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California EDUCATOR



Congratulations

**REBECCA
MIELIWOCKI**

Our **NATIONAL
TEACHER OF
THE YEAR**

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May 2012 Volume 16 Issue 8



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FEATURES



8 IS YOUR DISTRICT BREAKING SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW?

Teachers like Carol Siddle are seeing greater numbers of special ed students in general education classrooms. A new CTA report reveals districts are taking extreme measures to cut special education costs.



16 THE HUNGER GAMES

Teachers like Mindy Ahrens are using the popular book to help spark lively classroom discussion and to teach topics like math.

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ON THE COVER



Photo by Ron Sachs, CNP/Washington

► Burbank seventh-grade teacher Rebecca Mieliwocki is the National Teacher of the Year.

Proud to be a teacher

SOMETIMES THE CHALLENGES we face on a daily basis in our classrooms are so great that it's hard to remember the rewards of our profession and the reason why we chose to be educators. That's why it's been a delight to read thank-you notes from students that our members have shared with us over the past few months. Letters to the "Thank You, Teacher!" project can be read online at cta.org/thankyouteacher, and they give us all a moment to pause and remember why we are in it and why we stay.

This month, I received a note from one of my former students, and believe me, it both surprised and deeply touched me. Rachel was a student of mine in kindergarten, and her childhood memories of my class included me playing the guitar, singing during circle time, and enforcing a rule against children playing with their Velcro shoes.

Rachel wrote, "Thank you so much for all that you did. My inner child and outer adult ever appreciate it."

She concluded her letter by letting me know she is now in her seventh year of teaching and "couldn't imagine being anything else but an educator."

I felt the same pride when I went to Washington, D.C., to see Rebecca Mieliwocki, a California middle school teacher and member of the Burbank Teachers Association, honored as National Teacher of the Year during a White House ceremony.

Rebecca related that she had been working in publishing when she realized something was missing. I was struck by her comment: "I took some time to make a list of things I needed and wanted in my 'perfect' job: creativity, decision-making control, fun, flexibility, stability, the potential to work with young people. It dawned on me that teaching was the obvious place."

Rachel's note and Rebecca's achievement served as personal reminders to me of why we do it. They are also reminders of why I became involved with my union. It was to make things better for teachers and for our students.

**I received
a note from one
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both surprised
and deeply
touched me.**

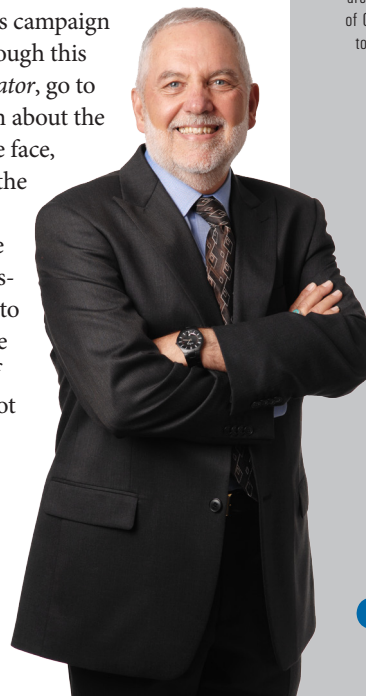
These days it's hard for a teacher to turn around without feeling like she's under attack. Many of us would prefer to retreat to our classrooms, mind our own business and just teach our students. We may not be interested in the political drama. But as the Greek statesman Pericles once said, "Just because you don't take an interest in politics doesn't mean politics won't take an interest in you."

Politics directly impacts almost everything we do in our schools and in our classrooms. And many politicians and corporate power brokers behave as if they know more about the dynamics of teaching and learning than we do. Yet no one knows better than we do what our students need to be successful.

We are facing some crucial issues coming up in the November election that will test that notion. As much as we'd like to shut the door of our classrooms and just teach, we won't be able to do that without passing a funding initiative that will begin to provide the resources to adequately fund our schools. We won't be able to do that if our voice is silenced and our ability to participate in politics is taken away. We won't be able to do that if we don't elect candidates who will advocate for public education.

In the coming weeks, I know many of us will be preoccupied with year-end activities with little time to do much else than help our students and each other tie things up and move forward. But as we head into summer, I hope you take some time for yourselves to recuperate and recharge. I also hope you take some time to become involved with this campaign season. Read through this issue of the *Educator*, go to our website, learn about the election issues we face, and step up. For the sake of our students, and for the sake of our profession, we all need to be involved in the election ahead. If not us, who? If not now, when?

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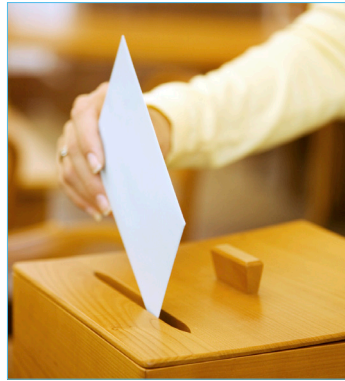
www.cta.org/DisabilityInsurance



Honoring Education Support Professionals

Paraprofessionals, office workers, bus drivers, custodians and maintenance staff play a key role in schools. ESP Day is May 22. Honor your colleagues with an E-card, proclamation or other resources.

www.cta.org/ESPday



Election recommendations

Make your vote count! Check out the Campaign 2012 page to see CTA's recommendations for the June 5 primary. For a glimpse at the recommended congressional candidates, you'll need to log in.

www.cta.org/campaign2012

Facebook MOST POPULAR FACEBOOK POSTS

24 Apr | 223 likes, 42 shares

"I am not the best teacher in America. There isn't one. All across this nation millions of teachers do the work that I do, and many do it better. I have the qualities that some of the best teachers have... an absolute passion for my work, a bottomless well of belief in my students and their potential. I have a thirst for getting better at what I do every single day. And I have a warm and welcoming heart for all students and the unique gifts that they bring to my classroom."

Rebecca Mieliwoki,
National Teacher of the Year

Twitter TOP TWEETS

@DianeRavitch

If you think that public education in the US is not under siege, you have not been paying attention.

@chbrenchley

Happy Teacher Appreciation Day. Teachers deserve nothing less than to be a worldwide trending topic. #thankateacher

Favorite COMMENTS

Shelly Larson

6:38 pm | 25 Apr

I used to tell my students and teachers, after a tough testing session, that it's only one test, one day, one time. It doesn't determine one's worth. I just wish the rest of the world understood that.

Ralph Durham

1:25 pm | 7 Apr

So-called "right-to-work" laws are an Orwellian term to describe the right to freeloader off of the bargaining work by union brothers and sisters, and to cut the knees out from unions as a political force. It's like businessmen pooling their money to form a corporation. You can choose to work a non-union job, or invest your money in something else.

▶ VIRAL VIDEO



What Teachers Make: By Taylor Mali, a slam poet, humorist and former teacher.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuBmSbiVXo0



▶ GET CONNECTED TO CTA FOR ALL THE LATEST NEWS. BECOME A **FACEBOOK** FAN. FOLLOW US ON **TWITTER**. WATCH US ON **YOUTUBE!**

calendar

MAY

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JUNE

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MAY 22

EVENT

CTA ESP Day

In recognition of the vital contributions of education support professionals, CTA observes ESP Day on the Tuesday of ESP Week (May 20-26).

Find out more: www.cta.org/espday

JUNE 1

APPLICATION DEADLINE

NEA Foundation grant

The NEA Foundation has awarded more than \$7 million in grants over the past decade to educators and ESP, including many CTA members. Student Achievement Grants support initiatives to improve academic achievement. Learning and Leadership Grants support high-quality professional development activities. The NEA website lists dozens of other grants and awards available to teachers and students.



Visit neafoundation.org and www.nea.org/grants/grantsawardsandmore.html.

JUNE 5

ELECTION

State primary election

All candidates will appear on a single ballot, and the top two vote-getters will move on to the Nov. 6 general election regardless of party affiliation. No one can assume their candidate is a shoo-in — it is doubly important that educators turn out and vote in this primary.



See CTA's recommended candidates at: www.cta.org/campaign2012

JUNE 30–JULY 5

CONVENTION

NEA Representative Assembly *Washington, D.C.*

The nation's capital will be the setting of the annual meeting of the Representative Assembly, the National Education Association's highest decision-making body. With more than 9,000 delegates (including more than 1,000 from California), the RA is the world's largest democratic deliberative body. CTA members will help set policy and chart the direction of NEA business through participation in various committees, constituencies, caucuses and leadership groups.

Find out more: www.nea.org/ra



JULY 23–26

CONFERENCE

Presidents Conference

Asilomar Conference Grounds, Pacific Grove

This four-day training program is geared toward local chapter leaders. New presidents and presidents of locals in the Community College Association arrive Monday to engage in specially tailored core sessions. Other participants join them Tuesday for electives and workshops to enhance leadership skills and understanding of issues. This year's Presidents Conference will focus on the November 2012 election.

