

California EDUCATOR

California Teachers Association March 2009 Volume 13 Issue 6

*"If you want to go fast,
go alone. If you want
to go far, go together."*

African proverb

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READING IS COOL!**
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VIRTUAL FIELD TRIPS
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SCHOOL BEHIND BARS
TEACHING INCARCERATED STUDENTS
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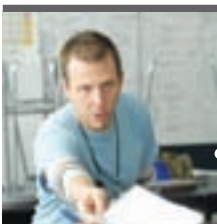


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¡Sí Se Puede! ¿Por Qué No?

BY CTA PRESIDENT DAVID A. SANCHEZ

By Friday, March 13, more than 26,500 California educators had received pink slips from their school districts. On that day, educators, students, parents and community members showed their support for public education at “Pink Friday” events all across our state. CTA’s statewide day of action drew attention to the more than \$11 billion in cuts to California schools and colleges. Members held flagpole rallies before school and marches and protests after school. In many areas local businesses offered support. In Oxnard, for example, employees of Gold’s Gym put aside their black uniforms for the day and wore pink in support of public education. Educators and community members also made great use of CTA’s www.pinkfriday09.org website, which helped teachers plan countless Pink Friday rallies and organize in an unprecedented way.

This is all happening in the wake of the Legislature passing and the governor signing an 18-month state budget package. The good news is, we have a budget. The bad news is, we have a budget. In order to close the state’s \$42 billion deficit, the compromise budget cuts more than \$11 billion from public education. That is the single largest cut to education in our state’s history. It will impact a generation of students. It is why taking action on Pink Friday was of such importance — to mobilize public education supporters for the May 19 special election.

As part of the state budget agreement, California voters will decide on six initiatives during a special election (*see page 32 for details*). These initiatives work in tandem, so that if any of them fail, education will surely face more cuts and the state will be back to square one with trying to balance the budget. You can be certain that if all these initiatives don’t pass, partisan gridlock will make a new compromise even harder to reach. The new Senate Republi-

can leader has vowed he will not support new taxes in any form.

In an emergency meeting last month, the CTA Board voted unanimously to take an interim support position on Proposition 1B, which starts the process of repaying \$9.3 billion owed to schools under the minimum funding guarantee. The Board felt it was imperative to take a support position on Prop. 1B so that CTA could sign the ballot arguments. But we need to bear in mind that many of these initiatives are dependent upon one another. For example, Prop. 1B sets up the repayment process, but Proposition 1A actually *provides* the funding to begin the repayment. At press time, State Council was meeting to consider and define our positions on all six initiatives.

In the midst of all this calamity, CTA also had some tremendous victories in the budget fight this year. First, we protected the state’s minimum school funding law, Proposition 98. Getting Prop. 1B on the ballot was a huge concession from lawmakers. CTA also fought off attempts to shorten the school year by five days. And CTA protected the state’s Class Size Reduction program, defeating several attempts to gut the program and give local school districts full flexibility to spend CSR money any way they wanted. Without CSR, many districts would be looking at even greater layoffs.

I want to thank all of you for getting involved and making your voices heard at Pink Friday events and on the www.pinkfriday09.org website. Be sure to continue to use the site, join in the discussion, post your Pink Friday photos and stories, and keep on using this incredible tool to help organize in support of the May 19 initiatives. This is our opportunity to turn the tide for public education in California. It’s our chance to do what we do best: take care of our state’s children.

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¡Sí Se Puede! [It can be done! Why not?], words inspired by César Chávez,
¿Por Qué No? encourage us to remember that, together, we can achieve great things.



WHAT'S NEW AT CTA.ORG

- > **Budget update**
Learn more about the recently passed state budget.
www.cta.org/issues/current/Budget_Crisis_2008-09.htm
- > **Women's History Month**
Celebrate the history and contributions of women during Women's History Month and year round.
www.cta.org/community/other/Womens+History+Month.htm
- > **ESP updates**
Find updated information for Education Support Professionals, including information for ESP who receive RIF notices.
www.cta.org/membership/esp
- > **Pink Friday website forum**
Tell your Pink Friday event stories, upload event photos, or open discussions with your fellow members.
www.pinkfriday09.org/forum
- > **Ethnic Minority Early Identification & Development Program**
Discover more about CTA's commitment to increasing ethnic minority leadership and staff.
www.cta.org/mycta/people/Leadership+Development.htm
- > **IFT Early Childhood Education Alliance**
Become a member of this statewide, organizing, virtual community.
www.cta.org/community/ift

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"Maybe through education these kids can also rise above their circumstances."
Elena Johnson, Los Angeles County Education Association

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calendar	mar 09	<input type="checkbox"/> March 13 <input type="checkbox"/> March 13-15 <input type="checkbox"/> March 20-22	Pink Friday Good Teaching Conference, Anaheim CTA State Council of Education, Los Angeles
	apr 09	<input type="checkbox"/> April 1-2 <input type="checkbox"/> April 17 <input type="checkbox"/> April 24-26 <input type="checkbox"/> April 24-26 <input type="checkbox"/> April 30	Secondary Literacy Summit, Costa Mesa Incentive grants deadline: Presidents Conf./Summer Inst. Region 4 Leadership Conference, Irvine CCA Conference/Spring Council and WHO Awards El Día de los Niños
	may 09	<input type="checkbox"/> May 6 <input type="checkbox"/> May 13 <input type="checkbox"/> May 15-17 <input type="checkbox"/> May 19 <input type="checkbox"/> May 19	School Nurses Day Day of the Teacher CTA State Council of Education, Los Angeles CTA ESP Day Statewide special election
	jul 09	<input type="checkbox"/> July 1-6 <input type="checkbox"/> July 20-24	NEA Representative Assembly, San Diego Presidents Conference, Asilomar
	aug 09	<input type="checkbox"/> Aug. 2-7	Summer Institute, UCLA

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UPDATE

TEACHERS FINALLY TREATED FAIRLY IN FAIRFIELD

In March 2008 *California Educator* covered a story on reconstitution at Fairfield Suisun Unified Teachers Association (F-SUTA). Members there charged that the involuntary transfer of 41 teachers from their school sites was based on their union activism, age, skin color and sexual orientation. F-SUTA alleged that transfers were made under the pretext of reconstitution — a sanction under No Child Left



Behind (NCLB) for schools that fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for four consecutive years.

In the months that followed, F-SUTA and CTA fought back. They charged that the transfers were illegal and filed claims with the state's Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) and the Department of Fair Employment and Housing, and brought griev-

ances to the level of arbitration in the teachers' defense. PERB issued a complaint in the matter.

A settlement reached last fall finally vindicated teachers, says F-SUTA Presi-

dent Melanie Driver. Transfer rights have been restored. And teachers involuntarily transferred were given \$3,500 and the right to relocate to their old school sites if they signed a waiver promising no further legal action. Most opted to sign.

"The settlement corrects the wrong that never should have happened," says Driver. "It is clear by all of the evidence that these teachers were discriminated against. This settlement means that these teachers are vindicated. Justice has been served, and our students and community will benefit from this important victory."

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

In the November edition, you ran an article titled "CalSTRS, CalPERS benefits protected by law." It was very confusing because 90 percent of the article discussed how well the investment fund is doing and how it can withstand the hit from the current financial collapse. But if retirement is guaranteed by law, then why even discuss the fund? The article left unclear to what extent retirement is protected by law, which law is it, how does the law interact with the fund, and what happens if there are a series of years like the last.

Steven L. Rice, Simi Valley

Many CTA members were concerned about the stability of those funds due to the recent economic downturn. With that article

we sought to provide them with reassurance through our interviews with CalSTRS and CalPERS executives. We are committed to keeping you informed about retirement issues. Please look for more information in upcoming issues.

Editor

Dear Editor:

While I thoroughly believe that laughter is a time-proven strategy for teaching and learning, not to mention just



going through life, it is very important for educators to be aware of the potential destructive powers of some humor as a tool. Your article in the December-January issue of *California Educator* lauds the use of "foreign accents" as a tool for humor, among many other ideas. I have personally received complaints from international students about faculty who use fake accents to make a point appear to be humorous. My point is that humor is very powerful, and should be used carefully and judiciously. Laughter is valuable when it teaches a good, strengthening lesson. When it undermines or belittles, it can be more destructive than a serious lecture.

Rachel O'Malley, San Jose State University

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School behind bars

Probation officers stand behind bulletproof glass to press the buzzer that opens the door to Nidorf Juvenile Hall. After you enter, the door bangs shut loudly. You can't help but wonder how teenagers — who supposedly have their whole lives ahead of them — feel when that door slams shut, knowing they could be locked up for decades or the rest of their lives.

Most kids only stay at Nidorf a few days or months, but there are hundreds of others tried as adults and facing years or decades of incarceration. Many will be sent to adult correctional facilities on their 18th birthdays. While some will be released when they are 25, others may return to life on the outside when they are senior citizens. And some are serving life sentences.

It seems strange to call them “kids,” but that’s what they are. Nearly all of them are poor and children of color. And they don’t stay kids for long.

“In the first year, they may go from 15 to 50,” says a Nidorf teacher.

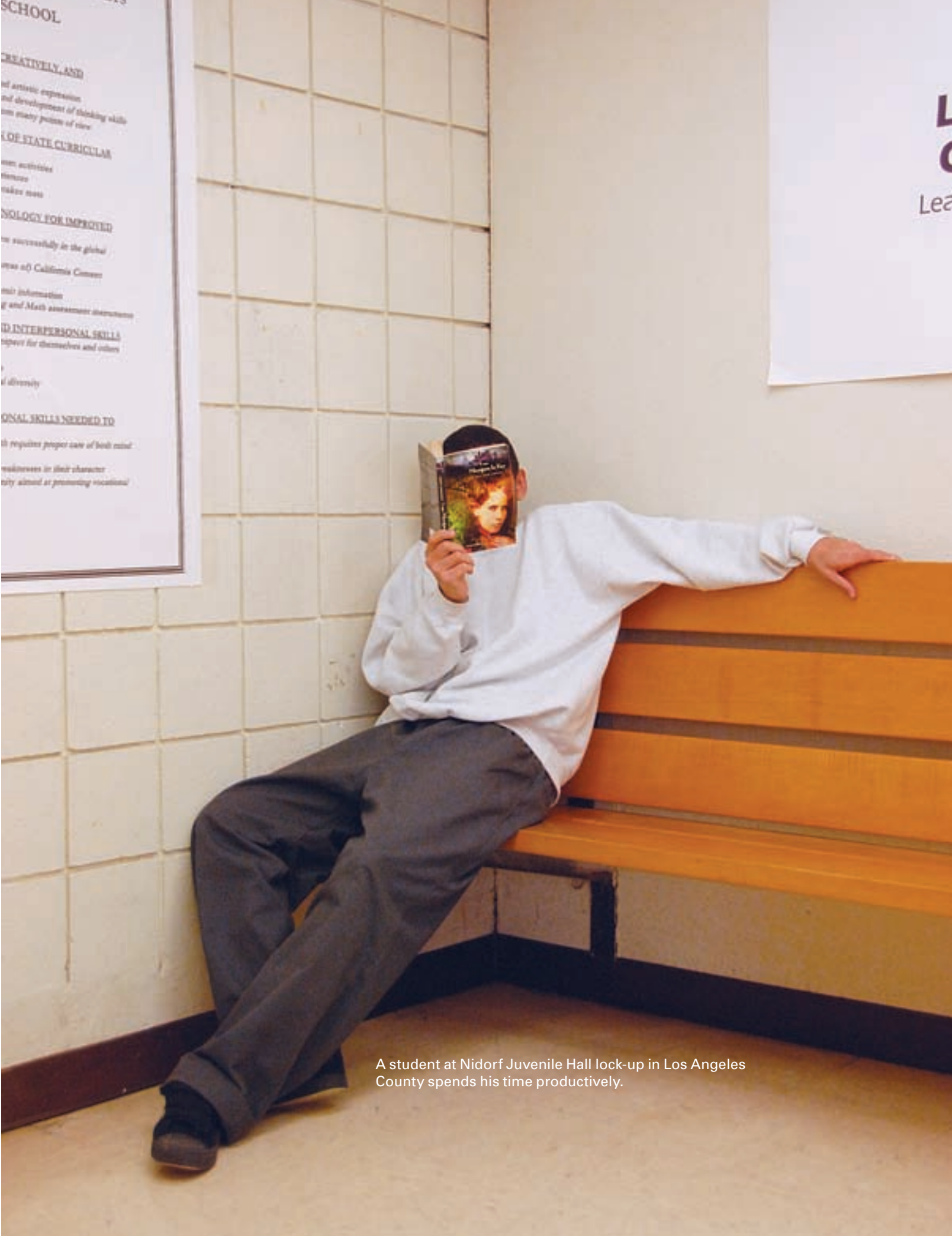
Nidorf teachers and counselors are members of the Los Angeles County Education Association (LACEA). They are dedicated and courageous. Most love what they do. But it’s not easy — even with a captive audience.

