



# California Teachers Empowerment Network

*Standing out from the crowd, fully informed on the issues*

March 16, 2022

Dear Colleague,

As things get back to normal in California, a troubling poll reveals that “confidence in California public schools has declined as voters and parents overwhelmingly have concluded that the quality of education worsened during the pandemic,” according to a UC Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies poll co-sponsored by the *Los Angeles Times*.

*Pollsters asked voters to give schools a letter-grade rating from A to F — essentially the same question asked of voters in a [2011 USC Dornsife/Los Angeles Times poll](#). A decade ago, the results [were interpreted as sobering](#); the numbers are worse now.*

*Statewide, about 21% of voters give the state's public schools an A or B; in 2011 it was 27%. Meanwhile, D or F grades statewide rose 15 percentage points in the last decade, from 13% to 28%.*

*In the city of Los Angeles, 18% of voters give schools an A or B; about 1 in 3 voters give D or F marks to public schools. Comparable figures are not available for 2011.*

*"The decline is significant," Mark DiCamillo, director of the IGS poll, who has surveyed voters in California for more than four decades. "It could be a long-term trend, but I would certainly think that the impact of COVID has probably contributed to it."*

*As in 2011, voters still give their local schools higher marks on average than they give to schools statewide, but the gap has shrunk. Statewide, 35% of voters give an A or B to "the public schools attended by children who live in your neighborhood."*

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

In the March 8 issue of *The New York Times*, Dana Goldstein writes, “It's 'Alarming': Children Are Severely Behind in Reading.”

*The literacy crisis didn't start with the pandemic. In 2019, results on national and international exams showed stagnant or declining American performance in reading, and widening gaps between high and low performers. The causes are multifaceted, but many experts point to a shortage of educators trained in phonics and phonemic awareness — the foundational skills of linking the sounds of spoken English to the letters that appear on the page.*

*The pandemic has compounded those issues.*

*Children spent months out of the classroom, where they were supposed to learn the basics of reading — the ABCs, what sound a “b” or “ch” makes. Many first and second-graders returned to classrooms needing to review parts of the kindergarten curriculum. But nearly half of public schools have teaching vacancies, especially in special education and the elementary grades, according to a federal survey conducted in December and January.*

*Even students with well-trained teachers have had far fewer hands-on hours with them than before the pandemic, which has been defined by closures, uneven access to online instruction, quarantine periods and — even on the best days — virus-related interruptions to regular classroom routines. Now, schools are under pressure to boost literacy as quickly as possible, so students gain the reading skills they need to learn the rest of the curriculum, from math word problems to civics lessons.*

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

According to a study by the University of California San Diego, disruptions to in-person learning during the COVID-19 pandemic have increased interest in expanding online tutoring to K-12 students.

*A pilot program intended to measure the results of online tutoring for K-12 students has shown promising results in helping them recover from pandemic-driven learning loss, researchers at UC San Diego announced Wednesday.*

*...“Our program explores the possibilities of a low-cost model with volunteer tutors which has the potential to reach more students in need,” said Sally Sadoff, associate professor of economics and strategic management at UCSD’s Rady School of Management and one of the study’s co-authors.*

*“The pandemic has been a seismic and ongoing disruption to K-12 schooling,” Sadoff said. “We find the tutoring offered during our study helped participants close about a quarter to a third of the learning loss during COVID.”*

*According to Sadoff and her colleagues, disruptions to in-person learning during the COVID-19 pandemic have increased interests in expanding online tutoring to K-12 students. However, expanding virtual academic support across public schools is constrained by high program costs and limited local supplies of tutors.*

*According to the findings, students who got more hours of online tutoring experienced better results.*

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

To state the obvious, it is not only kids who have been affected by the pandemic. *U.S. News and World Report* reveals, “New Federal Data Shows Pandemic's Effects on Teaching Profession.”