Find out more: www.cta.org/conferences

*Don't miss featured speakers
Doug Reeves and Andy Hargreaves
during the IPD Strand!*

JULY

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AUGUST 5-9

CONFERENCE

Summer Institute
*UCLA Conference Center,
 Los Angeles*

The premiere workshop of its kind, Summer Institute offers sessions in areas that assist chapter leaders in the day-to-day representation and support of members. Sessions include Communications, Instruction and Professional Development, Emerging Leaders, Bargaining, School Finance, Healthcare Benefits and Issues, Legal, Member Benefits, and Community Outreach. See story on page 80.

Find out more: www.cta.org/conferences

UC San Diego | Extension



New!

Introducing the Clear Credential Program (Single and Multiple Subject)

The UC San Diego Extension SB 2042 Clear Credential program is designed for public, charter and private school teachers who are employed in a school or district that do not have an Induction program.

After completing the program, students can then initiate the formal recommendation to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

The new UC San Diego Extension Clear Credential Program is:

- 100% online.
- designed to meet the new standards defined by the CCTC.
- one of the first programs to be made available under the new CCTC standards.
- specifically designed to be **completed within one year**.
- UC San Diego Extension is now accepting applications for the new program.

To view credential requirements, the program FAQ and to download an application please visit our Clear Credential program page at extension.ucsd.edu/clearcredential.

UC San Diego Extension also offers accessible and affordable online programs for K-12 and Postsecondary Educators.

- New courses begin every month
- Most programs can be completed online within 1 year
- Interactive, Research-Based Programs with Practical Classroom Application

Programs include:

- CLAD Through CTET
- CCTC-Approved Reading Certificate
- Career and Technical Education (CTE)
- College Counseling
- Gifted and Talented Education (GATE)
- Teaching Adult Learners
- Teaching Online
- Professional Development/ Salary Point Coursework

For more information, please contact **Morgan Appel, Director of Education** at: (858) 534-9273 or mappel@ucsd.edu

extension.ucsd.edu/education

WM12-3047

IS YOUR DISTRICT BREAKING SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW?

Elizabeth Alanis and **Joseph Vasquez** have each other's back when working with general and special education students.



General
education
teachers...

Cost-saving measures are putting more special ed students in your classroom whether they (or you) are ready or not.

By **Sherry Posnick-Goodwin**
Photos by **Scott Buschman**

➤ Imagine being assigned students with disabilities without receiving training or support to help them succeed.

IMAGINE seeing programs and services for students with disabilities disappearing to save money, because the district suddenly has a “new way” of doing business.

Imagine a student’s IEP (Individualized Education Program) being changed without notifying members of the IEP team.

These disturbing scenes are occurring statewide as districts are using misleading language and changing job titles to save money delivering one-size-fits-all special education programs, according to a new report available to CTA members called *Special Education in California* (see page 15). In many cases, what is happening violates the state’s Education Code, say CTA staff experts.

As much as special educators want students with disabilities to be mainstreamed into regular classrooms, it must be done correctly and for the right reason. Saving money is not the right reason.

Educators say students with disabilities are forced into general education classes because other options have been removed. Districts are changing job titles of those who work in special day class (SDC) and resource specialist program (RSP) categories, which circumvents Education Code requirements around student caseload requirements. Based on administrative dictates, all IEPs look the same.

Schools are saving money, but at what cost to general and special education students?

Jennifer Moon worries that special education students in general education classes are not having their needs met. IEPs are written to

fit the system, rather than having the system fit the child, she said.

“I have always believed in inclusion when it’s appropriate, but inclusion is a philosophy and not a program. It’s not good for every single kid,” said Moon, who teaches at Hidden Valley Middle School in Escondido.

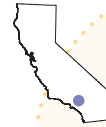
“Unfortunately, students with special needs don’t know the difference. Some have just shut down. They don’t want to participate and they are embarrassed to ask for help. It’s hard enough to have disabilities; it’s a double whammy when you are being pushed beyond what you can handle.”

» Beware of outside firms that ignore student needs

Reorganization of special education often happens after a school district hires an outside firm to evaluate special education programs or after administrators attend conferences on cutting costs in special education. Districts experiencing this type of reorganization include San Francisco, San Bernardino, Cajon Valley, Fullerton, Sacramento, Pomona, Escondido, San Diego, Madera, Covina, Salinas, Beaumont, Fremont and El Monte.

“They called it an ‘opportunity report,’” says special educator Joni Clark of a consultant’s recommendations to eliminate special education services in Fremont Unified School District. “They sugarcoat it as a great opportunity when it really means they will no longer offer individualized services.”

Teachers were astounded when Fremont Unified spent \$44,000 in Jobs Bill funding to hire the services of a company called School Innova-



Rosemead *No training, no say*

JOSEPH VASQUEZ and **ELIZABETH ALANIS** are making it work at Rosemead High School.

The two “co-teach” a general education class where five special education students are fully included. Vasquez, the general education teacher, does most of the teaching while Alanis, a special educator, helps students with disabilities keep up and assists struggling general education students and English learners.

“They just said, ‘Team up, you two.’ There could have been better preparation,” Vasquez recalls. There was no model to follow and no training. The two have separate planning periods and seldom have time to collaborate.

“When it first happened, it was a bit confusing for people,” recalls Alanis. “We are slowly working our way into it and making it work. I really want these kids to succeed. But it’s a struggle, and meeting all their needs is exhausting.”

While the two are doing their best, they worry the needs of some students are not being met.

“I would like services and programs returned to our school because some kids are falling through the cracks and we are doing them a disservice,” says Alanis. “But we had no say in this and were not included in the process.”

It's like calling the fox guarding the hen house and asking if the chickens are OK.
Philip Ramos

tions and Advocacy to review the district's special education programs. They were even more thunderstruck at the recommendations.

"Basically, they said save money and blend your programs," says Clark, a resource specialist and member of the Fremont Unified District

Newsworthy

- After failing for the eighth straight year to meet service delivery targets for special education, Los Angeles Unified School District has begun interviewing staff to understand why records indicate thousands of students with disabilities are not receiving their prescribed services.
- The San Francisco Unified School District has violated more than 100 special education regulations in the past year, according to a recent report by the California Department of Education. The violations include failing to properly assess students' disabilities, implement federally mandated services and employ qualified staff to work with special-needs students.
- Parents say Fresno Unified School District pressured them to waive special education rights. The couple were told if they drop a special education complaint filed against the district, their son's disabilities would be assessed and he'd be placed in the appropriate setting.

Teachers Association (FUDTA). "It was a cookie-cutter approach."

Recommendations included blending special day classes with resource classes, reducing certificated and classified staff, and removing students from special education, if possible. The school board has not yet acted on the recommendations.

"It's not right. It's scary. We are pushing back," says Clark. FUDTA has developed a special education liaison team and submitted its own recommendations to the school board and superintendent.

"We were blindsided when they did this over the summer," says Clark. "My advice is to be aware and organize early. Be proactive. That way you will be better prepared when things hit the fan."

Districts believe it will save them money to eliminate services and resource programs, says Stacy Begin, a special education expert with CTA's Instruction and Professional Development (IPD) Department. A former special education teacher, she warns CTA members to be extremely wary if their district calls in a consultant to evaluate special education services.

"Teachers should attend meetings held to reveal the report and ask for a copy of the full report," says Begin. "Often the changes being made and timelines recommended are not in the best interest of students. Some recommendations include reducing designated services like speech, adapted physical education and occupation therapy to a 'consult-only' model regardless of what each student needs to be successful. By law, the power to make these decisions continues to remain with the IEP team."

What are districts substituting for service and resource programs? Something called SAI.

» Specialized Academic Instruction was "hijacked"

By changing the name of a special education program to Specialized Academic Instruction, districts can circumvent requirements regarding services, resources and limits on student numbers. Educators say districts "hijacked" the term to replace programs like resource specialist programs, which are more expensive.

SAI is a catch-all to describe a variety of instructional services on a student's IEP. Districts are cutting programs, moving most special education students to general education classes and labeling it SAI — as if Specialized Academic Instruction were really a program.

The end result: General education teachers are assigned students with disabilities without receiving the proper training, a manageable

class size or supports like paraprofessionals to help them succeed. Special education teachers say they can no longer recommend the best options for their students and they are seeing caseloads of more than 75 students and may have 50 students in a classroom.

Annette Wiederholt has four to six special education students in her general education algebra classes at Rosemead High School. In one class, there is only one instructional aide to assist students. Despite her best efforts, most students with disabilities are flunking algebra.

"My pacing guide doesn't fit these students, and it's almost inhumane to do it this way," says the El Monte Union Educators Association (EMUEA) member. "The rigor is really too much for these kids."