Teachers never turn their back on a

classroom, even when writing on the board. They count the number of pencils they distribute at the beginning of class and count them when class is over, putting them in wooden pencil holders and making sure there are no empty slots. Sharpened pencils can be weapons. And even with probation officers close at hand, they can never let down their guard.

Journalists must wait a month to receive a court order signed by a judge for permission to visit classrooms in Los Angeles County juvenile detention facilities. The court order stipulates that journalists may not ask about the criminal histories or activities that brought minors here. Many of them have cases still pending. Because they are under the age of 18, their faces may not be shown in photographs. Identifying tattoos must also be excluded from photos. >>>

Stories by Sherry Posnick-Goodwin • Photos by Scott Buschman



A student at Nidorf Juvenile Hall lock-up in Los Angeles County spends his time productively.

Most of Nidorf's "residents" are gang members. The number of gangs has increased dramatically throughout the Los Angeles area during the past several years. LACEA members at Nidorf used to pride themselves on knowing which gang was based in which neighborhood. Now there are hundreds of gangs everywhere, they say, and it's too difficult to keep track of them all.

The more recent gangs don't have household names like the Crips and Bloods. The newcomers have names such as the Harpy's, Orphans, Westside Wilmas, Langdon Street, and the Wanderers, to name a few. Members of all these gangs share one thing in common at Nidorf, say teachers — intense hatred of each other.

From inside the courtyard Nidorf al-

most looks like a college campus, with brick buildings and green lawns. The buildings on the perimeter of the lawn are the classrooms and dormitories for youths with short sentences. When youths pass from one of these buildings to another, they are accompanied by probation officers carrying batons and mace. The youths walk slowly with their hands behind their backs, single file. Nidorf has mostly boys, but there is also a girls' unit, and the genders are separated at all times.

In the middle of the lawn is the "Compound," a series of buildings where the most serious HROs (High Risk Offenders) are housed and educated. Fencing topped by razor wire surrounds the Compound. It is a cage within a cage. Inside are youths that have committed crimes of violence, including murder. Students entering and leaving the Compound are shackled.

Nidorf is located in Sylmar, site of the fire that devastated many homes in November. The fire came to the edge of Nidorf — just before the fence — blackening the ground. The teens were not evacuated. Probation officials say they were never in danger, although parents were angry. Many said their children felt terrified and

abandoned as the flames crept closer and they were unable to flee with other Sylmar residents.

Nidorf may be a world away from other public schools, but perhaps the strangest thing is that Nidorf classrooms are amazingly similar to other classrooms in California. Colorful posters hang on the wall. Teachers work hard to make sure students understand the material and offer individual attention when possible. For the most part, students are well behaved. After a few minutes, it's easy to forget where you are.

Off to a better start

When a juvenile offender enters Nidorf, one of the first stops is with Mary Ricks at the Guidance Center. She enrolls youths into the county's educational system. The first thing she does is look at transcripts from other schools to determine what classes the newcomers will need.

"We want to put them where they left off and give them the classes they need to graduate," says Ricks. "We want to keep them moving through high school in an orderly, systematic fashion."

It's a tall order, considering most of the youths arrive at Nidorf with average math and reading levels between third and sixth grade. Some of them, she says, haven't been to school in a year or more.

"I like the challenge of it," says Ricks. "I'm working with people who are dynamic. They aren't here for a quick buck. They are here because they are interested in helping these kids."

Next stop for students is Roxanne Lee, the education counselor with a kindly smile and a regal black hat. She places them into academic courses and tracks



LEFT: The view from outside Nidorf Juvenile Hall in Los Angeles County. **OPPOSITE:** English language development teacher Valerie Garcia has taught male students in the general units at Nidorf for 11 years.

their progress. Report cards come every 80 days in “the hall,” with students constantly coming and going. If their grades or transcripts need to be “archived” she takes care of that and makes sure students stay on track.

“How they act depends on how they’re treated,” Lee says of the students. “And if they’re treated well, they act just like anybody else.”

Last year, four students in the Compound earned their high school diplomas at Nidorf. Many have passed the GED (General Educational Development Test), the high school equivalency exam. Some might wonder why this is so important, especially for youths who are facing life sentences or release dates when they are 80 or 90 years old.

“With a diploma or GED, they will get more privileges once they are in prison,” answers Lee matter-of-factly. “They will get better jobs in prison. And some might get an earlier release date with a diploma.” Students who complete their GED or diploma may even enroll in college courses at Nidorf.

For many students, school takes on more importance than it did on the “outs.” When students are incarcerated, school can become the highlight of an otherwise dull and regimented day. For those who act badly in class, the alternative is being taken away by a probation officer to spend the day in isolation and boredom. Most prefer school.

Nidorf, like other public schools, is under pressure to raise test scores. There are “prep classes” for the California High School Exit Exam and after-school tutoring classes for students struggling to earn a diploma or GED. There is even a PTA — yes, a PTA — for the Compound’s students with long-term and life sentences. Nidorf is proud to be the first juvenile detention facility in the state to have a PTA, founded a year ago. Members meet monthly to talk about their concerns,

many of them typical of any PTA. Parents, for example, are given tips on how to encourage their children to achieve better academically and stay focused. And parents express concerns to teachers and staff about their children’s educational environment.

“We talk about grades, report cards and mental health at PTA meetings,” says Montague Westmore, Nidorf’s principal. “We think it is making a difference.”

Teaching to the general population

Valerie Garcia gets respect by giving it. You have to be genuine with the students, the teacher says, because if they sense falseness or weakness, they’ll walk all over you. She describes herself as not exactly fearful, but rather careful.

“I have developed a sixth sense,” she explains. “Sometimes you can just feel it when there is a particular student you have to be careful with, in terms of ‘read-

“How they act DEPENDS ON HOW THEY’RE TREATED. If they’re treated well, they act just like anybody else.”

Roxanne Lee, counselor

ing’ kids. And I never turn my back on the kids — that’s an absolute.”

Garcia, an ELD (English language development) teacher here for 11 years, teaches male students in the general units. While not incarcerated for extreme violence, their crimes include both misdemeanors and felonies. Their stay at Nidorf could range from three days to a few months.

“I do get attached to them,” she admits. “A lot of them are facing difficult situations at home. They end up here because they were not in the best situations.”

Some of her students tell her what got



them into trouble, and others are more secretive — especially if they are accused of committing a sex offense. She doesn’t pry and when they do want to talk, she listens.

“Sometimes all they want to do is just to talk and have someone listen to them,” she says. “It’s as simple as that.”

But she is aware that her students can be volatile, citing an incident when she was shoved by a student. So she always stays on her guard and if she needs assistance, she immediately calls the probation officers stationed right outside the room.

“Probation is always willing to help. They helped when there was a fight this morning,” she says. “In some ways it’s much safer than teaching on the ‘outs.’”

Garcia likes having variety and a challenge, and in this job she has both.

“I like it here because the environment is always changing. Some days you will have a really easy day, and the next day could be really difficult with fights. And the kids are several grade levels below where they should be. Most of them really do want to learn. But they are preoccupied with things like court, so their minds may be elsewhere. For other youths, schoolwork and being in class gets their mind off their problems.”



What makes her job worthwhile is seeing students learn, and seeing them turn around in a positive way once they've left Nidorf. "I see them at the mall. Sometimes they come up and hug me and tell me they're in school or have a job. It gives you a sense of hope."

Teaching very young inmates

Elena Johnson teaches the "babies" at Nidorf — delinquents 14 and younger. She has them all day in a self-contained classroom. She has been doing it for nearly 20 years and has had students as young as age 9.

Her students often don't have a full understanding of why they have been placed in a juvenile facility — especially, she says, if it's for a sex offense or touching others inappropriately. They write in their journals about their confusion. Many of them have never suffered consequences for negative behavior before, nor had role models to tell them right from wrong.

"Sometimes they cry because they don't want to be in class. Or they camouflage their feelings by being aggressive and hostile, cussing people out. I reassure them and tell them not to be scared, because adults are watching over them. It's important for them to feel safe because when they don't, they can't focus."

After a few days, they generally settle down and connect with her, says Johnson. "Once they make that connection, I

find they are very hungry for education and some direction," she says. "Maybe because I'm a female they look at me like a mom."

There is no formula for success; she is constantly changing strategies in the classroom. "If someone says 'I don't learn by reading quietly, I learn by reading aloud,' I say 'OK.' I have to be flexible with them."

Johnson, raised in the Philippines, says education helped her to rise above poverty. "Maybe through education these kids can also rise above their circumstances," she says. "I want the best for them. They are not throw-away kids. My mission is to help make their lives better."

Bridging the gaps

John Clayton sees his job as "bridging the gaps" in their education. Because so many of his students missed chunks of instructional time at regular school, they need to make up for lost time in his math and science classes.

"I asked my class today how many of them missed seventh grade, and half of them raised their hands," says Clayton. "I asked how many missed eighth grade, and more raised their hands. And it was the same when I asked about ninth grade. It's a challenge, because so many prerequisites are needed for algebra and geometry. I'm filling in the holes while also teaching standards-based curriculum."

Clayton, who was named Court School Teacher of the Year, spent 10 years in regular public schools before arriving at Nidorf two years ago. He wouldn't trade it for the world.

"There's nothing like seeing kids 'get it' — and these are the kids that have been written off," he explains enthusiastically. "To see them learn and grasp the material — such as quadratic equations — is exciting to me. Working with these kids is far more rewarding than anything else. Everyone in this world has value. And these kids have shown time and time again that once they 'get it' they can



The view from inside Nidorf Juvenile Hall. **INSET:** Two-way radios are an essential tool of the trade for teachers.

ABOVE: Nidorf education counselor Roxanne Lee places students into academic courses and tracks their progress.

OPPOSITE: Elena Johnson teaches students 14 years old and younger at Nidorf.

rise to the occasion.”

David Berke assesses students in the general population, but in between the tests he administers, he always takes time to encourage students to look at their stay at Nidorf as an opportunity so they can continue to do well after they leave.

“I tell them it’s not the end, but the beginning. Most of my students feel that they have a limited amount of choices. And I want to change their thinking, and help them realize they have unlimited choices.”

Teaching in the Compound

After the regular school day ends, Berke teaches after-school college courses in American history to students in the Compound, the cage within a cage in the middle of the courtyard. He must go through a series of locked gates to enter his classroom to teach students with long-term sentences for violent crimes.