*“The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to a staffing shortage in the nation’s schools,” Commissioner Peggy Carr of the National Council of Education Statistics said in a statement.*

*“Public schools report they are struggling with a variety of staffing issues, including widespread vacancies, and a lack of prospective teachers,” she said. “These issues are disrupting school operations. Schools have resorted to using more teachers as well as non-teaching staff outside of their intended duties, increasing class sizes, sharing teachers and staff with other schools, and curtailing student transportation due to staff shortages.”*

*As of January 2022, 44% of public schools reported having at least one teaching vacancy, and 61% of them specifically identified the COVID-19 pandemic as a cause of those vacancies.*

*Among schools that reported vacancies, special education was identified as the teaching position with the most vacancies, with 45% of schools reporting this vacancy, followed by general elementary and substitute teachers, which 31% and 20% of schools reported, respectively.*

*In addition, roughly half of public schools – 49% – reported having at least one non-teaching staff vacancy. Custodial staff was identified as the staff position with the most vacancies, with 28% of schools reporting this vacancy, followed by transportation staff and nutrition staff positions, which 14% of schools reported for both positions.*

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

A civil-rights attorney and mother of ten children who lives in Northern Virginia makes the case that “school choice matters now more than ever.”

*It was three in the morning, and I woke up in a panic. A familiar panic. I’m a mother who needs to educate my seven youngest children. My eldest son who is still at home will begin his first year in college this fall. I’m also a Catholic — and that means that, these days, I’m looking at some frightening bills for education.*

*I went to my local public high school in the late '80s. There was nothing particularly awful about it. But then along came gender ideology and critical race theory, and now I do have a problem with government-run schools — including the academically excellent one in my neighborhood.*

*My four oldest children at home attend a Christian liberal-arts school, and the three youngest attend my local Catholic parochial school. I receive tuition assistance, but I still have to find over \$50,000 per academic year for tuition, books, and fees. Financial-aid offices in most colleges across the country rely on the criteria set by a federal form to assess a family’s financial situation — factors that do not account for private-school tuition for younger siblings. My college-bound son just received a financial-aid award from his dream school. And the amount I’m asked to pay is still too much. Hence my latest nocturnal panic.*

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

The use of restorative justice in schools has been on the rise, but Fordham Institute's Daniel Buck thinks this approach to discipline is a terrible idea.

*In the past decade, the role of the teacher in schools has slowly shifted from pedagogue to therapist. Perhaps the most glaring example of this shift is the practice called "circle conversations." These circles are cousins of the non-punitive approach to discipline called restorative justice, and are intended to be community-building prophylactics.*

*While the ritual—I mean classroom practice—can vary from school to school, it has a few common characteristics: students sit in a circle, pass around a talking piece, and discuss open-ended questions, often deeply personal ones. The NEA wrote positively of a school that incorporates them into classrooms weekly.*

*Take a step back, however, and these circles closely resemble group therapy. Consider a few example questions that one author at Edutopia suggests:*

*How does the state of your mental health affect you as a person?  
What do you do to relieve stress?  
Who would you like to forgive?*

*And now compare those to a few recommended questions at a counseling center:*

*How do you think your negative thoughts influence your behavior?  
What are some things that make you feel stressed? How are you coping with these things?  
Is there anyone in your life you're struggling to forgive? Why?*

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

"Teachers second-guess letter grades as they search for a fairer way," writes Valerie Strauss in *The Washington Post*.

*Districts around the country — from California to Virginia and more — are experimenting to level the competition and focus on what experts think matters most: What should a grade represent? How can grades be used to motivate students to learn and retain information? How can grading be equitable? The change has sparked headlines decrying the [elimination of D's and F's](#). But many teachers had already stopped giving those grades during the pandemic.*

*"We're aligning the letter grade with actual learning," said Moreno, who works in the Alhambra Unified School District in Southern California. "It's sad that it had to be for a worldwide pandemic to get people to look at this, but at the same time, it's good that it's happening. It had to."*

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

A new film about education, which opened in select theaters March 14, features Carol Swain, Rebecca Friedrichs, Robert Woodson et al. It is sure to be controversial, especially with the teachers unions. From the website:

*Whose Children Are They? is the groundbreaking and powerfully persuasive documentary featuring brave teachers, empowered parents, and front-line experts who pull back the curtain about what is truly happening in our public schools today.*

*This film will be the starting point for a full cultural conversation about the need to return to the original intent of education, not indoctrination. “Whose Children Are They?” will inform and equip parents, teachers, grandparents and concerned citizens, to partner together for the innocence and well-being of our children. It will also educate all education stakeholders on the corrupting influence of teachers’ unions, and the vital importance of removing them from our schools, in addition to educating parents on the need to stand with good teachers, and empower teachers to stage a mass Union Exit.*

To learn more about the film, 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 the CTEN Facebook page, which 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/> As a non-profit, we exist only through the generosity of others. Thanks, as always.

Sincerely,  
Larry Sand  
CTEN President