Her high school eliminated services and resource programs for students with "mild to moderate" disabilities. General education teachers



Joni Clark

were told to collaborate with special education teachers to learn strategies for teaching students with special needs, which they were glad to do. But they were not given common planning periods, so collaboration between general and special education teachers has been spotty.

“What happened has hurt students and frustrated teachers,” says Winetta Belt-Vargas, a Rosemead High School special education teacher who serves on the CTA Special Education Committee. “We have 100 students with disabilities in general education settings, and we simply don’t have enough instructional aides.”

EMUEA formed a special education committee to organize around issues impacting the district. “We need input from general education and special education teachers to do what is best for students,” says Belt-Vargas.

» Are districts circumventing the law?

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that a local education agency provide a “full continuum” of options in the “least restrictive environment” (LRE) whenever possible to meet a student’s individual needs.

The full continuum might include inclusion or “mainstreaming” with appropriate supports in place; classes where students are in self-contained classrooms all day or just for certain subjects; resource specialist programs where students are pulled out for small-group or individualized instruction in certain subjects; or general education and special education teachers working as co-teachers.

Administrators claim they are “forced” to mainstream nearly all students with disabilities to comply with federal requirements and therefore disband other programs, but that is untrue, according to CTA experts. In many cases, districts just want to save money.

To escape the “full continuum” requirement, some districts are

COMMUNITY COLLEGES FACE CUTS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Services for students with disabilities are decreasing at the community college level as administrators look for ways to cut costs.

Services include test proctoring, specialized counseling, interpreting or captioning for hearing impaired or deaf students, note-taking services, reader services, transcription services, specialized tutoring, and access to adaptive equipment through the Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSPS) site on campus.

Special education is not mandated at community colleges. Colleges must provide academic accommodations to students with disabilities regardless of the budget situation, according to Dr. Brooke Choo, a learning disabilities specialist at Irvine Valley College. Some disabled support program and student services budgets were slashed by 50 percent, but we still must provide those services,” says Choo.

Special services such as tutoring and classes designed for students with disabilities in math, English and study skills that can serve as a bridge to regular classes are the first things to go at many community colleges.

Also pared back are funds to assess students for learning disabilities. While such testing is not mandated, it can make the difference between success and failure of students with disabilities, says Choo. According to a 2009 study, 56 percent of students eligible for special services were undiagnosed before being tested at a community college.

“The reality is that we’re all trying to do more with less,” says Choo, who trains learning disability specialists throughout the state. “I am very concerned about our ability to meet the needs of our students.”



Brooke Choo

Winetta Belt-Vargas says what happened has hurt students and frustrated teachers.





Trina Brown worries that students' needs are not met.

Courtesy Photo

Beaumont Case carriers



“SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS do not interact with or have time to work on specific goals with their students because they spend their time working with general education students, gen education teachers and classroom aides,” explains Trina Brown, a speech and language pathologist for the Beaumont Unified School District.

Middle school special education teachers teach a class that groups special education students with struggling general education students and sometimes English learners. Besides teaching this class for half the day, teachers have a “caseload” of 28 special education students. They are called a “case carrier” and seldom interact directly with students.

“The effect is that kids are not getting the specific interventions that they need,” says Brown, a Beaumont Teachers Association member. “The district has implemented this cookie-cutter program because it’s a huge money saver.”

At the high school level, the district abolished a class designed for students with disabilities and “mainstreamed” them, says Greg Abt, a Beaumont High School teacher for students with mild to moderate disabilities.

“The special education teacher takes a support role. It isn’t working,” says Abt. “Before this happened, our test scores were going up. Once this happened, they started dropping.”

changing specific job titles to education specialist, the designation of an advanced credential held by special educators, as a way to “reorganize” special education. This allows placement of students with disabilities into general education classrooms without the services, support, training and additional personnel it takes to have successful inclusion, says Begin.

Changing a job title in no way justifies cutting services, she added. In this case, changing job titles increases workloads. When districts change a mandated job to “specialized academic instructor,” the limit of 28 students with special needs no longer applies. Plus, special education teachers are assigned general education students who are struggling.

The California Department of Education (CDE) Special Education Division has not eliminated resource specialist programs and specialized classes, which are the best options for many students with disabilities. Considered part of the “full continuum” of services to be provided, the CDE told districts: “Any changes to services provided to students with IEPs must be determined by the IEP team,

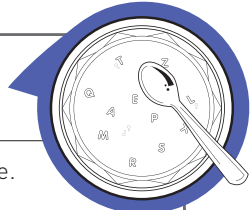
agreed to by the parent and documented in the IEP.”

» Districts alter IEPs

Educators say students with disabilities are forced into general education classes because other options have been removed from IEP paperwork. In fact, when IEP team members are asked to check the resources they believe would be best for students, the special day class (SDC) and resource specialist program (RSP) classifications have been removed from forms in many districts. Thus, they cannot choose from a “full continuum” of service as required by law, explains Barbara Schulman, a special education teacher in Saddleback Valley.

CTA research indicates districts are “directing” educators and IEP teams to change a student’s IEP.

“In some districts, IEPs are being unilaterally altered by administrators to place students in a less costly setting,” says Schulman. “This is unacceptable and, when identified, should be reported and stopped. Any changes to services must be determined by the IEP team, agreed to by the parent and documented in the



ALPHABET SOUP

Special education terms mentioned in this article.

IDEA: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, federal legislation written in 1975 guaranteeing students with disabilities a free and appropriate public education and the right to be educated with their non-disabled peers.

RSP: Resource Specialist Program, a program that provides instruction, materials and support services to students with identified disabilities who are assigned to a general classroom for more than 50 percent of their school day.

IEP: Individualized Education Program, a written plan that states goals, objectives and services for a student receiving special education. The IEP team consists of parents, teachers, administrators, and school personnel who provide services to the student.

SDC: Special Day Class, a self-contained special education class that provides services to students with intensive needs that cannot be met by the general education program or RSP, and occupies more than 50 percent of the student's day.

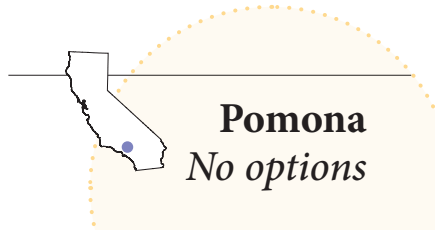
LEA: Local Education Agency, or school district participating in a Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA), which coordinates with school districts and the County Office of Education to provide a continuum of programs and services for disabled individuals from birth through 22 years of age.

SST: Student Study Team is a group that evaluates a child's performance, makes recommendations for success and develops a formal plan. The team includes the classroom teacher, parents, and educational specialists. Members may also make a recommendation for a special education evaluation.

IEP. The law does not provide for another individual, including district or school administrators, to overrule decisions made by the IEP team.”

The Folsom Cordova Unified School District made changes to students' IEPs without going through the IEP process, and students were transferred to different schools without much prior notification to parents. The district made changes and special education teachers were titled “case managers” for 28 students with special needs. Plus they now have daily

story continues on page 14 ▶



IT WAS THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL in 2009 and teacher Philip Ramos couldn't find the special day class (SDC). The self-contained special education classroom no longer existed because Pomona Unified School District had put all special education students into general education classes at nine school sites.

The switch was made over the summer without input from teachers or parents. A week before school, administrators called parents and told them that if they wanted their child in SDC, they would have to switch schools. General education teachers were not informed beforehand that students with disabilities would be fully included.

“I reminded administrators there must be an IEP meeting with teachers, administrators, parents and staff to change placement from SDC to general education, and it was against state Education Code to not go through the IEP process,” says Ramos, Associated Pomona Teachers. “Administrators told me that they could, in fact, do this.”



Philip Ramos discusses possible violations of the Education Code.

contact with many other students who need extra help but do not have an IEP.

Members of the Folsom Cordova Education Association filed a complaint with the state over the IEP violation and won.

“We were lucky,” says Michael Itkoff, FCEA president. “I have talked to other CTA chapters, and what happened with us was not the norm when the state conducts an investigation. Many others were not taken seriously or were outright ignored.”

» Eliminating the “I” in IEP?

Both teachers and parents have said they felt “blindsided” when they were informed about the “new way” their district would provide special education services.

Parents are just concerned about school districts eliminating the “continuum of services” at many sites, says Jane Floethe-Ford, education director of the nonprofit Parents Helping Parents, which provides training for families of children with special needs so they can be effectively involved in the IEP process.

A continuum of services is important because one size does not fit all, she says. “That’s why it is called an IEP, because the intent is to individualize. I understand that we are in a fiscal crisis, but the law still needs to be implemented.”