Like all Nidorf classes, the classroom has its own bathroom, so students don’t

have to go outside to use the restroom. The door to the bathroom has a small window. Unlike classes in the general unit, there is a probation officer stationed inside his room at all times.

“I’m really proud of what these kids are doing,” says Berke. “They are really working hard.”

When asked if he’s ever afraid, he says “yes” without hesitating. “You’d be a fool not to be,” he says. “You can’t ever let your guard down, because you are dealing with a very different type of environment here.”

Offering students a sense of hope is easy when kids have short stays. But with students facing long sentences, it’s quite different.

“It’s hard to give kids a sense of hope when they have sentences of 10, 20, 30 years or life,” he explains. “I guess you could say my goal is to help give these students a positive sense of *self*.”

When you walk into Robert Earl’s classroom inside the Compound, you might think you have entered an honors class or magnet program in an urban high school. Earl, dressed impeccably in a suit and tie, sits back and watches proudly as a boy stands at the front of the economics class, leading a spirited classroom discussion about blackmail, democracy and the mobilization of workers during World War I. Colorful posters hang on the wall and the students appear to be relaxed and engaged. At times there is laughter.

“I find the best way to teach this class is the way I would teach any class,” says Earl, who has worked at Nidorf since 2006. “I try to make it comfortable and inviting, run like a class I would want my own children to be in. My goal is for these students to let their guard down so they can allow education to happen.

“I get kids everyone thinks are hardened criminals and let them act like kids. When they enjoy learning, they become indistinguishable from any other kids on the outside.”

He allows students to lead class dis-



cussions while he plays the role of “guide on the side vs. sage on the stage,” because he believes that students don’t learn as much when they are just being lectured to. But learning doesn’t happen overnight. When new arrivals first enter his classroom, they are anything but enthusiastic. Usually they are highly resistant and defiant. Little by little, he says, their defense mechanisms break down. Other students urge them to try. Before long, they are trying, too.

“Sometimes the only thing that will cheer them up is trying to learn and achieve something,” he explains.

Even though most of his students have committed violent crimes, he is not afraid of them and is sympathetic about the circumstances that brought them to Nidorf. As they tell him their stories and talk about the crimes they are accused of, he realizes that many of them never had a chance.

“I had one 15-year-old who recently looked up at me and said, ‘Mr. Earl, there was never a day growing up when I didn’t





ting. It's easier to just look at them in the here and now, he explains.

"I try not to get into their business," says the math teacher. "I see them as my students irrespective of whatever they have done. And no matter what they have done, they are still my students. I am not here to condemn them; I just want to make their lives a little bit better."

Ozor uses a projector to write on the board so he never has to turn his back on students. He walks around and helps them individually to make sure they are "getting it." And more often than not, they are.

"I really am learning," says one boy. "I dropped out when I was younger. Now I just want to get my GED or my diploma. The teachers here, and Mr. Ethelbert, are good. They know how to teach in a way so I can learn this."

"The teacher's all right," says another boy who is close to his 18th birthday. "We're just kick-back here. My goal is to get a diploma. I already have 103 credits."



John Clayton
Los Angeles County
Education Association

"This is a difficult job," admits Ozor. "The culture we are dealing with is one where the kids aren't used to being in the classroom. They are used to being on the street. I tell them when they come in here that we are a family. New kids are read the rules by other students and told this is a classroom and not a place to fight. I give them tough love and tell them I want them to learn."

Students, he says, realize that it may be their "last chance" for a high school diploma because when they go to "the pen" they will probably not have that opportunity. Many of his students have been advised by relatives who have done hard time that they should get their education before leaving Nidorf,

because it will elevate their status in prison. So there is motivation to learn.

"It's true that most of them are facing long-term sentences," says Ozor. "But I try to make them understand that even with that, their lives will go on." ❖

hear gunfire.' He said that every adult in his family was in a gang or had been incarcerated. Preventing kids from being involved in gangs is the only real way to deal with the problem. Everything else is too little too late."

Ethelbert Ozor does not care to know about the circumstances that have led his students to living in the Compound, nor does he care to know any details about the crimes they are accused of commit-



Math instructor Ethelbert Ozor teaches at the "Compound" — a cage within a cage at Nidorf. **TOP LEFT:** Economics teacher Robert Earl also teaches in the Compound.

Members fight charter at juvenile detention facilities

Ashley is 17, has a gang tattoo on her neck, and has been in trouble with the law. She is spending a few months in a juvenile detention facility called Camp Scudder in northern Los Angeles County. The rural scenery is pretty, but she is hardly a happy camper. She hates just about everything about being in this facility surrounded by 12-foot fences and razor wire. Everything but the teachers, that is.

"I love the teachers here," says Ashley with a smile. "If Miss Hayward wasn't here, I wouldn't be working on my GED. Miss Hayward keeps me focused."

"The teachers are wonderful," says Shana, another incarcerated student. "They are here to teach you. Mr. Gitlin is wonderful. He is always telling me how he wants me to learn and how he wants me to make it."

They may be getting rave reviews from students, but teachers are threatened at

Camp Scudder, a detention facility for girls on medication, and the adjacent Camp Scott, which also houses female juvenile offenders. Los Angeles County supervisors are considering converting both Santa Clarita facilities to charter schools, as well as Camp Glenn Rockey in San Dimas for boys, which could mean that teachers at all three sites may lose their jobs.

The idea for charter conversion was one of 35 items in Probation's Comprehensive Education Reform Report for improving education in the county's probation camps. Under the agreement, educational responsibilities would be switched from the Los Angeles County Office of Education to the Los Angeles Department of Probation, which presently handles only law enforcement and

supervision duties at the facilities — and has no experience in the field of education.

Members of the Los Angeles County Education Association (LACEA) are on board with 34 items in the plan, but not with converting camps into charter schools. They assert that it's just an excuse for the county to hire cheaper, less experienced, non-union staff. If such a move happens in these three so-called pilot projects, it could pave the way for similar conversions throughout the 19 juvenile "court schools" staffed by LACEA members.

Initially, the move would impact 20 teachers. However, if all court schools were converted to charters, hundreds of LACEA members could potentially lose

"Sometimes charters can be successful in the right place and the right time. But this is not the time or place."

Mark Lewis, Los Angeles County Education Association President

their jobs. The plan calls for teacher salary cuts, which many believe will force current teachers out and allow the school to hire new teachers at cheaper rates.

"This is politically motivated," asserts LACEA President Mark Lewis. "This is about internal county politics and about power and control. The Probation Department sees money for our programs and says, 'We'd like to control it.' But others don't see what it will mean in terms of education for these students."

If charter conversion were to happen, says Lewis, experienced teachers would leave and novice teachers would be hired to work with the most challenging students in the state. That in itself, he says, is a recipe for disaster.

"Everyone wants to see reform and more avenues for students to succeed,"



Mark Lewis, president of the Los Angeles County Education Association, stands outside Nidorf Juvenile Hall in Los Angeles County.

says Lewis. "But we don't believe charters are the way to go. Some believe that charters are a panacea for solving all the problems in education. Sometimes charters can be successful in the right place and the right time. But this is not the time or place."

By law, it is school boards — and not county governments — that take responsibility

for authorizing charters. And converting a traditional public school into a charter school requires the signatures of at least half the number of teachers working there. Because the proponents won't get 50 percent of LACEA members on board, Lewis fears they will petition the state for a waiver to start up the schools without teacher support.

"We will fight this," vows Lewis. "We will explore court action with CTA. We are exploring legal, legislative and political remedies. It's important to fight this because if it happens here, it can happen anywhere."

Also unhappy with the plan for charter conversion are administrators at the camps, who say that for the most part, teachers are doing a good job with the challenging female populations at Camp

Susan Hayward teaches a class at Camp Scudder in Santa Clarita.

OPPOSITE: Roger Gitlin helps a student in his history class at Camp Scudder.



Scott and Scudder, who belong to some of the worst gangs in Los Angeles County. Many have been arrested for prostitution, drugs and worse.

"I really don't see the benefit of going charter," says Valerie Martin, principal of Camp Scott High School. "A lot of good ideas have come up in collaboration with others to make this school better, but these things can be accomplished in this setting."

Another administrator at Camp Scudder who wishes not to be identified agrees. "I wish they could come in here and see what my teachers do. They work so hard. New teachers would not know our environment or the programs that would work best."

Just the day before, says the Scudder administrator, there was a mini "riot" at the camp with girls rolling in the mud fighting each other. Teachers at Scudder believe that it is no coincidence that discipline has gotten much more lax at the school site, since it is the Probation Department that wants the charter conver-

sion and Probation that is supposed to enforce discipline. When discipline is not enforced, it makes teachers look bad and also makes for a more challenging learning and teaching environment.

"They are setting us up for failure," says Roger Gitlin, a history and economics teacher at Camp Scudder. "Probation is not doing its job here, and we have a facility that is devoid of rules. It has become borderline dangerous here. Probation is supposed to be providing structure for these kids and providing suitable consequences for their aberrancy — and they are not."

"The way things have become, the inmates are running the asylum," says Scudder teacher Susan Hayward. "Teachers have never put up with this kind of disrespect before. There are no rules enforced, no consequences, and kids are walking out of class and doing anything they want to do. If Probation doesn't do its job, how will it be any different with a charter school? It's beyond ridiculous."

Some of the students are well aware of

the situation and feel upset that their teachers are being treated badly.

"I think they're doing a good job," says a girl known as Bunny, 14. "They think they'll get better teachers but they won't. It's not right."

"They teach you in a way that you understand it here," agrees her classmate, Jessica, 15. "I'm at a third-grade level in math, but now I'm starting to understand algebra."

The girls, who have been at Camp Scott for a few months, are working diligently in math class. The teacher, Pat Kerschner, affectionately known as "coach" by her students, moves constantly from desk to desk to make sure all of the students understand the material.

"It's a challenge teaching here, because a lot of our students don't know their multiplication tables, and you are teaching them algebra," says Kerschner. "But it's so nice when you see a light bulb going off in their head and they get it. A lot of them have dropped out of school because they think they can't do the work. But I try to break it

down for them so it makes sense.”

No other court schools in the state have become charter schools, with the exception of San Francisco Sheriff’s Five Keys Charter School. However, that site only has students 18 and older, and it’s like comparing apples and oranges, say LACEA members.

“They are trying to compare us to a school for *adult* criminals in San Francisco,” says Edward Stawser, a counselor at Camp Scudder. “I don’t know how they can compare us. We have such a transient population. We have kids from L.A. County for a period of three to six to nine months. Most of them are here short term and many of them are reading at the second-grade



Pat Kerschner
Los Angeles County
Education Association

level. Don Knabe [of the Board of Supervisors] says we have been underperforming for years. How did he get that information? What are they comparing us to? I have no idea. That board member has never been out here or ever been out to the camps.”

“They say going charter will give us the flexibility to do innovative things that traditional schools are unable to do under the status quo,” says Gitlin. “Excuse me, but what kind of innovative things are we talking about? Circumnavigating pesky hurdles like unions and collective bargaining agreements?”

“I am hopeful that board members will rethink their position on this and give the Los Angeles County Office of



Education and its trained staff of teachers the tools necessary to continue to help these children,” adds Gitlin. “Many of these teens will be out and living in our neighborhoods soon. Let’s give them the tools to succeed.”



