



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.

November 17, 2021

Dear Colleague,

Between school shutdowns and the presence of Critical Race Theory in some schools, public education has been taking a beating of late. As such, some districts in the Bay Area have taken to advertising their wares.

Most education officials don't think of public schools as a product to sell, but just like fast food or sneaker brands, districts have billion-dollar budgets and compete in a crowded marketplace.

Now Bay Area public school officials, eyeing enrollment declines and teacher shortages, are hiring firms to boost their image. Those firms are looking to billboards, marketing plans and advertising campaigns to make their arguments.

While schools aren't soft drinks, education over the past couple of decades has become a competitive marketplace with a lot of options for families, officials said.

"Many times, families are making decisions about which is the right school or whether that's a public school, private school or charter school, with limited information," said Brian Epperson, CEO of Target River, a marketing firm working with districts in the Bay Area and seven states. "If they were a business, they'd have a massive marketing budget to support their efforts to attract and retain clients."

In this case, the clients are students, and each one is worth \$10,000 a year or more in state funding.

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

Talking about families making decisions, there is a new proposed ballot initiative that would give up to \$14,000 per student to attend private schools is quickly making headway into being on the ballot in 2022.

According to the [California Education Savings Accounts Initiative \(Educational Freedom Act\)](#), one of a [slew of proposed ballot initiatives](#) currently collecting signatures for next year, California would provide yearly voucher payments of \$14,000 into education savings accounts for K-12 students attending accredited private schools. The initiative would include religious schools, eliminating the current constitutional ban on public funding going towards religious and other private schools. California would not be allowed to set requirements on certain standards, such as teacher credentialing, curriculum, or disciplinary policies, but would need to meet educational standards in order to graduate and advance in grades, as well as meet state health and safety standards.

Funds for the vouchers would come directly from both the California state General Fund and local property taxes, with any extra funds from the vouchers after tuition and other private schools costs going to college, vocational training, and other higher education costs. If funds remain by the time the student is 30, all remaining funds will go back to the state.

To learn more about the proposed ballot initiative, go [here](#).

On the labor front, Mike Antonucci writes, “Amid Growing Parent Backlash, Teachers Unions Keep Trying to Rewrite School Reopening History.”

Give American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten a platform and she will deliver this often repeated claim about shuttered school campuses and the pandemic:

- [March 19, 2021](#): “We’ve been trying to reopen schools since last April.”
- [November 3, 2021](#): “When you see people say that teachers closed schools, don’t let that lie stand. We, the AFT, put out a plan in April 2020 and worked very hard to reopen schools safely.”

One part of those statements is accurate. The AFT did put out a plan in April 2020. The rest, however, is easily refuted by looking at what AFT and its affiliates actually did during almost a year-and-a-half of widespread school closures due to COVID-19.

I detail teacher union actions at the national, state and local levels in a new report for the [Defense of Freedom Institute](#). It’s called “[Teacher Union Resistance to Reopening Schools: An Examination of the Largest U.S. School Districts](#).” Districts studied included New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami-Dade County, Clark County (Nevada), Houston and Fairfax County (Virginia).

To learn more and read Antonucci’s report, go [here](#).

At least one teacher in the Sacramento area is fighting back against mask mandates, and is paying the price for his activism.

Earlier this week, 50 students at Ponderosa High School protested the school’s mask mandate in what they’re now calling “No-Mandate Monday.”

Michael Wilkes, a business technology teacher at the Shingle Springs high school, said he chose to join the students by removing his mask during class. Later that day, he was told he was placed on administrative leave.

Michael told CBS13 he wasn't surprised.

"Going into it, I knew obviously as a teacher, if I chose to support these students in protest, there would be professional consequences," he said.

Now, Michael says he believes his job is at stake.

Lexi Wagner is also paying the price for the protest. The Ponderosa High School senior helped spur the movement. Her mom, Andi Wagner, says Lexi has been "removed from class multiple times and ultimately asked to find 'alternative learning' because she will not comply."

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

According to the *Orange County Register*, "Some parents find a long-term solution in at-home learning."