Parents concerned about the educational needs of their child can be allies to make sure special education supports are in place. CTA advises educators to encourage parents to keep good records of all communica-



San Francisco *No professional development*



Carol Siddle worries about class size.

“IT WAS ALL ABOUT saving money,” says Linda Plack, vice president of United Educators of San Francisco (UESF).

Though teachers thought San Francisco Unified had appropriate inclusion in place, the district consultants said the number of mainstreamed students was too low and changes were made.

Professional development for general education teachers consisted of a half day before implementation, says Plack.

UESF members surveyed in January said that professional development is desperately needed for teachers and paras working in general education classrooms with kids who have IEPs — especially when it comes to violent and aggressive students. Teachers reported they had difficulty meeting the needs of students with disabilities while instructing the rest of the class. They also lack sufficient hours of paraprofessional support.

Carolyn Samoa, a special education paraprofessional at Paul Revere Elementary School, says that schools have cut hours

for classroom aides, even though paras are needed more than ever for inclusion classrooms with higher numbers.

“Some students only get 30 minutes per day with a para,” says Samoa. “It’s not nearly enough. It’s not fair to the kids.”

Carol Siddle says that increasing the numbers of students with disabilities has been “problematic” at Commodore Sloat Elementary School.

“It has been very chaotic at sites where they have overloaded the classes. Some classes were hit very hard, with 33 regular education students and four students with IEPs. There were six full-inclusion children placed within three kindergarten classrooms, with a seventh child currently qualifying for full inclusion and two others going through the assessment process.”

UESF is organizing and pushing back, says Plack. “We are demanding sufficient classroom support and professional development so we can do what’s best for students.”



Carolyn Samoa

tion in connection with their child, to become informed about the law and their rights, and suggests they visit websites for the U.S. Department of Education as well as the California Department of Education.

“If your classroom lacks essential support staff, let parents know that the law allows them to request services be provided to a child with a disability to help teachers work more effectively with that student,” Begin said. “Refer them to the CTA website for resources.”

» Whistle-blowers have legal protections

School employees who file reports concerning violations of Special Education laws are legally protected against retaliation for having done so, but they need to follow appropriate procedures to make sure their activities will be protected. CTA members who are investigated or subjected to adverse actions related to filing such reports should immediately contact CTA staff to determine how best to respond and whether CTA Legal assistance may be needed.

Last year Yolanda Rodriguez taught 32 students in a third- and fourth-grade combination class. Five of her students were fully included special education students. A general education teacher, Rodriguez received training for students with disabilities in a two-hour presentation after Pomona Unified School District collapsed services and resource programs, leaving no option but full inclusion at nine school sites.

“I had no support,” says Rodriguez, Associated Pomona Teachers. “I had a classroom aide only three hours a week and had to yell to get that. I had no planning time. Finally, I received assistance from a special education teacher for one hour per day.”

During an IEP meeting, Rodriguez told the parents of one student that she did not feel that child’s needs were being met. The principal wrote

a letter of reprimand, which was later rescinded thanks to CTA.

Philip Ramos filed a complaint with the California Department of Education about his district’s new style of delivering special education services. Without even visiting Pomona, the state sided with his administration.

“How can you conduct an investigation with one phone call to administration?” asks Ramos. “It’s like calling the fox guarding the hen house and asking if the chickens are OK.”

CTA is working to change this.

Meanwhile, a Supreme Court case (*Susan Barker v. Riverside County Office of Education*), the Education Code and CTA resources protect teachers who file complaints. The Barker case provided strength to whistle-blower laws. Ed Code Section 56046 protects educators who advocate for children with disabilities. 🎓



Yolanda Rodriguez wants training and para support.

CTA RESOURCES HELP YOU ADVOCATE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

Changes in special education

programs statewide have resulted in increased class sizes, increased teacher workload, increased caseloads for special educators, lack of teacher involvement in the IEP planning process, unmet needs of special education students, and students with special needs being moved into general education classes without adequate training provided to staff.

Because job descriptions and class size are subjects about which the employer is legally required to negotiate, such issues should be brought to the attention of the local chapter and its bargaining team to make sure California Labor Laws are being followed.

“It is a real problem,” says Barbara Schulman, chair of CTA’s Special Education Committee. “Unfortunately, districts are making changes in special education to save money even when it is not in the best interests of students — and perhaps against the Education Code.”

These are some of the findings of an online survey conducted by State Council’s Special Education Committee. The results of this survey are a new report available to all members called *Special Education in California*.

To download the report, visit www.cta.org/specialeducationincalifornia.

THE HUNGER GAMES

WHETS STUDENTS' APPETITES FOR READING

By Sherry Posnick-Goodwin
Photos by Scott Buschman

Joshua Wong comments during a discussion of *The Hunger Games*.



→ Joshua Wong didn't like reading.

That changed when his teacher selected *The Hunger Games* as a reading assignment at Hoover Middle School in San Francisco.

"I thought books were boring, but this book changed my mind," explains the eighth-grader. "*The Hunger Games* is a page-turner, and I never know what is going to happen next. Now I guess I should try a book to see whether it's good or not."

➔ Wong is among millions of students who have become enthralled with *The Hunger Games*, a trilogy by Suzanne Collins that depicts a bleak future where teens fight to the death in an annual tournament on live TV. Educators have found creative ways to use the book in the classroom, reports the *New York Times*. In addition to motivating students to read, *The Hunger Games* is generating powerful classroom discussions on government, oppression, inequality, surveillance, bullying, reality TV and morality.

That's certainly the case at Hoover Middle School, says Wong's language arts teacher, Sarah Gadye. She and Geraldine Darlington, both members of United Educators of San Francisco, decided *The Hunger Games* should be read by the entire eighth-grade class, and they asked the PTA to purchase copies for 400 students. Students have been reading sections of the book aloud in class.

"Even struggling readers are picking up the book so they can be part of the conversation. They don't even realize that they are discussing some very grownup themes," says Gadye. "We want to engage as many kids as possible — even kids who hate reading. And we've been successful. We're happy teachers."

Students wrote essays and did research projects based on the book. Some described how the fictional country Panem and its Capitol mirror the Roman Empire, where gladiators fought to the death. A student researched post-traumatic stress disorder because she felt Haymitch, a Hunger Games champion and mentor who drinks excessively, suffers from that condition.

Characters in the book are constantly being watched by the government, so when Hoover School installed surveillance cameras, students hotly debated whether being recorded increased safety or violated their privacy. This led to further discussion about the government's right to view phone and computer records of individuals.

"People who don't talk to people outside of their own group are talking to each other about the book at lunchtime or on the Muni bus," says student Riki Eijima.



TIPS

FOR TEACHING THE HUNGER GAMES



Ask students to compare it with classic books with similar dystopian themes such as *Lord of the Flies*, *Fahrenheit 451* or *1984*.

Ask students to write in journal format from the point of view of one of the main characters about what is taking place and how they feel about it.

Have students compare *The Hunger Games* to reality shows like "Survivor" or "American Idol."

Assign research topics based on themes of the book, such as government oppression, surveillance and the Patriot Act, poverty, ancient Rome or McCarthyism.

Visit online sites offering lesson plans, such as teachershare.scholastic.com/resources/11485.



Even the parents talked about it. Many parents made plans to accompany classes on field trips to see the film after finishing the book. Two groups from Hoover Middle School rented out the entire theater.

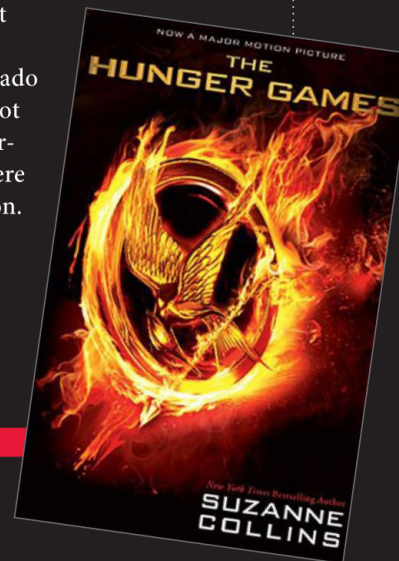
With TV viewers following every move of the Kardashians, Snooki and other reality TV stars, Gadye asked her students to compare current shows with *The Hunger Games* — the ultimate reality show where death is usually the outcome. Some students made comparisons to "American Idol" and "The Bachelor," where contestants suffer and cry before being eliminated. When asked by their teacher if they cheer for contestants to win — or lose — based on appearance, most students raised their hands in affirmation. Then they pondered whether this was good or bad.

"I had a lot of fun teaching this book," says Gadye. "The best thing is that it got students thinking. We could have spent more time on it, but we don't have lots of time because of testing. These days it's challenging to do anything in depth, but we succeeded."