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Virtual field

No bus, no fuss

Despite a severe storm, there's no need to cancel a field trip to Natural Bridges State Park in Santa Cruz, the state's only preserve for monarch butterflies. Students stay dry while touring a "butterfly city in the trees," hearing a presentation about "The magic of monarchs," and even participating in a lively question-and-answer session with a park ranger. Amazingly, the students do this without leaving Pacific Beach Middle School — located 500 miles away in San Diego.

Jenny Sims, coordinator of the school's International Baccalaureate program, organized the "virtual" field trip for students through a program called PORTS, Parks Online Resources for Teachers and Students, offered by the California State Parks Department.

"For teachers, this is another resource to

make learning relevant and exciting," says Sims, a member of the San Diego Education Association. "And students get to speak with an expert. It correlates really well with the science standards. It's very cool."

"It really is cool," agrees student Sara Serafinovski. "We learn about stuff without actually going there, but we learn just as much."

"It almost feels like we're there," chimes in classmate Marco Aguilar.

Virtual field trips have become increasingly trendy at public schools, and there are hundreds of them to choose from. The PORTS trips have been especially popular with teachers.

Pacific Beach students can see ranger John Goldberg on the screen, and he can see them. But since he doesn't know their names, he re-

lies on Sims to pick students to ask questions. "That way I won't say rude things like you, in the blue jacket," he explains to the students.

Goldberg talks about the park's Monarch Grove, which provides a temporary home for over 100,000 monarchs each winter. From mid-October through the end of February, the monarchs congregate in the trees, he says. The area's mild ocean air and eucalyptus grove provide a safe roost until spring.

"How many of you have ever looked a monarch butterfly right in the eye, eyeball to eyeball?" asks Goldberg. Nobody raises their hand, so Goldberg shows them slides of a monarch's eyeball and shares some astonishing information: Monarchs have the second-best vision of all insects.

"Why do I know this? I've never seen one with glasses. And that's the only bad joke I'm going to tell you," he says, before launching into an explanation of how to tell the males from the females. (The male has narrow veins and two dots.)

"This technology allows us to reach students we were never able to reach before," says Joe von Herrmann, PORTS program manager. "There has been a huge increase in urban students, and the state parks system has never had contact with most of them. But the good news



LEFT: San Diego Education Association member Jenny Sims takes her students on a virtual field trip through the PORTS program offered by the California State Parks Department.

OPPOSITE TOP: Pacific Beach Middle School students in San Diego are led through a tour of Natural Bridges State Park in Santa Cruz.

RIGHT: Ranger John Goldberg (on screen) guides the students from 500 miles away.

trips

is that last year, PORTS served about 25,000 students.”

Started in 2005, PORTS was used in about 700 classrooms last year. There is no cost to schools; they just need the right equipment — a high-speed Internet connection and a screen and camera for videoconferencing. Schools may borrow equipment initially from PORTS, with most school coordinators deciding afterward that it’s worth \$1,500 or so to purchase the technology themselves, according to von Herrmann, who says the PORTS staff is eager to help teachers get started.

Among the units of study available through PORTS are tide pool ecology from Crystal Cove State Park, a study of elephant seals at Año Nuevo State Reserve, a government unit which provides the possibility of videoconferencing with a state legislator, a Gold Rush unit at Columbia State Historic Park, and an earth science unit from Anza Borrego Desert State Park. For more information, visit www.ports.parks.ca.gov.

Usually the ranger is inside the park — having arrived there on a four-wheel drive vehicle equipped with satellite and videoconferencing equipment — talking live to students. Other times rangers are speaking to students live in a



studio against a backdrop of the park, much like a weather reporter on television. This was the case for the virtual visit to Natural Bridges State Park, since Santa Cruz was also experiencing a severe storm that day.

Rangers on location and in the studio rely on podcasts and slides to show students things that the camera can’t view close up, such as the intricate workings of a butterfly’s eyeball.

Virtual viewing of state parks can be geared to all age groups — even 5-year-olds. Janet Simms, a kindergarten teacher at Crescent Heights Language Arts Social Justice Magnet school, says her class loved it.

“It’s a lot of fun, it really is,” says the United Teachers Los Angeles member, whose class went on a virtual trip to Anza Borrego Desert State Park. “The ranger showed them fossil bones, and students were so amazed that the

ranger could see them and hear everything they said. It’s a great way to enrich curriculum — and a great way to get children engaged and exposed to technology. It also provides an opportunity for children to ask questions. Afterwards, the children wrote thank-you letters to the ranger. It was a wonderful experience for all involved.”

The next best thing to being there

Melissa VanderMolen, a fourth-grade teacher at Taft Community School in Redwood City, has enjoyed virtual field trips with her students via the PORTS program, but says they are no substitute for real ones. Her Title I school still manages a few trips each

year, but that is only because of funding from the Field Trip Foundation, which funds trips for schools in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties (for more information, visit www.fieldtripgroup.org).

“Nothing takes the place of being there and actually seeing something,” says VanderMolen.

“Although there are numerous advantages to taking elementary school students on virtual field trips, there are also constraints when using this type of exploration,” notes Meredith Robins in an online article, “Virtual Fieldtrips in the Elementary School Classroom.”

“Unfortunately, virtual field trips cannot provide sensory experiences for all the five senses like a live field trip may be able to achieve. For example, visiting a petting zoo provides an opportunity for students to interact with animals by petting them. Naturally, a virtual field trip is simply unable to provide the sensory experiences of touch, smell and per-

Among the units of study available through PORTS are:

- > Tide pool ecology from Crystal Cove State Park
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- > A government unit which provides the possibility of videoconferencing with a state legislator
- > A Gold Rush unit at Columbia State Historic Park
- > An earth science unit from Anza Borrego Desert State Park

For more information, visit www.ports.parks.ca.gov.



Joe von Herrmann
PORTS program manager

Tips for a successful virtual trip

- Keep parents in the loop. One way might be to send home “permission slips.”
- Have a goal. Have students search for particular information and make sure that the trip explores ideas, not just places.
- Continue the lessons offline. Have students keep journals of their travels. Encourage students to bring in food, music or clothing from cultures they are exploring.
- Select a virtual field trip that meshes with your classroom’s curriculum.
- Begin or follow up your virtual field trip with at least one lesson in order to help students make connections between the virtual destination and classroom curriculum.
- Remember that virtual field trips still require structure and supervision since you are “virtually” taking your students to another location.
- Plan ahead for a virtual field trip, just as you would plan ahead for a live one.
- If you are planning to go on a real field trip, go on a virtual one of the same place first. It’s a great way of letting students know what they should expect.

From Edutopia and Meredith Robins

haps taste. A virtual field trip can only accommodate a child’s sense of sight and sound.”

Indeed, the experiences of real field trips — boarding a bus with a permission slip and bag lunch in hand; driving adult chaperones crazy by singing “99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall”; and practicing the “buddy system” so nobody gets lost — are going by the wayside. Instead, teachers are opting for jaunts along the Information Highway due to budget constraints. This is especially true in low-income areas where parents can’t afford to pay out of pocket for excursions.

Sixty percent of teachers surveyed across the nation reported decreased funding for field trips in recent years due to budget cuts and high-stakes testing required by No Child Left Behind. The *Los Angeles Times* reports that class visits to science centers, museums and zoos are becoming increasingly rare, according to site operators and educators. For

example, the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County saw a sharp decline from 2004-05, when 241,075 students visited, to last year, when only 172,764 students came. With this year’s deficit, attendance is expected to drop further.

In some districts, administrators have put the kibosh on field trips. Last year, Riverside Unified School District ordered schools to re-evaluate the necessity of any field trips not paid for by donations, reports the *Los Angeles Times*.

“My school doesn’t get buses anymore because it’s too expensive,” says Kelly Magaudda, who teaches a third- and fourth-grade combination class for gifted students at Loma Portal Elementary School in San Diego. “It costs more than \$200 for one bus trip. And it’s tough getting parents to drive.”

Magaudda, a member of the San Diego Education Association, recently brought New York City to her students via Meet Me At The Corner, which provides behind-the-scenes tours of many of the Big Apple’s most renowned landmarks. Through the website, her students visited Juilliard, saw Christmas windows downtown, and toured an art museum.

“My students loved it because their tour guides were students and offered a kid’s perspective. When kids teach other kids, they listen because they have the same vocab-



ulary. It doesn’t go over their heads.”

Her students were so inspired that they wanted to create a podcast of their own virtual field trip, says Magaudda. So they filmed an outing where students experimented with pinhole photography and linked it to Meet Me At The Corner. (It can be viewed at www.meetmeatthecorner.org/episodes/pinhole-photography-for-kids.) Any class is capable of creating its own virtual field trip by taking a camera along on a real one, advises Magaudda.

Traveling abroad

While some school districts use virtual field trips to save money, other school districts view them as a nifty way for students to see faraway places they might otherwise never visit. At Bel Aire Elementary School in Tiburon, members of the Reed District Teachers Association took students to Central America for a few weeks via the Blue Zones, a free, interactive virtual

Blue Zones virtual field trips

Costa Rica; Sardinia, Italy; Okinawa, Japan; and Loma Linda, California. Blue Zones is set to embark on a brand-new venture to Icaria, Greece, April 20 through May 1, for those who are eager to experience a live version.

For more information, visit www.bluezones.com.



expedition sponsored by National Geographic, the University of Minnesota and the National Institute on Aging.

The entire school had a chance to join the Blue Zones Program in 2007 for a trip to the Nicoya Peninsula in Costa Rica. Students undertaking this journey were asked to uncover the mystery of why people there live such long lives, and were told that 75 percent of longevity is based on habits and 25 percent is based on genetics.

Students were encouraged to ask online questions about the Nicoya residents' diet, food preparation, exercise, family structure and daily lifestyle during a live "quest" that took place over several weeks. They cast online votes that directed the Blue Zones' team of scientists, doctors, reporters and videographers on the areas where they should focus on next.

After a schoolwide kickoff assembly, teachers adapted their own virtual versions of the expedition. Some had their class watch in real time, and others preferred recorded snippets. The Blue Zones crew documents each move with videos, photos, a detailed "Daily Dispatch" for older students, and a "Short Report" for younger ones. Teachers can download national standards aligned curricula in language arts, math, science, health and ge-

ography from the website www.bluezones.com and can create their own units, too.

"At our school, it was a seamless integration of curriculum and technology," reports Lori Mustille, the site's technology coordinator. "There was a lot of planning and flexibility among teachers, but we have a team-teaching approach here and that helped."

Fifth-grade teacher Carin Rhodes opted to infuse the Blue Zones with her Spanish curriculum through live videoconferencing. Students were able to converse with Blue Zones' staff as well as young Costa Ricans.

"It was a good opportunity for my students to use the Spanish-speaking skills they were learning in class and talk with some of the people there," she relates. "It was also a great way for them to reach out globally and make connections outside of where they live. It became real to them. They had a great time with it and learned so much."

Library media teacher Melissa Jones supported the project by helping students connect what they were learning through Blue Zones with their own lives and decisions affecting their own health. She helped them find online databases and library books for further research about Costa Rica.

"They learned that people there have a healthy diet of fresh fruits, vegetables and grains grown locally, and that their culture is one of hard work and hospitality. They are a very peaceful people and don't have a lot of stress like we have here in America. We have so much stress in our everyday life and its rush, rush, rush."

For extra credit, says Jones, students contributed to her blog and answered questions she posted. Some, says Rhodes, spent their lunchtime videoconferencing with students from other school sites about the Blue Zones trip.



Melissa Jones
Reed District
Teachers Association



TOP: Carin Rhodes helps fifth-grader Nicholas Laub work on a website. **BOTTOM:** Fourth-grade teacher Melissa VanderMolen goes over a science lesson at Taft Community School in Redwood City. **OPPOSITE TOP:** Crescent Heights Language Arts Social Justice Magnet School teacher Janet Simms teaches her kindergarten class. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM:** Meet Me At The Corner offers fun tours, like this trip to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.



