



# 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.*

April 21, 2021

Dear Colleague,

California is getting close to passing [AB 101](#), which would mandate teaching a one-semester course in ethnic studies in high school. As written, the bill does not include specific content, however. That decision would be left to each school district. But some agenda-driven extremists are waiting to pounce. In Los Angeles, the school district is considering a [curriculum](#) that disdains “merit” and “individualism,” and claims that “history classes and textbooks focus on the perspective of white colonial culture.”

In [San Diego](#), students must “confront and examine your white privilege” and to “acknowledge when you feel white fragility.” Additionally, children are told to “understand the impact of white supremacy in your work.” But a civil rights violation complaint has been filed against San Diego schools. The Californians for Equal Rights Foundation, along with five partner organizations, have filed the complaint against the school district for unlawful, discriminatory critical race training of teachers and employees. CFER claims, “Culturally Responsive Sustaining Practices & Ethnic Studies and other relevant training violates the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Article I Section 31 (a) of the California Constitution, as well as state anti-discrimination laws and Board policies.”

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

Also, regarding the racial agenda in schools, [Children’s Educational Opportunity Foundation](#) president Lewis Andrews writes that “woke curricula involve much more than warped views of history, the scientific method, and social relations – they also employ instructional methods that have been shown to [inflict serious psychological harm](#) completely independent of what is being taught. These include the frequent use of shaming, forced public confessions of so-called ‘privilege,’ the acceptance of one’s socioeconomic background as an excuse for not achieving, and the promotion of ideological conformity as the best way to deal with social conflict.”

Quoting psychologist [Anna Smith](#), Andrews adds that shame is the ultimate divider. “It’s a me versus them feeling. A deliberate act to cause one to feel like an outsider. As ‘a finger-pointing gesture,’ she says, it can easily induce the very reverse of what was intended.”

To read Andrews' piece, go [here](#).

On the Covid front, the lockdown tragedy is best summed up in an [extraordinarily moving blog post](#) written by Darren Miller, a veteran high school math teacher in the Sacramento area, and force behind the "[Right on the Left Coast](#)" blog. He returned to teach full time in person on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, and wrote the following one day later.

*After 2 days back at work this week, I've now taught each of my 5 classes in person for the first time in over a year. Without going into details about my district's exceedingly-flawed hybrid model, suffice it to say that I taught each class twice—once in the morning for in-person students and once in the afternoon for online students. My in-person classes ranged anywhere from 5-10 students each.*

*I'd like to focus on one of my classes in particular, which I didn't teach until today. This is a higher math class of almost exclusively college-bound students.*

*I'd previously notified my students that, with the hybrid model, our class time was significantly less than it had been under all-online classes, 50 minutes vs 90 minutes. Therefore, it was incumbent upon them to watch my instructional videos before class and take whatever notes they thought were necessary, because with only 50 minutes of class we'd need to get right into practice problems.*

*Not one of them had watched the video for today's class.*

*I wasn't going to reteach the material in the video, so I would incorporate as much "instruction" as I could while we worked out problems. Not long after I started in, I stopped.*

*They were just staring at me.*

*"Are any of you going to write any of this down?" A few reached for pencils and notebooks. I continued my instruction. As I'm wont to do when teaching, I frequently stop and ask questions to check for student understanding. And so I did. I asked a student a question.*

*The student just stared at me.*

*I looked at the student for a moment and then said, "You realize I can see you, right? You're not hiding behind a screen with your camera turned off." I said it with a hint of humor, but the dark truth is there – these kids have no idea how to be students. They have completely forgotten.*

*Yes, I know that 374 days had passed since the last time they were in school. But these college-bound students had been in school for several years before those 374 days. None of these students is a freshman.*

*They have forgotten how to be students.*

*This partly explains their low grades. They don't engage – they turn off their cameras (I cannot require them to turn them on), they don't ask questions, they don't really take notes. They listen to my videos—at least, they did when I played them during class—and they listen to me talk and explain. They don't do anything, they sit and listen and let the words flow over and around them. They learn only what they hear and remember, which cognitive science will tell you won't be much. They are completely passive, there is nothing active at all about their learning.*

Miller is not alone. He spoke with one of his school's vice principals, and learned that several other teachers had reported the same phenomenon. When talked to, the students “just stared.”