USING THE BOOK IN THE CLASSROOM

Capitalizing on students' passion for the book, Mindy Ahrens incorporated it into core subjects. When teaching percentages in math, she had them figure out the percentages of children from the 12 districts who are selected in a ceremony called the Reaping to become "tributes" and fight in the Hunger Games. There was also a class field trip to see the movie.

"On the bus ride home, I could not believe the rich conversations I heard from my kids," says Ahrens, a sixth-grade teacher at Northside Elementary School in Cool, El Dorado County. "There was a lot of talk about utopia versus dystopia, where there is hunger and starvation. I was impressed with the amount of critical thinking."



The book appeals to boys because there is a lot of action, while girls relate to the strong female heroine and a bit of romance, says Ahrens, a Black Oak Mine Teachers Association member. “I wanted to focus on the reality TV angle and why we keep watching these kinds of things. Why do we want to see the tears? Why do these things entertain us? In these types of shows, there is always an alliance and always a villain. We discussed many things, including trust and friendship. Even with the violence and craziness of the games, Katniss (the protagonist) builds trust in people.”

Marylen Haines, a teacher at Palomar Continuation High School, used the book as a basis for writing and vocabulary lessons. First she

read the book aloud, and then had students continue reading during silent sustained reading time. She was impressed with the discussions that followed.



Sandrine LeGrand

“They talked about the government and what can happen when you don’t use your right to speak out or vote, and what happens when the government makes decisions for you,” says Haines, a member of the Sweetwater Education Association. “A lot of my kids are turning 18, and *The Hunger Games* helped them realize that their vote and their voice really mean something.”

TAKING PART IN A REAPING

Before reading *The Hunger Games*, Sandrine LeGrand’s students took

part in a Reaping ceremony and had to enter their names in a class lottery based on their age and number of family members, as in the book. Names were selected for one male and one female student to become “tributes.” They were asked to imagine being forced into life-and-death battles. Unlike the book, no one volunteered to take their place.

“I definitely wanted somebody else to be picked,” says Maurice Barajas, the boy tribute. “It didn’t seem fair, because other students had their names entered more times than me.”

LeGrand, a resource reading teacher for eighth-graders with learning disabilities at Leyva Middle School in San Jose, asked donorschoose.org to find a benefactor, and soon 35 books arrived in the mail. Her students instantly felt a sense of “belonging” because they were reading the same popular book with other students.



Sarah Gadye listens to a *Hunger Games* presentation by students Whitney Lim and Riki Eijima.

“The book is violent, but it’s not about random violence; it’s about survival skills,” says LeGrand, an Evergreen Teachers Association member. “It’s about keeping your humanity in challenging circumstances. It’s something these kids can relate to.”

She said that many of her students identified with Katniss, the lead character, because they, too, are poor. “They said that they envisioned the Capitol being white people and the districts filled with poor people who are Mexican.”

Like Katniss, her students also take care of younger siblings and see themselves as caregivers, says LeGrand. “And they liked the fact that Katniss was a strong, independent young woman who was able to take care of herself.” 🎓



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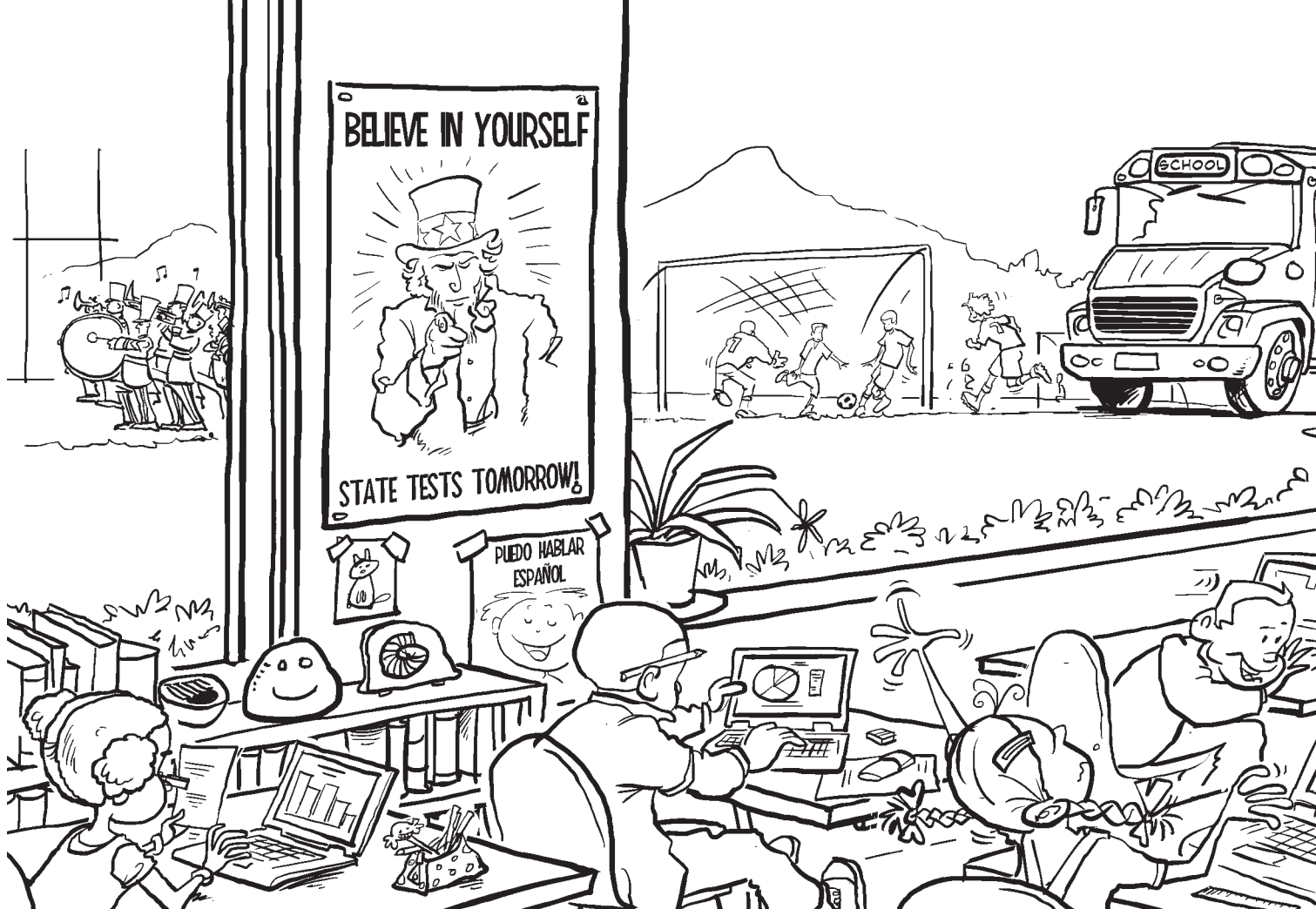
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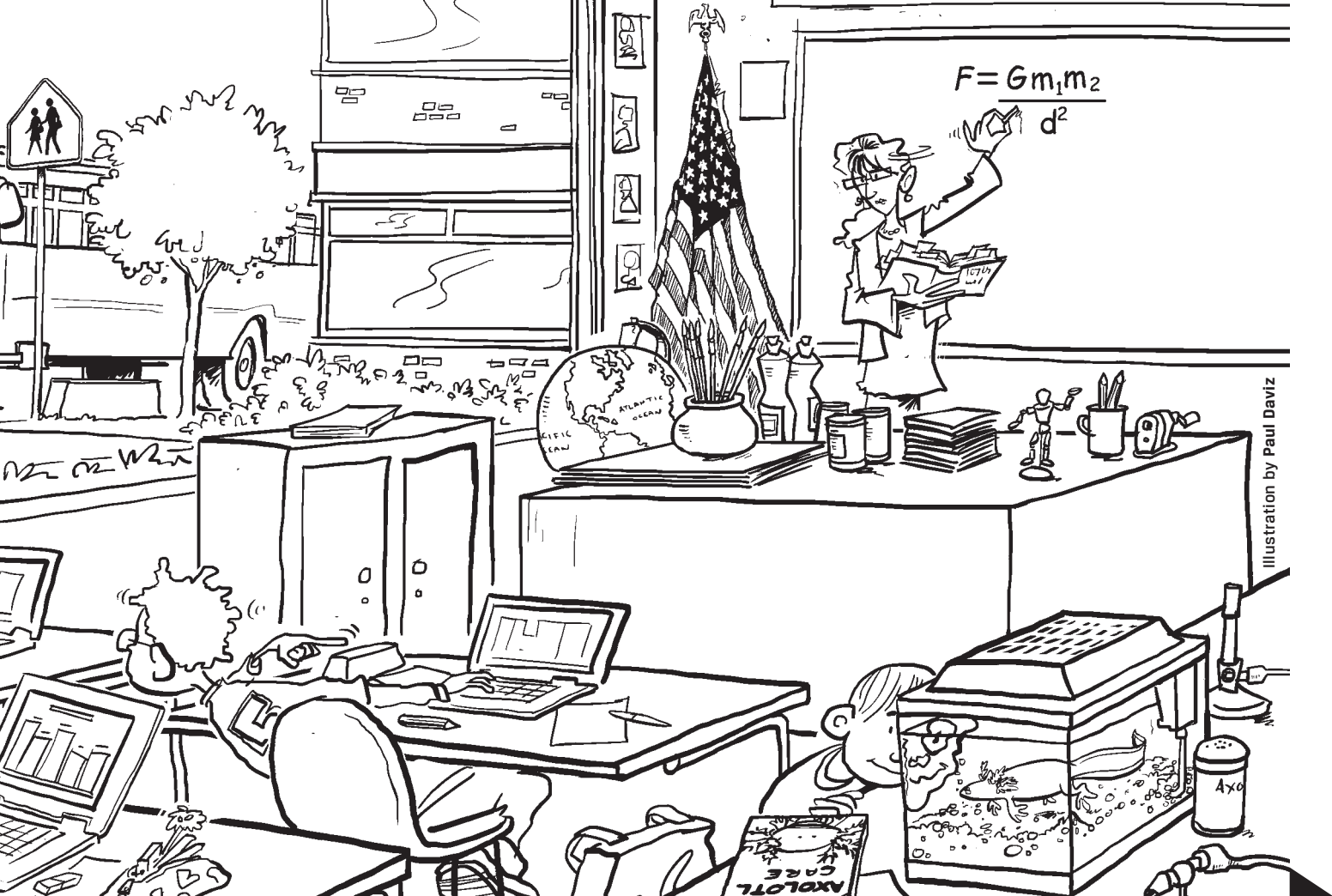