"Students learned many great things from this experience," relates Mustille. "They learned that even in places where there is a different lifestyle, much is still the same. Students ride bicycles, play soccer and do other things just like them. But they don't eat packaged food, they do lots of chores on the farm and are very productive and hard-working after school. Students here realized that watching TV for six hours a day may not be a good thing for a longer life. It was an interesting perspective." ❖

Read our extended story on virtual field trips at www.cta.org/community/other/virtual+fieldtrips.htm, where you'll also find our picks of the best virtual field trips currently available online.



PERB rules in favor of San Diego teachers

Strengthened by a California Public Employee Relations Board (PERB) ruling last January that said the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) had violated the law by engaging in bad faith bargaining, the San Diego Education Association — now in its seventh month without a new contract — is standing firm in demanding a fair, equitable and reasonable proposal that deals with major work issues faced by its members.

“The PERB ruling is a huge victory for SDEA members,” says SDEA President Camille Zombro. “It is further evidence that the district has not been up-front with SDEA’s negotiators, and that their refusal to bargain cannot continue.”

The PERB charges against SDUSD included: canceling two of five scheduled bargaining sessions last September and October; rejecting SDEA requests to schedule additional sessions; attempting to postpone the negotiations process until after the Nov. 4, 2008, election; and failure to come prepared to bargain at sessions, as evidenced by refusing to make proposals or counterproposals. The ruling completely validated the unfair labor practice charge filed by SDEA last December.

According to Zombro, the top issues San Diego teachers want to see addressed in the contract include numerous workload issues. “Teachers are

working harder than ever, but top-down changes in programs are cutting down instructional time and creating unsafe conditions in schools.”

San Diego teachers have experienced massive increases in assessments. In addition to the annual statewide exams, many teachers administer 16 or more district-required assessments each year. Teachers must administer one-on-one reading tests starting in kindergarten that can take 30 minutes per student. One teacher administered seven tests in one day, and another says she lost an entire

“The PERB ruling is evidence that the district has not been up-front with SDEA’s negotiators, and that their refusal to bargain cannot continue.”

Camille Zombro, SDEA president

week during the course of a month to do her midterm tests.

SDEA members have also seen detrimental changes to special education programs. The district has dismantled special education programs, while cutting teaching assistants in most classes and providing little or no clear direction or training to teachers on their new assignments. Special ed students are now fully included in general education classrooms at all levels, taught by teachers who have no special ed training. Specialist and general education “co-teachers” who share students have

no time to plan their collaboration or to assess the students they share.

“Teachers and students are just thrown together with no understanding of what’s expected or how to make the classes work,” says Zombro. “SDEA wants to bargain a workload model over the existing caseload or class-size model. We want a model that takes into account the actual work required to meet students’ needs, rather than simply a number of students assigned to each individual teacher.”

Continuing low salaries of

ey, projected up to \$144 million, they stand to gain from a proposed early retirement incentive offer over the next five years.”

On Friday, Feb. 13, in the first bargaining session conducted in the shadow of the PERB bad faith ruling against SDUSD, the district responded to SDEA’s last proposal by offering to “settle the contract now,” with a two-year contract and immediate re-opens on wages, benefits, transfer policy, evaluation and up to two additional articles. “The district’s positions were unacceptable to

SDEA,” says Zombro. “Agreeing to that proposal would allow the district to avoid the legal constraints of the unfair labor practice ruling that is now forcing them to bargain with us in good faith.”

“SDEA has made a fair, equitable and reasonable proposal that deals with major work issues, while the district seems focused solely on wage/benefit issues,” says Zombro. “SDEA members have clearly expressed that workload increases and the impact of changes to special education must be addressed in any contract settlement, and we are hopeful that the influence of the three new board of education members SDEA helped elect to office late last year will facilitate the process toward a speedy contract settlement.”

BILL GUY

San Francisco charter creates own union, enlists CTA for help

What do you do when your school board is out of control, your administrators are mishandling money, your work environment can best be described as “hostile” and your school has a nearly 70 percent rate of turnover among teachers?

Teachers at the K-8 Edison Charter Academy in San Francisco couldn't turn to their union for assistance, because they didn't belong to one. So they decided to create one, and turned to CTA and NEA for much-needed help.

Like many who teach in charter schools, teachers applying to Edison were promised freedom from some of the rules and regulations of the Education Code, a chance to work in a stimulating environment and the opportunity to truly make a difference. But in this case, they got much more than they bar-

gained for.

Teachers had been told they would be paid 1 percent more than members of United Educators of San Francisco (UESF). But they were paid less, and worked longer hours. Instead of being thanked for their hard work, they were unappreciated. Every year, at least 65 percent of the teaching staff quit.

Teachers discovered they were unable to make any decisions since the school board — consisting of three individuals — called all the shots. Board members changed grades given by classroom teachers. They revoked a discipline policy put into place. And board members even canceled a dance for all middle school age students because their children or grandchildren violated school rules and were not allowed to attend.

But the final straw came when board members allegedly refused to hand over grant money the school received from the state to run an after-school program.

Teaching staff approached UESF for help, but were told that they couldn't join, since that chapter's by-laws did not allow charter school members. So they reached out to NEA and to Carolina Monroy, a CTA charter school



CTA photos by Scott Buschman

ABOVE: Catherine Cook, Edison Charter Teachers Union of San Francisco president, works with Andres Rojas. **BELOW:** Math and science teacher Greg Gallup is the ECTUSF negotiations chair.

organizer.

Deciding to unionize was somewhat scary, they admit, because as “at-will employees” they feared being fired without due process. But the teachers were so outraged at the injustices they witnessed on a daily basis that they decided it was well worth that risk. The vote in favor of forming a union was 28 to 2, and nobody was fired.

“We felt like we had absolutely no say in our future or in anything,” relates Catherine Cook, president of the newly formed Edison Charter Teachers Union of San Francisco (ECTUSF) and an elementary grade teacher. “We felt desperately alone. But it was the right thing to do, and once we became a unit, we became stronger and were able to make some amazing changes.”

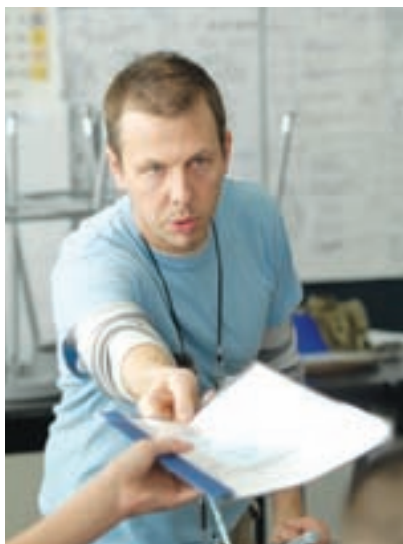
Indeed, their accomplishments have been nothing short of amazing. After teachers unionized in spring of 2007, the entire school board resigned the next fall, along with the principal and vice principal. And it was no coincidence that the resignations occurred shortly after the

union asked to see the school's financial records during a negotiations session, says Cook.

“As soon as we began asking for documents and asking questions, we lost them,” says Greg Gallup, negotiations chair and middle school math and science teacher. “It just screamed as one of those situations where people did not want to be held accountable for the decisions they made.”

A special election was held in 2007, and association members recruited local business people and community members to run for seats on the school board. A brand-new seven-member board was elected, and they are described as strong supporters of the school and those who work there. And the new principal and vice principal on board, says Gallup, are financially competent, pro-

Continued on page 38





Making a Difference



CTA photo by Bill Cuy

LEFT: CTA President David A. Sanchez reads with Micaela Smith and Gianna Picone at Salt Creek Elementary School Read Across America event.

Read Across America a huge hit

Wearing brightly colored pajamas and even brighter smiles, students at Dolores Huerta Elementary School in Lennox walked into the cafete-

ria. Inside were hockey star Luc Robitaille and actor Jason George, honorary co-chairs of Read Across America (RAA), an event celebrated March 2 in California and

the rest of the nation.

“Cool,” many of the students murmured.

“Reading is Cool,” noted CTA Secretary-Treasurer Dan Vaughn, on hand for the celebration. “It’s this year’s theme and it says it all. It’s cool to be here to promote reading. And it’s cool to be promoting something so positive.”

Luc Robitaille, who won the Stanley Cup with the Detroit Red Wings, spent 14 sea-

sons with the Los Angeles Kings and holds the record as the highest-scoring left winger in National Hockey League history. He told the students, many of them English learners, that he was raised in Canada and only spoke French before moving to California.

“I was the guy everybody said wasn’t good enough to make it,” he told the youngsters. “They said I was too small. But I didn’t listen to anybody around me, because I wanted to live my dream. If you want to live your dreams, you have to know how to read. I need to read my contract to know what’s going on in my life.”

Jason George, who appears in the television show “Eli Stone,” confided that what actors do for a living mostly involves reading.

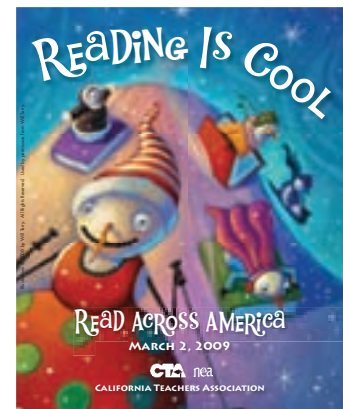
“The acting part is only 20 or 30 minutes and the rest of the day you are reading script



CTA photo by Katherine Bauer-Helwig

LEFT: CTA Vice President Dean Vogel reads aloud to the students at Hoopa Elementary School, which serves the Hoopa Valley Indian Tribe in Hoopa.

RIGHT: The Reading Is Cool! artwork was created by Will Terry.



Illustrations © 2008 by Will Terry

after script. The writer uses his imagination and takes the craziest thing he can think of and writes it down so it can come to life. It all comes down to reading what is written on paper.”

George’s mother is a retired teacher and was the leader of her local NEA chapter, so reading was strongly encouraged as a child. Now that he’s the father of a 5-year-old, plus

10-month-old twins, it’s the same in his household.

Robitaille and George took turns reading *Snowpeople* by Rick and Ryan Zeeb, a book about frozen creatures in search of their own personal identity who learn an important lesson: “Different is brilliant — it’s what makes you YOU.”

The students may have been in pajamas, but they were wide awake and excited about the event.

“It’s important to read,” said a fifth-grade girl. “You get to learn about everything. And you get to learn a lot of new words, too.”

In the San Diego area, CTA President David A. Sanchez celebrated RAA with youngsters at a few locations.

“I feel energized,” he said, after witnessing fourth-, fifth- and sixth-graders at Allen Elementary School in Bonita present a program that included a student-produced film, drama and dance to celebrate RAA. “Seeing the outstanding accomplishments of the students, encouraged by exemplary work by their CTA-member teachers in all the schools I visited,

Continued on page 36

Throughout California, schools celebrated chapter and verse

- Riverside: Student drama, dance and band enthusiasts presented their fifth annual Read Across America production of “A Cat in the Hat Celebration” at Norte Vista High School.
- Fullerton: Live animals from the “Wonders of Wildlife” group were used to illustrate stories read to children at Commonwealth Elementary School.
- Vista: Sixty Marines from Camp Pendleton read to 1,300 students in small groups and also fed the kids green eggs and ham, in festivities at Vista Academy of Arts.
- St. Helena: The chief of police administered a “reader’s oath” to all students at St. Helena Primary School, and those reading to kids included local firefighters, police officers, the mayor and superintendent of schools.

