



California Teachers Empowerment Network

Standing out from the crowd, fully informed on the issues

February 16, 2022

Dear Colleague,

More than half of teachers nationwide are looking for the exits, according to a poll conducted by the National Education Association.

Teachers are picking up slack for absent colleagues. They're covering for unfilled positions. And 55% of them say they will leave teaching sooner than they had originally planned, according to a poll of its members by the nation's largest teachers union.

The National Education Association poll, conducted in January, helps quantify the stress being placed on educators right now and it found that the number who say they'll leave the profession sooner has risen significantly since August. Among the NEA poll's other findings:

- *90% of its members say that feeling burned out is a serious problem.*
- *86% say they have seen more educators leaving the profession or retiring early since the start of the pandemic.*
- *80% report that unfilled job openings have led to more work obligations for those left.*

"Last summer, I started traveling across the country," says Becky Pringle, president of the NEA, which has nearly 3 million members, talking about the impetus for the survey. "Without exception, every stop I made, from Kentucky to Oakland, I heard those similar stories of educators who were exhausted, overwhelmed, feeling unloved, disrespected."

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

Here in California, the high school graduation rate has held steady during pandemic. At first glance, this would seem to be good news, but is it?

The numbers might seem surprising considering the 2020-21 school year consisted primarily of students attending class at home over Zoom, but state flexibility may have helped keep the graduation rates from falling. [State lawmakers allowed](#) parents to request that D's and F's earned that school year be changed to pass or no-pass grades and offered students the option to take a fifth year of high school if needed.

Many districts also allowed last year's juniors and seniors to graduate by meeting the state's [minimum requirements](#) — made up of 13 courses totaling about 130 units — rather than the higher number of units most districts require.

“It’s quite diminished requirements,” said Russell Rumberger, a professor emeritus of education at UC Santa Barbara. “In a way, that has always been the case. I’ve looked at it nationally. California has one of the lowest state requirements of any state in the country.”

California school districts historically add their own prerequisites to the state minimum, [generally requiring](#) students to take 22 to 26 courses to earn a diploma, earning about 10 units for each class.

During the pandemic, districts allowed students who could prove hardship to graduate with the state’s minimum number of units, although some required more. Nevada Joint Union High School District, for example, allowed students who were struggling academically last school year to petition the district to allow them to graduate with 160 units, instead of the 210 units the district usually requires.

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

“We all agree that college isn’t for everyone. We should start acting like it,” asserts Fordham Institute president Mike Petrilli.

For people who aren’t academic superstars but have other strengths and interests, a trade or the like might be a better fit. Individuals only benefit from the “college wage premium” if they actually complete college, and that is unlikely for people who leave high school without college-ready skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. And as [recent studies](#) have shown, more education doesn’t always equate to more earnings.

Yet today, thanks to state high school graduation requirements and school accountability systems, we only give kids time to take a few CTE courses as electives. Instead, we should embrace models from Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, where many sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds spend most, if not all, of their time in apprenticeships, at workplaces, while finishing coursework that purposefully connects academics to technical skills. We might, in other words, allow students to choose to finish their core academic courses after their sophomore year, and spend junior and senior years getting ready for the real world, as Maryland’s Kirwan Commission [recommended](#). And if we stop fetishizing college degrees, we might even help to stem the [populist backlash against meritocracy](#) that is shaking our society and our politics.

We talk a good game on career and technical education and the “dignity of work.” It’s time for us to walk the walk, too.

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

The American Federation of Teachers has decided that online misinformation has to be combated. To that end, the union has launched a national partnership with NewsGuard “a leading

anti-misinformation tool” which AFT claims will “protect and champion legitimate journalism and fact-based reporting and to help educators and their students navigate a sea of online disinformation.”

Under the terms of the pathbreaking licensing agreement, coinciding with National News Literacy Week, the AFT’s 1.7 million members, tens of millions of kids they teach, and their families, can now receive free, real-time “traffic light” news ratings and detailed “Nutrition Label” reviews, via a licensed copy of NewsGuard’s browser extension, whenever they search the web for news and information.