Illustration by Paul Daviz

ure are governed by politics?

u CAN'T see.

a voice, it singles out unions that represent teachers, nurses and firefighters for unfair treatment. It weakens our voice on things that matter. And corporations already outspend unions 15 to 1 on political contributions.

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in your classroom. Don't let them take it about the Corporate Power Grab Initiative.

TAKING A STAND

Political action training	22
Budget Update	24
Dismissal bills still alive	26

GOOD NEWS! The CTA-supported tax plan will be on the November 2012 Ballot!

► *This means the super-wealthy, who don't currently pay their fair share in taxes, will have to ante up.*

GOVERNOR JERRY BROWN said enough signatures have been collected to qualify the tax initiative for the November ballot. Thank you, CTA members who collected signatures and made this happen. More than 800,000 valid voter signatures were collected — and CTA members, with the help of coalition partners, collected at least 300,000 of them! The Schools and Local Public Safety Protection Act of 2012 taxes the super-wealthy to provide billions for public schools and essential services, and helps close the state budget crisis.

Polls don't win elections. Votes do. VOTE JUNE 5

EVERY DAY YOU GO TO WORK, politicians make decisions that impact your students and your profession.

To get better decisions, we need better decision-makers.

There are many ways we advocate for our students and for public schools. Voting is just one of them. We want lawmakers ready to advocate for our schools and colleges and the funding we need. In California's "open primary" system, the top two vote-getters, regardless of political party, will move to the November general election.

Make your vote count! Vote for pro-public education candidates. See CTA's recommended candidates and why you should vote YES on Prop. 28 at www.cta.org/campaign2012.

How many things are governed by politics?

FEEL FREE TO TEAR OUT THE POSTER on the previous page and post it in your classroom, worksite or wherever you think it important to share our opposition to the Corporate Power Grab.

Making a difference in the political arena

"I'll get out of politics when you take politics out of my classroom."
—Mary Hatwood Futrell, NEA President, 1983-89

THIS OFTEN-ECHOED STATEMENT clarifies the dilemma many teachers face — wanting to focus their energies on their students and classrooms while knowing that political decisions made by school boards, legislators and government officials directly impact everything that takes place there.

"After being RIF'd [pink-slipped] in my first year of teaching, I realized that everything in school is politically driven, from the number of pencils in my classroom to my grade level assignment," says United Teachers of Pasadena second-grade teacher Yolanda Munoz. "Teachers come into the profession to make a difference, but how can we when our rights and the rights of our students get mired in political bureaucracy? In order to effect change, we have to be involved in the political process."

Munoz joined 100 of her CTA colleagues to do just that — gain knowledge and hone their political advocacy skills by participating in the Region IV Political Academy in April.

"Either we can sit back and accept what happens to us, or we can take an active role in advocating, lobbying and educating the politicians who represent us and the citizens in our communities," says Jolene E. Tripp, Redlands Education Support Professionals Association president and school bus driver. She cites a nasty passive-aggressive manager as her impetus for political action. "I often find the first challenge is to help politicians understand who ESPs are in the first place. I can guarantee that if we do not engage them about our issues and concerns, the result will ultimately harm our students."

Fontana Teachers Association member Trent Stillman draws upon a diving metaphor to characterize his involvement in political advocacy. "Once I dipped my toes into the water, it was easy just to dive in completely. Not everyone is initially comfortable gathering signatures, organizing precinct walks or



CTA President Dean Vogle participates in the Organizing4Power Training with Riverside County Office TA President Mike Bochicchio and members Lionel Castro and Sheryl Eugene.

Photo by Bill Guy

managing phone banks, but CTA does such an outstanding job providing resources, training and support that I'm very confident in those roles."

Deb McKenzie, Rialto Education Association, recalls despicable behavior by a difficult school superintendent that reminded her of her former marriage to an abusive husband. "I was stressed, frustrated, bullied and disrespected. I had told myself that I would never let myself be treated that way again, so I started going to school board meetings and got involved in the next election cycle. We helped elect three new board members, the superintendent resigned the day after the election, and I've been politically active ever since. If we don't push for informed, supportive education legislation, schools will continue to be underfunded and overregulated."

"My greatest joy is when I see my students engaged in learning and enjoying themselves," says Santa Ana Educators Association member Karen Bluel. "I love it when they have a chance to be creative or when something we do in class together motivates them to learn on a deeper level. As I began to realize

Either we can sit back and accept what happens to us, or we can take an active role in advocating, lobbying and educating the politicians who represent us and the citizens in our communities.

Jolene E. Tripp

more fully that our profession and our ability to meaningfully engage our students is threatened, I knew something had to be done. So I jumped in!"

So what can CTA and local chapters do to help members become better informed about and engaged in political action? McKenzie advocates for continued networking and learning opportunities for CTA members from different chapters like the Political Academy. Tripp says everything should begin and end with the local chapters, "since that's where our members are."

"Too often, people get focused on their own situations and not the bigger picture," says Bluel. "I'd like to see us make more effective use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube." Stillman and Munoz offer similar solutions — sending teams to sites for assistance with 10-minute meetings and one-on-ones.

"My personal goal dovetails with our local chapter's goal," says Munoz. "We're getting the word out about the Corporate Power Grab Initiative and doing everything we can to get the needed votes to defeat it. We are in a fight to preserve our rights and our students' educations."

By Bill Guy

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Budget update: New state shortfalls increase importance of CTA-backed tax initiative

CALIFORNIA'S REVENUES appear to be running as much as \$3 billion below the estimates used in finalizing the 2011-12 state budget, placing even more importance on voters passing Gov. Jerry Brown's tax initiative in November.

The CTA-backed initiative would bring in about \$9 billion annually in new revenue and protect public education from automatic cuts of \$4.9 billion in the 2012-13 budget if the measure doesn't pass.

Key financial experts, including state Controller John Chiang and Legislative Analyst Mac Taylor, issued reports that find the shortfalls running between \$1 billion and \$3 billion for the state funding year that ends in June.

Schools are already reeling from more than \$20 billion in cuts that are driving California to the bottom of the 50 states in per-pupil spending. Thousands of certificated educators lost their jobs last year, and 20,000 more recently received preliminary layoff notices.

As the *Educator* went to press, CTA advocates in the state capital were gearing up for the release of the May Revision, Gov. Brown's revised 2012-13 budget proposal.

The revision, an annual part of the state budget process, draws on updated information about revenues and expenses. It becomes the basis for the Legislature's efforts to finalize a budget proposal by the June 15 constitutional deadline. State law gives the governor until June 30 to sign the spending plan into law prior to the start of the new fiscal year July 1.

KEY BATTLE TO PREVENT FIGHTING FOR RESOURCES

Ironically, the release of the May Revision is coming on the fifth anniversary of the publication of a 144-page Stanford study that determined California's schools would need an additional \$40 billion annually to be "adequately funded."

Experts reported that California was actually moving backward on school funding during a recent PACE (Policy Analysis for California Education) forum that reviewed the state's progress toward meeting the goals identified by the "Getting Down to Facts" study.