Continued on page 36



CTA photo by Glen Korengold

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:

Two students share a book on dinosaurs at Ethel Phillips School in Sacramento; CTA Secretary-Treasurer Dan Vaughn and actor Jason George at Dolores Huerta Elementary School in Lennox; students at Dolores Huerta Elementary School listen to stories while in their pajamas; Hockey star Luc Robitaille entertains the kids at Dolores Huerta.



CTA photos by Scott Buschman

Two recipients of NEA Human and Civil Rights Awards

Two of the NEA Human and Civil Rights Awards for 2009 were given to retired United Teachers Los Angeles member C. Jerome Woods and San Francisco resident, union and civil rights activist LeRoy King. The program honors individuals and affiliates who stand up and defend human and civil rights.



LeRoy King

G. Woodson Memorial Award for his efforts to help enrich the lives of students through cultural awareness and the celebration of racial heritage, as well as improving the conditions of their lives and extending the capacity of schools to serve their local and world communities.

NEA writes about Woods, “He knows the importance of

preserving cultural memory and revealing it as a way of encouraging personal and racial pride, and he recognizes the value of sharing life and heritage experiences across cultures. As he sees it, not only is it necessary for all people to honor their own heritage, but they need to learn about and respect the racial and cultural heritage of others.”



C. Jerome Woods

King was honored with the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Award for his work as a union and civil rights activist and neighborhood advocate. “For 60 years he has organized and marched and demonstrated for peace, for human and civil rights, and for the labor movement,” writes NEA. “A
Continued on page 33

Organizing seminar proves helpful for members

“Our goal in coming to this seminar is to learn strategies for helping our members see the value in our association, so that when we need to activate or motivate them, the infrastructure is already in place,” said Dominic Dirksen, president of the Steele Canyon Charter Education Association (SCCEA), about his local’s participation in the Region 4 Organizing Seminar held Feb. 19-20 in San Diego, the ninth annual such event in the region.

SCCEA members Joseph Schramm, Mike Ritter and Dirksen met with colleagues from all over the region, including the Association of Colton Educators, the Coachella Valley Teachers Association, the Corona-Norco Teachers Association, the Lake Elsinore Teachers Association, the Ocean View Teachers Association, the Redlands Teachers Association, the Rialto Education Association, the San Bernardino Teachers Association, and the Santa Ana Educators

Association. Members — along with their CTA primary contact staff persons — joined together for this organizing seminar designed to help teams of local association leaders tackle specific organizing challenges typically faced by chapters.



Participants from the Rialto Education Association, including Deborah McKenzie, Penny Robinson, Rebecca Barbee and Laura Kelly, said their objective was to get back to the basics of organizing a more involved association, rather than organizing

around specific crises that events of the last few years have necessitated. “We were able to help elect three new board members last fall, resulting in the resignation of a hostile superintendent the very next day,” said Robinson, “and now we hope to mend some fences as well as build on the momentum to strengthen our association overall.”

LEFT: Steele Canyon Charter Education Association members (left to right) Joseph Schramm, Dominic Dirksen and Mike Ritter engage in a workshop at the organizing seminar in San Diego. **ABOVE:** San Bernardino Teachers Association members Denise Loera and Robert Rodriguez found the seminar extremely beneficial.

Funded by a CTA special projects grant with additional support this year from CTA’s Community Outreach Department, the seminar was coordinated by a group of Region 4 staff headed by Region 4 organizer Tim Hill. The agenda included the presentation of a variety of topics designed to give participants cutting-



CTA photos by Bill Guy

edge tools, coupled with plenty of time for them to work together as teams on their self-selected organizing projects. Part of the extended process includes regular follow-ups to assess and make adjustments toward achieving their goals.

Denise Loera and Robert Rodriguez, participants from the San Bernardino Teachers Association,

agreed that the seminar was extremely beneficial in helping them to clarify and plan for achieving their goal of empowering their local site reps in locations where they work with hostile administrators. Said Loera, "Being able to share ideas with colleagues in meetings like this is very validating."

BILL GUY

Oakdale Unified wins CTA's State Gold Award

A community foundation that has enriched the quality of education in the Oakdale Joint Unified School District is the recipient of CTA's State Gold Award for outstanding support of public schools.

"In a time of diminishing resources, the Oakdale Educational Foundation has stepped up to the plate to provide more than \$300,000 in grants that have gone directly into Oakdale classrooms and programs," says CTA President David A. Sanchez. "Some of those grants include funds for art and music programs, LCD projectors, scanners, Smart Boards, a character education program, as well as sponsorship of the district's Academic Decathlon team."

Founded by a group of local citizens in August 2003, the Oakdale Educational Foundation has held numerous fundraising drives in the community, such as the "Celebrity Waiter Dinner," which was so successful that OEF board member Denise Hitch shared the concept with education foundations nationwide. The dinners alone raise as much as \$75,000 a year and feature notable community members as waiters.

"We applaud the efforts by the community, local businesses, and the many volunteers who have given not only their time and energy, but monetary contributions

to make the Oakdale Educational Foundation a success," says Sanchez. "The foundation's continuing commitment to local schools illustrates the kind of public support that is required to give our students and our schools the help they need. The foundation embodies the qualities we seek in State Gold Award recipients."

The Oakdale Educational Foundation also hosts a grant reception, where teachers are given a chance to present information on their grants. Local businesses are also honored, which helps create a working relationship between the schools and business owners.

In addition to seeking financial support from the community, the foundation has made a diligent effort to form a bridge between families and schools by sponsoring a KIDS SPLASH Showcase where teachers showcase their grants. The showcase not only allows teachers to share their projects, it provides a day of fun for Oakdale families who attend the event.

Some of the projects included in the showcase included demonstrations by the Model UN program; a Readers Theater with books donated by the foundation; a Children's Garden tour; and a peer conflict resolution program presentation.

DINA MARTIN



Teaching outside the lesson plan.

Grace had asked her teacher 100 times to tie her shoes. It wasn't until the 101st time that she realized Grace didn't care as much about her laces as she did about someone taking time for her. That's the priceless gift of personal attention an educator can give.

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Members use Pink Friday site to organize and mobilize

In February, CTA dove into new waters, launching www.pinkfriday09.org, a website dedicated to helping teachers share their stories, latest news articles and Pink Friday event planning tips, as well as alerting them to locally planned rallies. At press time, there were more than 1,500 Pink Friday community members, with that number growing steadily every day. Also at press time, more than 26,000 teachers had already received pink slips.

“Budget cuts only hurt the students we teach,” says Maria Eastham, a San Marcos Educators Association member, on the www.pinkfriday09.org site. “We are cutting back on the investment of future doctors, teachers and politicians. Please write the governor, your senator and Assemblyman immediately to inform them of your concern.”

To fight back, teachers have started blogging about local layoffs, contributing to discussion boards, and uploading photos and videos — and are in the midst of actively creating an online community. The phone tree



method has given way to online social networking, providing a more immediate and streamlined way of organizing and promoting initiatives.

The Pink Friday mobilizing plan is rooted in the dedicated work of the new CTA State Budget Crisis Workgroup chaired by CTA Vice President Dean E. Vogel. The large, dynamic committee consists of CTA chapter leaders, CTA Board members, organizers and other staff, and encourages a free and frank exchange of ideas and strategies, says Vogel.

“The Crisis Workgroup is so diverse that it truly represents all of the members of CTA,” says Vogel. “We have explored every method of organizing against these devastating pink slips and school cuts. We explored using technology, and that’s paying off as CTA members and the public go online to our new website to build a social network of support for our public schools. We will push to keep that online dialogue going beyond Pink Friday. We will keep working for what all of us are working for — to stabilize education

method has given way to online social networking, providing a more immediate and streamlined way of organizing and promoting initiatives. **ABOVE:** The www.pinkfriday09.org website offers teachers a way to share their stories, latest news articles and Pink Friday event planning tips and local planned rally info. **BELOW:** Maria Eastham, a San Marcos Educators Association member, comments on the www.pinkfriday09.org site about the poor state of California’s school funding.

funding so that our students can get the public education they deserve.”

News media was so impressed with the initial effort of the website that the Bay Area affiliate of ABC News, KGO-TV, ran a segment in February highlighting www.pinkfriday09.org

A good place to start online

Many are wary of posting personal information online. The best way to approach social networking is to be aware of the inherent dangers of the Internet. Don’t share too much personal information (you’ll need to decide how much is too much). Imagine that your boss, children, parents, students, neighbors and future employers can read what you write and see your posted photos and videos. Things can be copied and pasted very easily. Also be aware that the Internet is archived. Your postings can be found years later. CTA legal counsel suggests you not write anything online that you wouldn’t put in a letter.



pinkfriday09.org — and a video posted there about the mobilizing efforts of New Haven teachers in Union City, Alameda County. Their “Walk ‘n Talk” campaign involves teachers going door to door sharing their school’s budget cut stories and legislator contact information with their community. Other members were inspired by this effort and the video, providing an amazing opportunity for teachers to unite online.

“Our members are so excited about all the press our video has received,” says Charmaine Kawaguchi, president of the 700-member New Haven Teachers Association. “And going out and knocking on doors to warn our parents about local and state school cuts is paying off. The neighborhoods are responding. We now have many parents who are joining us in our door-to-door campaign to protect our schools. We truly feel we can change things for the better this way.”

Members caught on quickly, realizing the powerful tool at their disposal. Ronda Gupton-Pruett, a teacher from Napa, suggested in one of her posts that teachers write “Pink-slipped Teacher” in pink lettering on their cars. Soon after she posted her thought, others took up the idea and began sharing other effective methods. Stockton teachers decided to protest at a busy intersection wearing pink and carrying signs. Some members blogged about how they were planning to go to Sacramento to protest the layoffs in addition to joining local protests in their area. One community member from Vallejo shared a digital file of a Pink Friday

button, and another posted that they had designed fliers and T-shirts — all easily shared among members and quickly downloaded from www.pinkfriday09.org.

Most importantly, www.pinkfriday09.org has become a place for teachers to commiserate and share information about layoffs happening up and down the state. Having an online space made it possible for teachers to share experiences with one another and discuss which protest ideas worked in the past, which did not, and how they felt personally and professionally about the layoffs.

Members caught on quickly, realizing the powerful tool at their disposal.

Viral effect

With the growing popularity of social networking sites such as Facebook, it’s only natural that unions are finally seizing the opportunity to organize in such an effective way. Pink Friday was added as an event on Facebook and quickly had hundreds of members. In no time, more than 10 local Pink Friday events were posted on Facebook. Videos posted to the site are being shared with friends on Facebook, YouTube and elsewhere. In addition, interactive ads placed all over the Internet have driven people to www.pinkfriday09.org, leading teachers from other



ABOVE: New Haven teachers in Union City, Alameda posted a video about their mobilizing efforts and “Walk ‘n Talk” campaign, which took them door to door sharing local school cut stories and legislator contact information. **BELOW:** By clicking on a particular city on the digital map, users are able to see real-life stories from members of how the budget cuts are impacting California’s schools.



After March 13, the site will be accessible at www.standupforschools.org with a continued focus on funding for education. The special election on May 19 offers educators an opportunity to restore much-needed funding to our schools. The website will have information, calls to action and bloggers who will be writing on the topic and sharing updates on the situation. The future of this site depends solely on the efforts of the active, participating community members who stand up for themselves, California’s schools and their students.

TIFFANY HASKER

Ways to get involved in an online community

1. Register and post your profile.
2. If you read something that resonates, post a comment.
3. Share your story through a blog post.
4. Ask or answer a question in the discussion forum.