Families are coming to homeschooling at record rates during the pandemic, with the numbers doubling from 5.4 percent to 11 percent between March 2020 and March 2021, according to the U.S. Census. Homeschool associations across California saw memberships and social media followings grow, and places that offer curriculum received calls from first-timers eager for solutions.

There are many reasons these families say they are making the switch from COVID-19 concerns to the quality of distance learning. Parents report that some children with sensitivities struggle with masks, others want learning centered around religious world views, and still others worry about bullying and racism in the standard classroom. After 18 months of uncertainty, and with so many Californians still centering their lives around the home, some families may never return to brick-and-mortar schools.

"I have seen nothing like this in the last 27 years that I've been reading and studying or following this area," says Martin Whitehead, spokesperson for the Homeschool Association of California. Whitehead, who homeschooled his two daughters all the way through high school, describes the pandemic increase as a "breakthrough" number.

It's hard to know exactly how big that number is in California because the state doesn't track how many students homeschool in its many forms. Under the umbrella of the public school system, there are independent study programs and homeschool charter programs. The traditional route is where parents choose a curriculum and teach their kids themselves. To get an estimate of how many parents are doing this, many turn to data on private school affidavits.

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

“They stuck to their anti-vax beliefs. Now these teachers and school workers are out of jobs.” So writes Howard Blume in the *Los Angeles Times*.

Two teachers, a teaching assistant and a cafeteria manager — all were opposed to the COVID-19 vaccination mandate for Los Angeles school employees. One remains teaching, but lost a beloved position; another was fired outright. An employee who won an exemption is out of work anyway. And yet another gave in to a job at the last minute, but only because of a family crisis.

Their anti-vaccine views are outliers among some 73,000 colleagues, 95% of whom have had at least one shot. But Jamal Y. Speakes Sr., Hovik Saponghian, Angela Karapetyan and Nadine Jackson paid a price for holding to personal beliefs in the face of public-health policy mandates and experts who cite strong evidence that COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective.

The Los Angeles Unified School District was among the first school systems in the nation to require employees to be vaccinated. The Oct. 15 deadline prompted a last-minute surge among thousands who were hesitant. No vaccine meant no entry onto a campus — and likely no job.

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

Regarding Glenn Youngkin’s defeat of Terry McAuliffe in the gubernatorial race in Virginia earlier this month, the American Enterprise Institute’s Rick Hess asks, “Just what educational lessons should be taken from what unfolded in the Old Dominion.”

First, to say this race was about “education” is to say it was really about school closures, parental frustration, and concerns that ideological extremists are calling the shots on public education. Other than insisting that schools stayed closed too long last year, that parents need to be heard, and that there are serious problems with what falls under the label of Critical Race Theory, Youngkin didn’t get especially concrete on education. This is not education policy as we’ve grown used to debating it over much of the past two decades. Sure, Youngkin, a private-equity executive, had the standard five-point plan, which featured planks like “getting every student college or career ready,” “raising teacher pay,” and creating charter schools, but his breakthrough on education wasn’t fueled by his stance on accountability, standards, school spending, or the rest of the familiar school improvement checklist. It was all about values, frustration, and parental empowerment. And that is potent, deeply personal stuff.

Second, while McAuliffe, Harris, and the talking heads at MSNBC described Youngkin’s critique of CRT as a race-baiting appeal to the base, a quick look at [the polling](#) suggests something very different. In an election where turnout was almost 50 percent higher than expected, Youngkin won independents and made notable gains with women and minority voters. This has a lot more in common with how Bill Clinton, Bush, and Obama used education to court the middle than with how Trump, Hillary Clinton, and Biden used it to energize the base in 2016 and 2020. The map suggests that going after the ideological extremism underlying CRT helped Youngkin win back suburban voters that Trump lost, a fact Democrats ignore at their peril.

To continue reading, 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 or posting on Facebook, if you prefer. The CTEN page can be accessed [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. Thanks, as always.

Sincerely,
Larry Sand
CTEN President