Cuts have resulted in widespread teacher layoffs, increases in class sizes, and elimination of a wide array of important educational services. Students have lost access to nurses, librarians and counselors. The ranks of education support professionals have

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been decimated, and higher education students have been hit by the loss of faculty and courses and increases in their out-of-pocket costs.

The only positive note at the PACE forum was the presence on the November

Thousands of certificated educators lost their jobs last year, and 20,000 more recently received preliminary layoff notices.

ballot of the governor's measure that would protect schools against further cuts.

Against this backdrop, CTA and its partners in the 1 million-member state-wide Education Coalition are battling a fiscal proposal that, while well-intentioned, threatens to force districts and local education agencies to fight one another for existing funds.

Under terms of the governor's "weighted student funding formula," funds would be taken away from some districts and given to others to help students and schools with more challenging education needs. CTA and the Education Coalition have been telling the governor and lawmakers that "reforming" the state's allocation of resources can come only after all schools are adequately funded.

CTA members from around the state have been urging their lawmakers to protect school funding and to defer any conversations about the "weighted student funding formula."

Hundreds of CTA leaders from around California will travel to Sacramento May 22 for CTA's Presidents Lobby Day.

By Len Feldman

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One bad dismissal bill defeated Two others are amended and moved, but still bad

TWO CTA-OPPOSED BILLS would quash teachers' constitutional rights, while doing nothing to address the Los Angeles Unified School District management's failure to protect children.

CTA representatives defeated one of three measures spawned by headlines and the failure of the management of LAUSD to protect students from a sexual predator.

As the *Educator* goes to press, two other bills that would undermine teachers' constitutional rights are still alive, as LAUSD scrambles to blame "shortcomings" in current law — rather than the district's neglect — for the problems.

CTA received a report from the April meeting of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing that LAUSD — after years of failing to file reports of suspected misconduct — had rushed over the previous two months to file 530 allegations with the licensing board, more than three times the number filed by all districts in California combined in any one year. The filings come at the same time the district is backing the CTA-opposed bills, which would broadly expand its powers while eliminating teachers' rights to a fair hearing.

CTA efforts defeated SB 1059, a measure by Sen. Bob Huff (R-Diamond Bar)

that would have taken away teachers' constitutional rights, including their right to a fair hearing and to confront their accusers. The bill's provisions were so broad that a teacher could have faced comparable district penalties for unsafely wearing open-toed shoes in a shop class or abuse of a child.

The Senate and the Assembly Education committees substantially amended and then approved two other measures, which CTA continues to oppose in their new forms. Neither bill addresses the failure of a school district's management to take the necessary steps to protect children.

SB 1530, by Sen. Alex Padilla (D-Pacoima), cleared the Senate Education Committee in April over CTA's objections. The bill now heads to the Senate Appropriations Committee, where the major focus will be on the bill's potential to raise district costs while it cuts desperately needed

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classroom dollars. CTA continues to have major concerns about the bill and remains opposed to it.

In the Assembly Education Committee, Assembly Member Steve Knight (R-Antelope Valley) reluctantly agreed to allow his bill, AB 2028, to be substantially changed, so much so it was considered “gutted and amended.” Unfortunately for educators, it still contains unacceptable provisions.

Education supporters are asked to get in touch with their senators and Assembly members to urge them to support CTA’s effort to restore due process protections to Sen. Padilla’s SB 1530 and to defeat AB 2028. CTA representatives are continuing to work with Sen. Padilla’s office in hopes that he will amend the measure into something that would be helpful to schools.

Updated information about the bills can be found at blog.cta.org and at the “Contact Your Lawmaker” link at cta.org/legislation.

By Len Feldman



CTA members often travel to the Capitol to meet with their Assembly members and state senators on vital issues, including school funding and educators’ pensions. Here, Livermore EA member Shelly Fields and Alcosta Service Center Chair Laura Finco urge Assembly Member Mary Hayashi (D-Hayward) to support increased funding for schools.

Photo by Len Feldman

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MAKING A DIFFERENCE

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Read more about the CTA member who became the National Teacher of the Year at www.cta.org/rebeccamieliwocki.

Rebecca Mieliwocki named National Teacher of the Year

IN A LIGHT-HEARTED White House ceremony, CTA member Rebecca Mieliwocki was honored as the 2012 National Teacher of the Year by President Barack Obama.

“Rebecca is the definition of above and beyond,” said President Obama in presenting the honor. She responded, “I’m not the best teacher in America — but I am a reflection of all of us who have devoted ourselves to teaching.”

Mieliwocki (pronounced like the city of Milwaukee) will serve for one year as a full-time national and international spokesperson for public education. CTA President Dean E. Vogel said, “As the nation’s advocate for public schools, she will inspire

others about the promise of our state’s classrooms, just as she has inspired a love of learning in her middle school students in Burbank for many years.”

Mieliwocki has advocated for education in comments since being named Teacher of the Year, speaking out on issues ranging from the need for teacher training and professional development to support for public schools. She has made it clear that “commitment to education must extend beyond the walls of the classroom. Parent support and community involvement are essential to ensure the success of our students.”

Teachers face so many barriers to student success that they didn’t create and

that are beyond their control, Mieliwocki noted. “I can’t control whether my students eat breakfast, have a place to sleep at night, whether they have access to technology. I can do everything I can when they step into my classroom to try to level the playing field, but one person alone just can’t do it all, and that’s pretty overwhelming.”

Mieliwocki said there are amazing teachers across the country, and they cannot fix the problems in schools alone. “In any school system in any state, whether the most affluent district or not, you have families in crisis right now. Everyone is worried about money, jobs, and their economic future. I see it in my classroom. The needs are so great — health care, hunger, transportation, clothing, parents losing jobs.”

“We don’t have the funding to keep up with all the things we need to do to give children a 21st century education,” Mieliwocki added. “In California, funding has been cut to such a degree it’s a real challenge to stay strong. It feels like you’re saving children’s lives with education — but you might not be able to do it. If you don’t have the desks, you don’t have the books, you don’t have the technology, you might not be able to do it. That would give anyone low morale, not just teachers.”

Mieliwocki has been teaching for 14



Rebecca Mieliwocki displayed her sense of humor when accepting the National Teacher of the Year honor from President Barack Obama.

years and has spent nine years in her current position as a seventh-grade English teacher. She holds a bachelor of arts degree in speech communication from California Polytechnic State University and a professional clear credential in secondary English education from CSU Northridge. She is the 2005 California League of Middle Schools Educator of the Year for Southern California, a 2009 PTA Honorary Service Award winner and a Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment mentor.

TO CTA STATE COUNCIL: WE ARE ALL REMARKABLE

“I can’t say anything without first thanking you for the incredibly hard work you do on behalf of California’s educators, many of whom you will never meet,” Mieliwocki told CTA’s State Council in March. “It’s an inspiration to me and I am very, very thankful for it. It is your representation and your wise stewardship of this association that makes us the strong and proud group of professionals that we are today.”

She reflected on teaching, saying, “We are nothing and we are everything.” She talked about the perspective she shares with the other California Teachers of the Year: Florence Avognon, Los Angeles County Education Association; Tom Collett, Newark Teachers Association; Shari Ann Herout, Travis Unified Teachers Association; and Ken LaVigne, Whittier Secondary Education Association.

“In our first year of teaching, we were enthusiastic teachers committed to imparting our content knowledge to our students. We were the ones coming in early, staying late; we’d be the ones calling parents at lunch time and working with colleagues after school on our lessons to make sure that tomorrow was even better; and we’d be devoting our weekends going to conventions and conferences just like this to try to strengthen our craft.

“And now, years later, after all those kids that we’ve seen, we see the true importance in teaching is not necessarily in our subject matter. It’s in the connections we make with young people; it’s the way we help our students become better people. We know value lies in all the little acts of love that a teacher can give a child — whether it’s the first smile or the only smile that an adult



will give that child that day; whether it’s the fact that your classroom is a safe harbor for a kid that needs refuge at lunchtime; maybe it’s the high-five for a job well done; or maybe it’s having a shoulder strong enough for a kid to cry on when his mother dies from breast cancer.

“Whatever that act is, what rises above all the rest is that as teachers, we realize what we do is about loving children and understanding who they are as human beings is far more than the sum of their academic parts. There is simply nothing we won’t do to help a child, to help every child realize that their life, their learning, their development as a young person is everything to us. We love our students maybe

even more than we love our jobs.

“We teachers have a front row seat to the future. Our impact is enormous. It shapes the lives of every child we teach and it fills the better world we all live in. Far too many work too hard for too long without ever being reminded about that.”

Mieliwocki said it will be her mission to share that message, “how incredibly important teachers are. You are all remarkable, we are all remarkable, and I’m so honored I get to represent you.”

