



# 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.*

October 21, 2020

Dear Colleague,

In a major surprise, California Governor Gavin Newsom vetoed Assembly Bill 331 on Sept. 30<sup>th</sup>. This legislation would have made taking an ethnic studies class a requirement to graduate high school in the state. “There is much uncertainty about the appropriate K-12 model curriculum for ethnic studies,” Newsom wrote in his veto statement. “The latest draft, which is currently out for review, still needs revision.”

But there are other things in the works. In a California Department of Education “Covid-19 update,” Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond referenced the disease only as a way to rant against Donald Trump.

*COVID-19 is not the only virus affecting our society today. The man-made viruses—the ones of racism, hate and bigotry—are also gaining a foothold. Increasingly, I see heartbreaking stories of anti-Semitic behavior, bullying of Asian American students because of our President’s rhetoric, Islamophobia, discrimination of our LGBTQ neighbors, and violence directed at people of color.*

As a way to deal with all the above, Thurmond announced an “Education to End Hate” initiative which “includes educator training grants, partnerships with community leaders, and virtual classroom sessions to address hate and bigotry in our schools and society.”

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

One of the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic is that “Enrollment Is Dropping In Public Schools Around the Country” writes NPR’s Anya Kamenetz.

*Orange County, Fla., has 8,000 missing students. The Miami-Dade County public schools have 16,000 fewer than last year. Los Angeles Unified — the nation’s second-largest school system — is down nearly 11,000. Charlotte-Mecklenburg in North Carolina has 5,000 missing. Utah, Virginia and Washington are reporting declines statewide.*

*Comprehensive national data aren't available yet, but reporting by NPR and our member stations, along with media reports from around the country, shows enrollment declines in dozens of school districts across 20 states. Large and small, rich and poor, urban and rural — in most of these districts the decline is a departure from recent trends. Over the past 15 years, data from the U.S. Education Department show that small and steady annual increases in public school enrollment have been the rule.*

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

As we have mentioned in the last two newsletters, many parents are opting for what are called “pandemic pods,” a form of microschooling. Families work together to educate their own kids, and sometimes recruit professional teachers to help with the process. It’s a way for clusters of students to receive professional instruction for several hours each day. Just a couple of weeks ago, Cato Institute scholar Jason Bedrick and EdChoice fellow Matthew Ladner released “Let’s Get Small: Microschools, Pandemic Pods, and the Future of Education in America,” a report on the phenomenon. In the summary, they write that COVID-19 has

*...spurred the dramatic rise of microschools and ‘pandemic pods’ as school districts’ reopening plans (or lack thereof) drove desperate parents to explore alternative education options. For many microschooling or podding families, these options are merely temporary, intended to get them through the pandemic. However, given the considerable growth in microschooling in recent years, there are reasons to believe that the pandemic accelerated a growing trend that could significantly reshape K–12 education in the United States.*

*The 74’s Bekah McNeil agrees that we are in the midst of a pandemic homeschooling boom. She writes that many families have discovered that their children need something other than what is offered in public schools, and find success using different curricula than they use.*

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

While many parents are embracing pods, the teachers unions are not happy with them.

*Pods are a divisive trend. NEA president Becky Pringle agrees that these new arrangements help teachers earn money. But she worries pods will become more widespread and damage a public-education system already reeling from budget cuts and struggling to fund Covid-19 safety measures. This could open the door for more inequity, segregation and unsafe workplaces, since pods are expensive and unregulated, she says.*

*Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, says while learning pods highlight the need for more small-group teaching in schools, she believes they’re a “pandemic Band-Aid” instead of a long-term, viable career option.*

But there are teachers who have a different opinion. Unhappy with the way her school district handled the pandemic, Salem, MA special ed teacher Krissy Rand put out her résumé.

*Eight groups of families contacted her within three days. She now makes more money teaching six first-graders from six families in Wellesley, Mass. They are following their public school's curriculum, and she's added cooking, yoga and earth sciences, with lots of hands-on experiments. She loves that there are no rules and administrative red tape, and no sitting through long meetings.*

*"It's a teacher's dream," she says. "The day flies by."*

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

Many parents who haven't abandoned their local public school are not happy with the way online teaching has been going. In Los Angeles, nine parents have filed a class action lawsuit.

*The parents are claiming that teachers in Los Angeles are offering just a fraction of the instruction time seen in other large school districts. The inadequate instruction puts Los Angeles students at a disadvantage and violates their right to a basic public education under the state constitution, according to the suit. The lawsuit comes at a time that the nation's second largest school district grapples with the pandemic and the logistics of distance learning when most students are living below the poverty level.*

*The Los Angeles Superior Court complaint, announced during a news conference at the County Courthouse, also alleges that minority students, particularly Blacks and Latinos, are disproportionately impacted.*

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

In any event, parents are justifiably concerned by the disruption to their children's education. According to a report issued on October 1<sup>st</sup> by Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO), on average, students in 19 states had an estimated loss from 57 to 183 days of learning in reading and from 136 to 232 days of learning in math in the spring of 2020 due to the lockdowns.

*"In the absence of any actual assessments, these results serve as scientifically grounded estimates of what happened to students since March. It will take extended broad-based support from all corners to address the current deficits and the ripples they cause into the future," said Dr. Margaret Raymond, Director of CREDO at Stanford University.*

*Raymond adds, "For us, the bigger concern is the variation in loss estimates across schools. The students who would have been at the back of the pack if regular assessments had been used are the students that have the deepest rates of "COVID Slide."*

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

The American Federation of Teachers' yearly financial report has just been released, and as Mike Antonucci notes, "the precipitous loss of members unions feared has not occurred, AFT did

indeed lose working members in 2020,” but at the same time the union gained 22,000 new retired members. Politically, AFT’s spending is, as always, a one-way affair.

*AFT gave seven-figure grants to four national Democratic Party super PACs:*

- [Senate Majority PAC](#) — \$3.4 million
- [House Majority PAC](#) — \$3.25 million
- [For Our Future PAC](#) — \$1 million
- [Priorities USA](#) — \$1 million

*Six-figure grants went to organizations and campaigns such as Emily’s List, the [Opportunity to Learn Action Fund](#) and the [State Innovation Exchange](#), including an eye-opening \$400,000 to help elect Jackie Goldberg to the Los Angeles Unified School District school board.*

To learn more about AFT’s finances, go [here](#).

If you have any valuable resources that you would like to share, or report on what your school district is doing – good, bad or indifferent – to deal with the “new normal,” please do so by emailing [cteninfo@ctenhome.org](mailto:cteninfo@ctenhome.org) or posting on Facebook if you prefer. The CTEN page can be accessed [here](#), and the CTEN group can be found [here](#).

Best of luck to all of you, your families and your students during these very trying times.

Sincerely,  
Larry Sand  
CTEN President