ACTION



CTA photo by Len Feldman

LEFT: CTA President David Sanchez, joined by Alicia Gaddis, City Board Chair for Sacramento ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now), tells reporters during a news conference in Sacramento that educators, parents, and community members view the state's Class Size Reduction program as vital to student achievement. The media event was part of CTA's aggressive defense of the crucial CSR program, which led to the imposition of heavy financial penalties for districts that exceed class size caps in grades K-3.

CTA beats back attack on Prop. 98, but budget cuts will still hurt schools

While CTA and its allies defeated efforts to gut California's Proposition 98 — schools' minimum funding guarantee — the newly approved 17-month state budget reduces K-14 public education funding by a devastating \$11.6 billion. Cuts of that magnitude, the largest in the state's history, will force the layoffs of thousands of educators, eliminate vital student programs, and turn thousands of qualified students away from higher education institutions.

"These cuts will impact an entire generation of children and es-

calate California's race to the bottom in education funding," warns CTA President David A. Sanchez. "These cuts send the wrong message to our students, their parents, our communities and our country. An investment in our

"These cuts will impact an entire generation of students."

President Sanchez

children's future now will make sure they prosper in the future."

Sanchez notes that the final budget places "an initiative on the special election ballot to repay the \$9.3 billion owed to education over several years. The restora-

tion of this money will be critical to the future of our public schools." The Budget Stabilization Fund (BSF) initiative on the May 19 special election ballot will create a mechanism to facilitate the repayment of the Proposition 98

"maintenance factor." Without the BSF, though, the state will not be able to make the repayment. (See story on page 32.)

"The plan also protects the state's successful Class Size Reduction (CSR) program from

complete elimination," Sanchez emphasizes, "allowing local school districts to continue smaller class sizes in kindergarten through third grade." The plan maintains ratios at 20.4 to 1 for K-3 class sizes, and adjusts penalties for school districts if they choose to exceed CSR program caps.

Sanchez notes the disappointing and frustrating nature of the prolonged budget battle and the clear recognition that the process is in dire need of reform, but commends Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Assembly Speaker Karen Bass (D-Los Angeles), Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento), and Senator Abel Maldonado (R-Santa Maria) for "having the courage to support revenue increases."

The enacted budget would raise about \$11.1 billion in new revenues.

A new 1 percent sales tax and an increase in the Vehicle License



CTA photo by Becky Flanigan

ABOVE: In a demonstration of unity, members of the Vallejo Education Association marched with 190 numbered, pink sheets of paper at the March 5 school board meeting where 190 pink slips were issued. Attendees held up numbers signifying that the cuts are personal, more than just numbers.

Fee (VLF) from 0.65 to 1.15 percent will raise the largest share of the new state revenues. These increases are paired with a surcharge of up to 0.25 percent on the state personal income tax and a 0.15 percent tax to pay for law enforcement services, which will free up about \$600 million in state funds for other purposes. The proposal also raises new revenues by reducing the taxpayers' tax credit for dependent-related expenditures.

Despite some victories, schools will still be hit hard by cuts in the budget agreement that the governor and legislative leaders crafted to close the \$42 billion revenue gap.

LEN FELDMAN

Some key elements of the enacted budget package

- Raises new revenues of about \$11.1 billion.
- Slashes K-14 education funding by a record \$11.6 billion.
- Sets special election for May 19 asking voters to approve a mechanism to repay schools \$9.3 billion.
- Maintains current ratios at 20.4 to 1 for K-3 class sizes. Adjusts penalties for school districts if they choose to exceed Class Size Reduction (CSR) program class size caps.
- Includes three new tiers for categorical programs. The budget does not reduce funding for Tier 1 categorical programs and allows districts no flexibility to move the funds to other programs. Tier 1 programs include Special Education, Child Development, K-3 CSR, and Economic Impact Aid (EIA).
- Reduces funding for Tier 2 categorical programs by 15.4 percent in 2008-09 and an additional 4.7 percent reduction in 2009-10, but funds from these programs can't be moved to support other programs.
- Reduces funding for Tier 3 categorical programs by the same amount as the reductions affecting Tier 2 programs, but funds from Tier 3 programs can be moved to other programs after the district holds local public hearings.
- Avoids a fee increase for community college students for 2009-10.
- Protects CalGrants for eligible students at the state's community colleges, California State University, and the University of California.
- Reduces funding for CSU and UC by 10 percent across the board and requires reduced costs for retirement contributions.

CTA stops catastrophic cuts-only solution

By mobilizing its members throughout the state, CTA was able to build momentum that pushed back Republican proposals to close the looming budget gap by cuts and cuts alone. Instead, the final spending combines new revenues, cuts, fund transfers and borrowing to balance the 2008-09 and 2009-10 budgets.

Fully three-fifths of the \$42 billion budget solution came in the form of new revenues and borrowing, but two-fifths — \$15.8 billion — took the form of budget cuts. About 50 percent of those 2008-09 and 2009-10 cuts are from the public education budget. This is the largest cut in the state budget.

Another element that helped stop a cuts-only "solution" is the proposal to borrow against future lottery revenues. The proposal assures schools an annual amount equivalent to past years' lottery revenues and adds that amount to the state's general fund. This will result in an increase to Proposition 98 funds beginning in 2010-11, and will cause education lottery funds to now be subject to cost-of-living adjustments.

LEN FELDMAN

Ballot measures are slated to go to the voters May 19

At press time, CTA State Council is meeting to define CTA's positions on a number of measures slated for the May 19 special election. Five of the measures work in tandem to make the state budget operable. In the next issue of *California Educator* we will feature an update on the positions State Council decides to take and the rationale for those choices. Two additional ballot measures were approved by the Legislature as part of a last-minute compromise. The first, which would restrict legislative pay increases in deficit years, is set for a May 19 vote. The second, which would create an "open primary," is expected to go on the June 2010 ballot. For up-to-date information on the special election, visit www.cta.org.

- **Proposition 1A** — *Reform and Stabilize State Budget (Budget Stabilization Fund)*

Prop. 1A provides long-term reform to our broken budget system by stabilizing future state spending and creating an enhanced rainy day reserve fund. Without impacting the state's minimum school funding guarantee, Prop. 1A requires the state to direct 3 percent of revenues into a rainy day fund each year, except when the fund is full or during economic downturns. It increases the overall size of the state's rainy day reserve from 5 percent to 12.5 percent of the budget. Part of the money from the Prop. 1A reserve fund is used to repay the \$9 billion owed to public schools. If Prop. 1A fails, there will be no mechanism in place to restore the funding to schools and community colleges. Prop. 1A does not downsize government or give the governor authority to make midyear cuts to education.

- **Proposition 1B** — *Protect Education Funding (Prop. 98 Restoration)*

The budget crisis has cut more than \$12 billion from our schools and colleges. Over 5,000 teachers and education support professionals have been laid off and thousands more are threatened. Prop. 1B starts the process of paying back our schools and community colleges as economic conditions improve. Prop. 1B sets up a repayment plan to ensure schools are repaid the \$9 billion they are owed under the state's minimum school funding law. The payments to schools would come out of the newly created rainy day fund established in Prop. 1A and are dependent on the passage of Prop. 1A. Payments would begin in 2011-12.

- **Proposition 1C** — *Lottery Modernization Act*

Prop. 1C will increase the performance and accountability of the state lottery and bring immediate funding to the state without raising taxes. By modernizing the lottery, Prop. 1C will immediately raise \$5 billion in new revenues to immediately help with this year's budget deficit. The measure also guarantees that public schools will receive the same amount of funds they currently receive from the lottery. In fact, Prop. 1C takes education

funding out of future lottery proceeds and places that money under the Prop. 98 minimum school funding guarantee. So schools will actually receive more money in future years due to cost-of-living increases. If Prop. 1C fails, there will be a \$5 billion hole in the state budget, meaning schools and other programs could face additional cuts.

- **Proposition 1D** — *Children's Services Funding*

Prop. 1D temporarily redirects a portion of excess funds from the voter-approved tobacco tax to pay for children's health and social services over the next two years. Currently, the Children and Families Trust Fund has about \$2.5 billion that has not been spent. Prop. 1D diverts a portion of this unexpended money to prevent deeper cuts to children's health care and other human services programs. Only a portion of these tobacco tax funds would be redirected, thereby protecting existing programs currently funded by the tax. Failure of Prop. 1D creates a more than \$600 million hole in the state budget and means deeper cuts for children's health and social service programs.

- **Proposition 1E** — *Mental Health Funding*

Prop. 1E would temporarily redirect a portion of the funds from the Mental Health Services Trust Fund approved by voters in 2004 to fund children's health programs that are at risk of elimination due to the state budget crisis, including health care screenings, diagnosis and treatment for children's health. Failure of Prop. 1E means the state budget deficit grows by \$227 million and means those programs face deeper cuts or even elimination.

- **Proposition 1F** — *Restricts Elected Officials' Salaries*

Prop. 1F prohibits legislators, the governor and other state politicians from getting pay raises whenever our state budget is running a deficit. By stopping legislative pay raises during state budget deficits, we can save California millions of dollars when they're needed most and bring accountability to the Legislature and the governor's office.

NEA awards

Continued from page 26

year ago, when the teachers and paraprofessionals mounted a demonstration opposing layoffs, a demonstration that had a pink theme to protest 'pink slips,' some of the men in the event balked at wearing pink. But LeRoy King showed up for the demonstration and

showed all who had eyes to see that real men can wear pink."

The NEA Human and Civil Rights Awards program honors individuals who have expanded educational opportunities for minority students and educators and improved intergroup relations in the public schools.

CTA sponsors bill to stop needless, costly second-grade testing

The California Teachers Association is sponsoring newly introduced legislation — SB 800 authored by Sen. Loni Hancock (D-Berkeley) — that would bring California testing requirements in line with the federal government's by eliminating statewide testing for second-grade students.

"Second-grade students are forced to undergo statewide testing each year that does not help them and does not assist teachers in assessing their performance, development and learning needs," says CTA President David A. Sanchez. "Eliminating these second-grade tests will preserve precious instructional time for these students, and it saves millions of dollars at a time when schools are reeling from unprecedented funding cuts."

Teachers complain bitterly that the testing — specifically, the second-grade Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) exam — steals a significant amount of instructional time from students. The requirement also uses up more than \$4.5 million annually and does not align with the federal

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind), which does not mandate second-grade standardized testing.

The controversial second-grade testing program was slated to phase out June 30, 2007. But a 2007 deal between the governor and legislative leaders on the state budget included language extending the expiration date of second-grade testing until 2011.

Teachers and the bill's author point out that testing generally provides only one component of a comprehensive plan to assess students' development and learning needs. They argue that second-grade tests create harmful, unintended consequences for our youngest learners because the tests are not age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate. Experts say that data provided by the second-grade testing have not proved to be valid or reliable enough to inform teaching and learning.

Says Sanchez, "Our schools should not be allowing testing to eliminate valuable classroom instruction time for our youngest students."

LEN FELDMAN



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Local chapters fight for smaller class sizes

Despite CTA's successful effort in the state budget battle to preserve the state's 12-year-old Class Size Reduction (CSR) program, many school districts are still threatening to increase class sizes.

Around the state, smaller classes are being eliminated despite their proven benefit of providing more one-on-one teaching and learning. Decisions were still being finalized at press time, but some districts had already made theirs.

"Parents are very upset," says Mount Pleasant Educators Association Co-President Lori

Hiura, whose district in San Jose chose in February to kill off all smaller classes in kindergarten through third grade. "This will affect our struggling students, especially those students

who are English learners." Despite widespread state cuts to education funding, the new state budget fully funds K-3 Class Size Reduction, and maintains ratios at 20.4 to 1 for K-3 class sizes, adjusting penalties for school districts if they choose to exceed CSR program caps.

