disputes the need for adequate school facilities, the problem is that the state's education establishment has failed to show that it uses existing school facility bond money effectively. California voters already have approved big school bonds, including a recent 2016 \$7 billion measure, only to see much of those funds squandered. (Remember the infamous Belmont High School scandal when LAUSD wasted hundreds of millions building the nation's most expensive high school on top of a toxic waste site?)*

To learn more, the ballot guide can be accessed [here](#). Fensterwald's take is [here](#). HJTA president Jon Coupal's rebuttal can be found [here](#).

Whatever your take on Prop.13, the state is spending a lot on education at this time. The California Department of Education projects total state expenditures for 2019–20 from all sources to be a record [\\$214.8 billion](#). The problem in many school districts is the inability to live within a budget. In Los Angeles, for example, after the six-day teacher strike in January 2019, the district and union settled on a contract that many questioned. Now, a year later, LAUSD officials admit to spending \$18,788 per student. But in a mid-January interview with *EdSource*, school superintendent Austin Beutner indicated that the district receives just [\\$16,402](#) from the state to educate each child.

Beutner went on to explain that LAUSD would have to borrow from future reserves to cover the hefty shortfall. Knowing that kicking the can down the road is a stopgap, he added that “we have to go to the Legislature and get more funding.” Which means, of course, “We need to raise taxes.”

UTLA leader Alex Caputo-Pearl sloughs off the problem by saying he is skeptical about “doomsday predictions.” He claims that California is 43<sup>rd</sup> in the U.S. in per-pupil spending. Yet, according to the latest available data from the [U.S. Census Bureau](#), the state actually ranks 21<sup>st</sup> in state education spending. The same report also informs us that [L.A. is ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in per-pupil spending of the nation's 25 largest school districts](#) (and 11<sup>th</sup> of the top 50), coming in ahead of Chicago, Houston, Philadelphia, Dallas, et al.

Speaking of unions, the Buckeye Institute has announced it is filing an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court in *Reisman v. Associated Faculties of the University of Maine*. Professor Jonathan Reisman, an economics professor at the school, was previously a member of the Associated Faculties of the University of Maine, but decided to leave the union over political disagreements with its state and national affiliates – the Maine Education Association and the National Education Association. Now, Dr. Reisman is trying to free himself from compelled union representation. Should he succeed, many others will then be sure to follow.

The unions traditionally have complained that they are forced to represent all workers during collective bargaining and ridiculed any non-payer as a “free rider.” But in reality, it is the unions that are the problem. No law forces the responsibility of exclusive representation on the unions – in fact, the unions themselves demand it. As Mike Antonucci explains, “The very first thing any new union wants is exclusivity,” whereby “no other unions are allowed to negotiate on behalf of people in the bargaining unit. Unit members cannot hire their own agent, nor can they represent themselves.”

To learn more about the *Reisman* case, go [here](#) and [here](#). To read Antonucci’s post on monopoly bargaining, go [here](#).

School choice was a prominent part of President Trump’s State of the Union talk a couple of weeks ago. He specifically gave a shout-out to Texas Senator Ted Cruz’s [Education Freedom Scholarships and Opportunities Act](#). This legislation would provide tax credits to individuals and businesses that make contributions to scholarship funds that could be used to defray tuition costs at private schools, for career and technical education, etc. Trump added that no parent should be forced to send their kid to a failing government school. The teachers unions were not pleased, to say the least. [Lily Eskelsen García](#), president of the National Education Association fumed,

*Tonight, Donald Trump once again put the agenda of Betsy DeVos, the least qualified Secretary of Education in U.S. history, front and center in his State of the Union by renewing his push to divert scarce funding from the public schools that 90 percent of students attend into private school voucher programs.*

Those who are school choice advocates have mixed opinions on the bill. Pacific Research Institute scholar [Lance Izumi](#) likes the proposal, noting it would “not be a top-down federal program, but would allow states to decide whether to participate and how to select eligible students, education providers and allowable education expenses.” Other prominent choicers, like the [American Federation of Children](#), are also positively disposed to the plan.

However, others are concerned with the fact that Washington would be running the show. The Heritage Foundation maintains that the program “[could invite further regulations](#), impede further tax overhauls and was out of the federal government’s jurisdiction.” The Cato Institute’s Neal McCluskey said that while the proposal sought to “skirt the control problem” by making it optional, it still invited [federal encroachment](#).

Also, on choice, during National School Choice Week many groups used the opportunity to screen *Miss Virginia*. The film documents the story of Virginia Walden Ford, the force behind the Washington, D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, a voucher program that lets low-income parents use public funding to send their children to private schools.

Set in 2003, the movie portrays Virginia as a devoted single mom raising her 15-year-old son, James, in a low-income Washington neighborhood. He’s a bright kid, but a fish out of water in a tough school. James ditches class regularly and even flirts with becoming a gangbanger. In one heartrending scene, after he reluctantly joins local hoods in assaulting an intelligent student, he is threatened with expulsion. Desperate, Virginia enrolls James in a private school, but the \$7,000

annual tuition becomes an even bigger problem, so she becomes a maid, cleaning the office of a congresswoman.

The film's turning point, however, occurs when Virginia discovers that her son's expensive private school educates children at half the cost per pupil of the money spent by Washington's public school system.

To read more about the film, go [here](#) and [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