He concludes his post: “I have no idea if they'll get back to “normal” any time soon or not. If they don't, though, we have a much bigger problem on our hands than so-called learning loss. This could be nightmarish.”

To read the rest of Miller's post, go [here](#).

Last November, a lawsuit was filed by the Public Counsel on behalf of California students, parents and several community organizations which claimed that children have been left behind during months of distance learning, and were lacking access to digital tools as well as badly needed academic and social-emotional supports. In addition, a group of parents are suing the Los Angeles Unified School District and the United Teachers of Los Angeles. They allege “that LAUSD breached its responsibility to act in the best interest of students by allowing the teachers union to dictate when schools should reopen.”

*LAUSD, United Teachers Los Angeles and UTLA President Cecily Myart-Cruz are named as defendants in the complaint.*

*Timothy Snowball, an attorney for the four plaintiffs, said in an interview Wednesday, March 31, that UTLA used students as a “bargaining chip” by refusing to have its members return to campuses sooner in order to try and advance the union's own agenda. For example, the complaint alleges that during negotiations with the district on reopening schools, the union wanted other issues addressed, such as the defunding of police.*

*“UTLA used the tragedy of COVID-19 as an excuse to extract concessions based on its preferred personal and ideological policies by holding the education and future of LAUSD's children hostage,” the complaint states. “UTLA was willing for teachers to remain out of the classroom, and children, including Plaintiffs, [sic] to suffer the mental, social, and academic consequences.”*

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

As many unionized school districts remain locked down, school choice is ascending. On March 29<sup>th</sup>, West Virginia passed the most expansive school choice program in the country. Under the new law, all parents have unrestrained options. If parents choose a private school for their kids, they will receive 100 percent of their state education dollars – \$4,600 annually – to help defray expenses. In addition to private school tuition, parents can use the funding to homeschool or for

other education expenses. The new law stands in stark contrast to 2018 when Mountain State educators made news by launching a statewide strike, which morphed into the nationwide “Red for Ed” movement. Interestingly, the unions have been very quiet about the new law. Patricia Rucker, chair of the Senate Education Committee and chief architect of the ESA effort, explained that when legislators pushed for reforms in 2019, they caught a lot of flak from the teachers union. But this time around, she says it has been quiet. “The unions don’t like the bill, but our phones aren’t ringing. We aren’t getting emails. It’s nothing like last time.”

Even in California, hardly a school choice mecca, there is rumbling. A revolutionary universal education savings account initiative is in the works for the November 2022 ballot. The ESA would give parents control of the money the state spends on educating their child. The funds would be spent on the school of their choice, and any money not spent would accumulate and could be used for college or vocational training. Additionally, California State Assemblyman Kevin Kiley has proposed “Cal Grant K-12,” a privately funded grant program which would “help parents who have been forced to pay out-of-pocket expenses to keep up with their children’s remote learning.” According to Fox News, the bill “incentivizes individuals and businesses to make donations that will provide eligible students scholarship funds they can use for approved expenses to help reduce pandemic-induced learning loss.”

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

The results of a new poll reveal that nearly half of U.S. parents want more noncollege paths.

*According to the Family Voices study -- a recent survey of U.S. parents conducted by Carnegie Corporation and Gallup -- 54% of parents of children aged 11 to 25 in the United States would prefer that their child enroll in a four-year university immediately after high school. However, 46% of parents say even if there were no barriers to their child earning a bachelor's degree, they would prefer another postsecondary option.*

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

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.

Sincerely,  
Larry Sand  
CTEN President