Mount Pleasant School District will have as many as 33 students in some K-3 classes, Hiura says, and is also reeling from other cuts that include closing one elementary school.

"When we lose the 20-to-1 ratio, our members will no longer be able to give our students the personal attention they deserve."

Andy Montoya, Fullerton ETA

In Alameda County, Hayward Education Association members are so angry that the school board is pulling out of the CSR program that they plan to protest the resulting layoffs by symbolically burning their pink slips March 25 at a public park. Some 370 permanent and temporary teachers will lose their jobs, says HEA President Kathleen Crummey.

In Solano County, teachers in the Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District were fighting a battle at press time to keep the school board from voting to increase K-3 class sizes to as many as 24 students and just accept a stiff loss of state funding — and the issuing of approximately 300 teacher pink slips.

"Increasing class size is a huge step in the wrong direction," says Melanie Driver, president of the Fairfield-Suisun United Teachers Association. "We need to keep programs that have been shown to increase student achievement."

In Fullerton, where the school board plans to cut 73 K-3 teaching positions due to deep CSR cuts, Fullerton Elementary Teachers Association President Andy Montoya's concerns echo those of his colleagues.

"When we lose the 20-to-1 class size ratio that will result from these cuts, our members will no longer be able to give our students the personal attention they deserve," Montoya says. "Statistics show that only one in eight students who fall behind in first grade ever catch up without significant intervention. So whether or not I teach first grade, I know that Class Size Reduction makes a tremendous difference — most importantly to the students,

BELOW: Hayward Teachers Association members rally to protect California's class size reduction program, which has proven to benefit students.



Photo courtesy of Hayward Teachers Association

but also to every teacher they will have throughout their school years.”

In Kerman Unified School District, Class Size Reduction was already eliminated in third grade some five years ago due to budget cuts resulting from district mismanagement under a previous superintendent, and now the district is talking about further eliminating it in grades K-2 due to the current financial

crisis.

Kerman Unified Teachers Association President Marie Motta says the district is supposed to be making a decision soon. But the previous blow to CSR in third grade already took its toll.

“It’s very demoralizing for teachers, because we still have to meet state standards, we still are expected to show student progress, and we’re having to do it with a third more students

in the class,” Motta says.

El Segundo Teachers Association President Daphne Moote is alarmed by what her school board is seriously considering.

She says El Segundo has notified 44 teachers they may not have jobs next year. Elimination of classes like foreign language will especially put people with single subject credentials at risk.

“The board is looking at the

elimination of CSR for our primary grades,” Moote says, “and they’re laying off people from every grade level.”

MIKE MYSLINSKI, DINA MARTIN,
BILL GUY, FRANK WELLS

For a policy statement on CTA’s fight for smaller classes, and a summary of studies showing how they help student achievement, visit the CTA website at this link: www.cta.org/issues/other/class+size+reduction.htm.

Court backs teachers’ rights to determine final grades

The Education Code plainly states that teachers have the right to determine a student’s final grade. And that right was upheld recently when a Superior Court Judge ruled that administrators violated the law by changing the final grades of 89 students attending Central Valley High School in Ceres last year.

The grade changes were made months after teachers had submitted the grades and without the teachers’ consent.

Judge William A. Mayhew ruled in favor of the Ceres Unified Teachers Association (CUTA) and ordered the Ceres Unified School District to rescind its policy of changing final grades based on a standardized test scores or AP test results. The district was ordered to halt any further changes to students’ grades and to restore the final grades issued by teachers at Central Valley High School during the 2007-08 school year.

Changing grades based on

test scores was adopted by the district as an “incentive” for students to try harder on tests. Grades were made higher — often increasing by as much as one letter — and never lowered. In some cases this meant the difference between passing a course with a D and failing with an F. In some instances it allowed athletes to continue playing sports, since the district only allows one F for those who play team sports.

Teachers learned that the new grading policy would be initiated when they were informed by their principal that he was sending a proposal to be approved by the superintendent. Teachers were then asked whether they wanted the policy to apply to one semester’s grade or to both. They were sent a consent form asking whether they would prefer to have clerical staff make changes to grades or change grades themselves. There was no option on the form to decline.

English teacher Susan Engstrom and social studies teacher Marilyn Wood refused to vote on whether the policy should be for one or two semesters — and also refused to sign the form — on the basis that the policy was illegal, based on Education Code section 49066, which states: “When grades are given for any course of instruction taught in a school district, the grade given to each pupil shall be the grade determined by the teacher of the course and the determination of the pupil’s grade by the teacher, in the absence of clerical or mechanical mistake, fraud, bad faith, or incompetency, shall be final.”

The two CUTA members were ordered to meet with administrators and accused of insubordination and unprofessional conduct. Letters of reprimand were placed in their personnel files. But they refused to back down.

“The legal aspects were pretty black and white,” explains Eng-

strom. “And the law was created to prevent situations like this.”

But she objected for ethical reasons, too. She was afraid her students, many of whom are “at risk,” would not work as hard.

“I think it sent the wrong message to kids,” says Engstrom, who has been teaching for more than 20 years and is National Board certified. “The American work ethic is that we work toward a goal. This policy told students they could do nothing in class, and that if they passed the test they would pass the class. It reinforced the Lotto mentality: You can get a good grade on the test; you’ve hit the Lotto and you don’t have to do anything for the rest of the year. This policy didn’t take adolescent development into account.”

“I had a lot of sleepless nights,” admits Wood. “It’s not easy to go against what your superiors tell you to do. It goes against my nature. But I knew we were doing the right thing.”

Continued on page 36



Marilyn Wood
Ceres Unified
Teachers Association



Susan Engstrom
Ceres Unified
Teachers Association

Read Across

Continued from page 25

only further motivates me to do everything I can to ensure stable and adequate finances for California's public schools."

member Dana Dillon in reading to students. Also in Sacramento was CTA Board member Michael Bustos, who accepted a legislative proclamation of Read Across America from Assemblyman Tony Mendoza (D-Norwalk) in a brief ceremony in the Assem-

School, which serves the Hoopa Valley Indian Tribe in Hoopa Valley. "Reading is the foundation of academic success for children," said Vogel. "As teachers, the best thing we can do is to help instill them with a love of reading."

SHERRY POSNICK-GOODWIN

Final grades

Continued from page 35

Warnings were sent to district officials by CTA attorney Thomas Driscoll warning that the grade-changing policy was in violation of the Education Code and demanding that the district cease and desist from harassment of teachers who declined to implement the policy. In October 2008, both teachers became aware that some of their grades had been changed anyway — affecting a total of 89 students — so CTA legal staff filed a lawsuit on their behalf.

The judge concluded that test scores were not an "additional factor" in determining students' grades but an actual revision of the grade — occurring four months after the end of the school year.

"I'm very pleased with the judge's decision," says Engstrom. "It was fair. Now kids will be sent the right message that they need to work toward a goal and that they have to come in every day and do a good job — not just do well on a test."

"The judge made the decision that I knew would be made," says Wood. "From reading the law, it became very clear that it was the only decision that could be made."

The judge's decision will have implications for students. Some may find that a lower grade could jeopardize college acceptance. Others who thought they had enough credits to graduate and did not attend summer school may find themselves without a diploma.

At this time, it is unknown whether the district will appeal the ruling.

SHERRY POSNICK-GOODWIN



LEFT: Actor James Avery and actress Tatyana Ali entertain students with a story at Compton Unified School District offices.

BELOW: CTA Board member Dana Dillon reads to students at Ethel Phillips School in Sacramento.



CTA photo by Glen Korengold

Hoping to ignite reading at Ethel Phillips School in Sacramento was Lou Paulson, president of California Professional Firefighters, who was joined by CTA Board

bly chambers at the Capitol.

CTA Vice President Dean Vogel read to students at Hoopa Elementary

Throughout California, schools celebrated chapter and verse

- Oakland: Honored readers included First Lady of Oakland Cynthia Dellums, Alameda County Schools Superintendent Sheila Jordan, OUSD Interim Superintendent Roberta Mayor, Supervisor Keith Carson, Oakland school board directors, fellow unionists from SEIU 1021, the painters and carpenters union, and others.
- San Jose: Mike Inouye, local traffic anchor for KNTV (NBC), read to first-graders at Blackford Elementary.
- Bakersfield: Rick and Ryan Zeeb read their book *Snowpeople* at the Majestic Fox Theater; face painting, booths and games were part of the fun.
- Sacramento: Dana Dillon, CTA Board member, and Lou Paulson, president of California Professional Firefighters, read to students at Ethel Phillips Elementary School.

IPD's Culture of Success strand at Summer Institute

This year's Instruction and Professional Development (IPD) strand at CTA's Summer Institute August 2-9 at UCLA will focus on the topic "Building a Culture for School Success." The weeklong strand will focus on examining adult and student culture; analyzing your school's culture and learning climate; and building a positive school culture for student success.

Featured speakers include such nationally and internationally known experts as Kent Peterson and Pam Robbins discussing "School culture, climate, student performance, classroom practice"; Glenn Singleton on "Courageous conversation"; and Anthony Muhammad on "Leadership and change."

School reform initiatives have focused on structural changes, instructional strategies and the change process — but a critical area that is often overlooked in school improvement is ensuring that the school has a positive culture and climate that promote student learning.

Highlights of the strand include team planning time, interactive dialogue, networking and resources.

IPD invites collaborative school teams of classroom teachers, classified employees, parents, school site council members, QEIA school site contacts, and site and district administrators to participate in "Building a Culture for School Success." This is an ideal opportunity for teams from Quality Education Investment Act (QEIA), Program Improvement (PI), and School Assistance and Intervention Team (SAIT) schools to become leaders for bold change.

For questions about the program content, please call Martha Buenrostro at (650) 577-5181 or e-mail her at mbuenrostro@cta.org. For registration assistance, please contact the CTA Conference Coordination Center at (650) 552-5355. Online registration will be available the first week in April, 2009.

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SF charter

Continued from page 23

teacher and extremely welcome.

“Teachers got things done because we stuck together,” says Cook. “As a unit we are really strong and cohesive. We had no idea that these things were even possible.”

Even more amazing: Only two teachers left the school last year, both for personal reasons.

Edison School in San Francisco has a charter issued by the state of California. When it was converted to a charter more than a decade ago, it made headlines because the privatization of public schools was a relatively new phenomenon. Its founder, Chris Whittle, was the owner of Channel I, which created controversy by producing classroom newscasts that included commercials. Whittle is still one of the directors of Edison Schools, which

serves more than 285,000 students in 19 states, the District of Columbia and the United Kingdom.

According to the organization’s website, “Edison recognizes the importance of the role of teachers’ unions and has maintained positive, strong, working relationships with the unions in communities throughout the country.”

Although Edison teachers in San Francisco voted to unionize two years ago, it only recently became official with a signing ceremony. And UESF changed its bylaws prohibiting charter members and is now affiliated with the new CTA chapter.

“We broadened our constitution and bylaws to welcome our fellow educators at Edison and other schools,” says UESF President Dennis Kelly. “We believe that

all education workers deserve the security and protection of a contract that can be enforced by the strongest union we can build.”

Edison teachers say they feel optimistic about the future and can now focus on creating positive changes within the classroom, since they are working in a calmer, saner environment.

“I think there’s going to be some exciting things happening this year,” predicts Andrew Tuomey, a seventh-grade math and science teacher who serves on the negotiations team. “Now, we have a true collaborative effort between the teachers, administration, school board and community. We can now work together, to make this urban school a true gem.”

SHERRY POSNICK-GOODWIN

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