



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.

September 15, 2021

Dear Colleague,

Due to the Covid pandemic, online learning became a reality throughout much of the country, and it might stick around in some places. Richard Barrera, board president of San Diego Unified, told *Voice of San Diego*.

“We’ve learned a lot from COVID – and most of it has been a nightmare – but some of it has been positive and creating an online academy is a benefit we can take out of the pandemic,”

San Diego Unified is one of many districts across the county that plan to do just that. Any student in transitional kindergarten through 12th grade will be allowed to learn online if they choose, Barrera said.

Exactly why families choose to stay online will vary. The largest chunk may still fear the effects of COVID-19. But many reasons go beyond the pandemic. Some students with severe anxiety or those who have experienced bullying may learn better online.

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

Additionally, the pandemic has been a boon to homeschooling. According to a new report from Bellwether Education Partners, nearly 2.6 million kids nationwide have switched from traditional school to homeschooling since the pandemic began. Now the total number of homeschooled kids sits at about 5 million, which is more than 11% of U.S. households.

And it's not just white families who are moving to homeschooling: 9.7% of white families with kids have pulled out of traditional education, as have 12.1% of Hispanic families, 8.8% of Asian families and 16.1% of Black families.

Families' reasons for turning to homeschooling are varied. For the first time in modern history, parents got a chance to observe their children's education up close, at home. Many are deciding they want more individualized learning options for their kids, whether that's more attention from

educators or more personalized lesson plans, says Alex Spurrier, a senior analyst at Bellwether and one of the authors of the report.

Some families are fed up with virtual learning, while others don't feel safe sending kids to school while the pandemic still rages on.

Many families of color are choosing to homeschool their children because they're not satisfied with how schools are teaching kids about race and racism against the backdrop of social justice protests and rising Asian hate.

"As an African American, I didn't like the way the school was addressing some of the cultural things going on," says Torlecia Bates, a mother of three in Richmond, Virginia, who switched to homeschooling during the pandemic. "Someone asked me when I'll return my kids to public school and I said, 'When I show up in the textbooks, and I'm represented well and accurately.'"

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

Also, in the school choice realm, Florida has expanded its voucher program to accommodate parents during the mask wars.

The board then invoked an existing law to clarify eligibility for the Hope Scholarship, which is meant to protect children against bullying, adding "COVID-19 harassment" as a prohibited form of discrimination. It defined this as "any threatening, discriminatory, insulting, or dehumanizing verbal, written or physical conduct" students suffer as a result of COVID-19 protocols such as mask or testing requirements and isolation measures that "have the effect of substantially interfering with a student's educational performance."

"We're not going to hurt kids. We're not going to pull money that's going to hurt kids in any way," said board member Ben Gibson.

But he said the rule the board approved has the effect of law, and that if school districts don't comply, the board could hold up the transfer of state money.

"If a parent wants their child to wear a mask at school, they should have that right. If a parent doesn't want their child to wear a mask at school, they should have that right," Gibson said.

In response to the governor's order, the Department of Health approved a rule saying students can wear masks, but school districts must allow parents to opt their children out of any local mandates.

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

Meanwhile, the embattled San Francisco school board will have to go through a recall election.

The effort to recall three San Francisco school board members hit a critical milestone, reaching 70,000 signatures, virtually ensuring an election late this year or early next, organizers said Monday.

“Overall we’re so gratified and humbled by the outpouring of support for the school board recall from people in every walk of life and from every part of the city,” said Siva Raj, a parent and organizer of the recall.

Raj said they will submit the signatures for the recall of school board President Gabriela López, Vice President Faauuga Moliga and Commissioner Alison Collins on Sept. 7.

The effort reflects anger and frustration among San Francisco families after public schools remained closed much of last school year as Bay Area other districts and private schools reopened.

While distance learning devastated many families, the board spent significant time and energy on renaming 44 schools, a decision later reversed, and ending the merit-based admission to academically elite Lowell High School.

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

And it’s not only San Francisco that is a hot spot for school board members. All over the country, vituperative board meetings have seen many members quit or be recalled.

Police have been called to intervene in places including Vail, where parents protesting a mask mandate pushed their way into a board room in April, and in Mesa County, Colorado, where Doug Levinson was among school board members escorted to their cars by officers who had been unable to de-escalate a raucous Aug. 17 meeting. “Why am I doing this?” Levinson asked himself.

Kurt Thigpen wrote in leaving the Washoe County, Nevada, school board that he considered suicide amid relentless bullying and threats led by people who didn’t live in the county, let alone have children in the schools. “I was constantly looking over my shoulder,” he wrote in July.

Susan Crenshaw resigned from the Craig County, Virginia, school board this month with more than a year left in her term after being “blindsided,” she said, by her board’s decision to defy the state’s mask mandate in a move that she said felt more driven by political than educational considerations.

“This is something that’s come into play against government overreach and tyranny and other things that have absolutely nothing to do with the education of children,” said Crenshaw, who taught for 31 years and whose district has just 500 students. “It’s a bigger issue than the mask. I just feel like the mask is the spark or trigger that got this dialogue started.”

While experts say the widespread use of masks can effectively limit virus transmission in school buildings, opponents say they restrict breathing and the ability of children to read social cues.

Conflicts over masks have put some boards in Florida, Texas and Arizona at odds with their Republican governors.

In several states, embattled board members who do not resign are facing recall efforts. Ballotpedia lists 59 school board recall efforts against 147 board members in 2021.

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

Between Covid and the rise of Critical Race Theory, teacher union leaders have been in the news quite frequently. In July, AFT president Randi Weingarten gave a 74-minute talk at an online conference in which she averred “Let’s be clear: critical race theory is not taught in elementary schools or high schools. It’s a method of examination taught in law school and college that helps analyze whether systemic racism exists—and, in particular, whether it has an effect on law and public policy.”

How she could make such a statement in light of overwhelming evidence to the contrary is mind-numbing. For example,

- The Arizona Department of Education has created an “equity” toolkit, which claims that [babies show the first signs of racism at three months old](#), and that white children become full racists – “strongly biased in favor of whiteness” – by age five.
- In [Cupertino, CA](#) third-graders are forced to deconstruct their racial identities, then rank themselves according to their “power and privilege.”
- The principal of a school in New York City sent white parents a “tool for action,” which tells them they must become “[white traitors](#)” and then advocate for full “white abolition.”
- In Seattle, there was a training session for teachers in which schools were deemed guilty of “[spirit murder](#)” against black students.
- The [San Diego Unified School District](#) orders their students to “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.”

Also, if CRT were not being taught, why was Ibram X. Kendi, probably the most vocal and aggressive CRT proponent in the country, speak at the conference? His talk was touted as, “Hear from Dr. Ibram X. Kendi in this free-ranging [discussion with student activists](#) and AFT members on his scholarship and on developing anti-racist mindsets and actions inside and outside classrooms.”

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

Another teacher union leader, Cecily Myart-Cruz, president of the United Teachers of Los Angeles, also said some rather interesting things recently. In a lengthy and very revealing interview for *Los Angeles Magazine*, she was asked how her insistence on keeping L.A.’s schools mostly locked down over the last year and a half may have impacted the city’s 600,000 kindergarten through 12th-grade students.

There is no such thing as learning loss. Our kids didn't lose anything. It's OK that our babies may not have learned all their times tables. They learned resilience. They learned survival. They learned critical-thinking skills. They know the difference between a riot and a protest. They know the words insurrection and coup.

Myart-Cruz even went so far as to suggest that “learning loss” is a fake crisis marketed by shadowy purveyors of clinical and classroom assessments.

To continue reading, 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