For years, educators have fought battles against suspect sourcing, with their students often misled by dubious outlets and spam sites posing as “news.” NewsGuard offers a practical solution, alerting students and educators to those sites while also providing a valuable lesson in media literacy.

But many conservative news sites are not happy with AFT’s move.

A recent study by the [Media Research Center \(MRC\)](#), a conservative media watchdog, reveals that NewsGuard has an “extraordinary” political bias that makes left-wing news outlets more likely to get a better rating. The [study](#) found that outlets rated “left” or “lean left” received an average [NewsGuard score of 93](#), while sites considered “right” or “lean right” had an average rating of just 66. The MRC reports that Jacobin, a socialist magazine which calls itself the “leading voice of the American left” and champions such notions as [the nationalization of supermarkets](#), receives a score of 92.5 by NewsGuard. The Nation, also a far-left magazine which has [defended the looting and vandalism](#) committed during the widespread riots in the summer of 2020, also has a 92.5 NewsGuard score.

To get both sides of the story go [here](#) and [here](#).

It seems that, increasingly, schools are being accused of coaching children to go against their born gender. As *Chalkbeat Review* reports,

Salinas, California parents are expressing their [outrage](#) after a hidden “Gay-Straight Alliance” club at a local middle school was uncovered last month. Jessica Konen alleged that her child was “coached” into a transgender identity (without her or her husband’s knowledge) after two teachers investigated the child’s internet search history, which also included evidence of depression.

Amid the controversy, CPS was called on Konen when she used incorrect pronouns at a school meeting.

“It made me feel very, very small as a parent. I was unaware of anything. Not one time had she mentioned to me ‘Oh, I think that I want to change my name,’ or ‘I’m transgender’ or anything. Nothing. I only heard bisexual one time, and that was it,” Konen said.

This practice of hiding information from parents is growing in prevalence. Teachers in Florida secretly [met](#) with a student regarding their gender identity. The parents were informed of this development only after the student attempted suicide as a result of a gender identity crisis. Meanwhile, Keller Independent School District in Texas is [requiring](#) parents to sign an NDA before they challenge pornographic materials in the district.

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

With all the hubbub surrounding schools these days, *Washington Post* writer Laura Meckler opines that “Public education is facing a crisis of epic proportions.” Her piece begins,

Test scores are down, and violence is up. Parents are screaming at school boards, and children are crying on the couches of social workers. Anger is rising. Patience is falling.

For public schools, the numbers are all going in the wrong direction. Enrollment is down. Absenteeism is up. There aren't enough teachers, substitutes or bus drivers. Each phase of the pandemic brings new logistics to manage, and Republicans are planning political campaigns this year aimed squarely at failings of public schools.

Public education is facing a crisis unlike anything in decades, and it reaches into almost everything that educators do: from teaching math, to counseling anxious children, to managing the building.

Political battles are now a central feature of education, leaving school boards, educators and students in the crosshairs of culture warriors. Schools are on the defensive about their pandemic decision-making, their curriculums, their policies regarding race and racial equity and even the contents of their libraries. Republicans — who see education as a winning political issue — are pressing their case for more “parental control,” or the right to second-guess educators’ choices. Meanwhile, an energized school choice movement has capitalized on the pandemic to promote alternatives to traditional public schools.

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

As schools are embattled, what will parents choose to do? More than half of U.S. parents (52%) have or are considering finding a different school for their child according to a recent survey done by National School Choice Week, a nonprofit charity whose purpose is to raise awareness about school choice.

Most respondents (36%) who said they have or are considering transferring their child said it's because they want or wanted a higher quality education. A close second (34%) were parents worried about the disruption to their child's education from the school's COVID-19 protocols.

Overall, nearly 70% of parents said they support school choice, with 73% of African-American parents, 72% of Hispanic or Latino parents and 69% of white parents in favor.

Another poll conducted by RealClear Opinion Research polled more than 1,700 registered voters and found 74% of them support school choice, and it proved true across party lines, with 83% of Republicans, 69% of Independents and 70% of Democrats either somewhat or strongly supporting the idea.

To learn more, 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