Summer training builds skills and knowledge

CTA'S SUMMER INSTITUTE 2012

will be held Aug. 5-9 at UCLA's Conference Center. This event offers a variety of trainings designed to assist chapters in day-to-day representation, help teachers build leadership skills, and improve teaching and learning.

Register now for your training of choice at www.cta.org/conferences. Enrollment is on a first-come, first-served basis, and many strands fill up quickly. For more information, contact the CTA Conference Coordination Center at (650) 552-5355.

➔ **Negotiations and Organizational Development Strand** — The NOD Strand offers five full-week tracks.

Emerging Leaders — Designed to arm members who are beginning their activism with the information, resources and skills needed to become effective organizers and future leaders in their local chapter, this track includes the basic concepts of unionism and advocacy, union history and structure, and effective organizing techniques. This track does not cover bargaining or grievance representation skills.

Essential Bargaining Skills — In this highly interactive session, designed to guide participants in the use of a 10-step process to ensure a successful bargaining experience, teams of participants will bargain an agreement and work through extensive coaching and debriefing sessions to determine which strategies were successful. Participants must attend every session from Sunday afternoon to Thursday morning.

Advanced Bargaining Skills — This track will teach the skills needed to prepare for and implement successful bargaining. Topics include developing and implementing bargaining strategies and tactics, analyzing contract language, identifying key elements of the district budget, balancing the bargaining goals of complex constituencies, and utilizing CTA's research database. Participants must have three years of experience on a local bargaining team, or have previously completed the Essential



CTA Members learn and share skills, knowledge and expertise on various topics.

Bargaining Skills track and one year of experience on a local bargaining team.

School Finance — Designed for leaders and bargaining team members who want to become more knowledgeable about school finance and district budgets, this session includes tracking the trends of budget priorities, calculating the cost of a bargaining proposal, determining a district's ability to pay, and developing comparability data to support bargaining objectives.

Health and Welfare Issues for Active Members and Retirees — This track will focus on bargaining health benefits in order to increase the quality of care and reduce costs, and will also cover current local, state and national medical health care reform measures, current activities of CTA coalitions, and Medicare benefits for retirees. Participants should be prepared to discuss their Summary Plan Descriptions, contract language and other information pertaining to their locally bargained medical benefits program.

➔ **Legal Strand** — The Legal Department offers two introductory partial-week tracks. Participants may register for either or both.

Track I (Sunday–Tuesday) — This track will focus on “group” labor and employment issues. Topics include basic union and employee rights under the Educational Employment Relations Act; the legal framework for bargaining; Brown Act open meeting issues; the rights of members to union representation; duty of fair representation — best practices to protect your chapter from DFR liability; union activities that are protected by labor laws; and what actions by the district can be successfully challenged by filing an unfair practice charge.

Track II (Tuesday–Thursday) — This track will focus on “individual” labor and employment issues. Topics include the rights of union members under antidiscrimination and sexual harassment laws; the rights of educational employees to a safe and healthy workplace; discipline and dismissal procedure under the Education Code; disability discrimination

and reasonable accommodation; leave of absence issues; and cyberlaw, texting, MySpace and Facebook — best practices in a hyperconnected world.

➔ **Instruction and Professional Development Strand** — The full-week IPD Strand will focus on “Building Leadership Capacity in Today's Educational Landscape.” Its goal is to empower participants with leadership and advocacy skills to implement the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the accompanying SMARTER Balanced Assessments (SBAC). Topics include the development of the CCSS and SBAC, English-language arts, mathematics, universal design for special populations, assessment literacy, performance assessment and proficiency level, and textbook adoption and supplemental materials. Featured keynote speakers are Doug Reeves and Andy Hargreaves. Teachers, administrators, curriculum coordinators and other educators are welcome. You can use QEIA, School Site Council, PI, SIG and Title II funds to register for this important professional development.

➔ **Member Benefits Strand** — This partial-week strand (Sunday–Tuesday) will show chapter leaders how to cultivate strong chapters and make the most of the numerous benefits provided exclusively to CTA and NEA members. It will help your chapter provide tools to meet members' needs, use member benefits in the fall campaign and other organizing efforts, grow and retain membership, convert agency-fee payers to members, and build chapter appreciation and loyalty. Hands-on activities teach how to survey membership, develop communication pieces, plan a member benefits event, and build a chapter's member benefits action plan.

➔ **Community Outreach Strand** — This partial-week strand (Tuesday–Thursday) will explore a variety of strategies and tools for tapping into community power. Activities include: Keynote from CTA President Dean Vogel; Community Carousel

— Campaign 2012 and a synopsis of the electives; attending a local community meeting off-site; and World Café — a group approach to problem-solving. Electives include: Parent Trigger Law; Community Conversations; Community Mapping; and Getting Started — the Nuts and Bolts of Community Outreach. Guest speakers will include local community organizers and activists.

➤ **Communications Strand** — This strand will offer four separate tracks, which provide the most comprehensive communications training from CTA. Every participant will attend each of the tracks. Participants should be comfortable using the Internet.

From “Gee Whiz” to “Gee WOW!” — Communicate your message effectively online. Create an e-newsletter, polish your e-writing skills, and learn the dos and don’ts of e-mailing.

Sure Cure for the Tongue-Tied Blues — This session on public speaking offers easy, fun tips to help you deliver strong, effective speeches with greater poise and confidence, and includes information about message discipline and development of strategies for crisis communications.

Headlines and Deadlines and Cameras, Oh My! — Plan media events and get compelling news coverage of your chapter’s issues. Reach out to news media, and be prepared when they reach out to you. The session includes crisis communications and participating in a simulated news conference.

Organizing Online: Engaging Your Members Through Social Media — Use social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to reach, inform and engage your members, and become a cyberactivist through online organizing.



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Elk Grove preserves benefits, saves jobs

IT TOOK A MASSIVE MARCH by 1,500 members, regular protests in front of the district office, and long mediation and fact-finding sessions, but in the end, the Elk Grove Education Association overwhelmingly approved a negotiated settlement that preserves class sizes in grades K-3 and health benefits and saves the jobs of 68 teachers who would have been laid off.

“We now have a lot more people involved in the association,” says EGEA President Maggie Ellis. “We can thank the district for that. They have wakened the giant.”

The new contract retains health benefits by implementing a cost-sharing plan in which members will pick up 20 percent of the premium costs for their health care. The district dropped its demand for a cap on health care premiums. The association also negotiated a wellness program that will give participating members a 5 percent rebate if they undergo a physical with age-appropriate screenings and complete an online health assessment.

An increase in class sizes in grades 4-6 will allow the district to bring back 68



teachers who would have been laid off, while the work week will be reduced from 39 hours to 38½ hours, and group meeting time will be reduced from 90 minutes a week to 60 minutes.

Still, it was a bittersweet victory for the 3,000-member association, which was forced to abandon its history of interest-based bargaining (IBB) with an emphasis on collaboration, and instead began to use strong-arm tactics to obtain an agreement.

“We had 25 years of interest-based bargaining and always came to an agreement. In bad times, you try to meet each other’s needs. You don’t throw out decades of relationships,” Ellis says.

Dynamics between the district and the association apparently began changing several years ago when the district’s superintendent brought in a new chief financial officer and a new attorney. Soon, the EGEA negotiating team began to see deterioration in the district’s long-standing commitment to IBB. Instead of bargaining based on mutual respect and collaboration, EGEA found itself at a table where the law was being used as a weapon and heading toward contract imposition by the district.

In true union form, however, association members didn’t mourn. They organized. In a march that brought CTA Vice President Eric C. Heins to town, EGEA staged a New Orleans-style “funeral” complete with coffins marking the death of interest-based bargaining. Police closed down a local street to facilitate more than 1,500 members walking to the school district office in protest. That evening, 260 pink-slipped teachers faced the school board, and each of them tossed a pink paper rose into a coffin as their name and years of service were



called aloud. Gasps from the crowd could be heard as some with 20 years of service stepped forward, demonstrating the impact the board decisions were having on students and employees.

EGEA members picketed the district offices on a daily basis, even through pouring rainstorms. Meanwhile, many members pledged to “work to contract” and withheld such volunteer activity as advising clubs and providing after-school tutoring. In the process, not only did their students and parents realize how much the teachers contributed freely, but teachers realized it for themselves.

“Instead of staying after school for hours on end, they went home to help their own children,” Ellis says. “They realized it’s also important to take care of themselves.”

Even with a new contract, there is still a lot of organizing to do. Ellis is angry that the contract had been reopened by the district in the first place. Instead of arguing over health care costs that had already been paid for and ignoring the intent of the mediated contract, the district and association could have been bargaining for next year.

As it is, EGEA is not only looking at the 2013-14 contract, but next year’s school board race, where four board members are up for election.

“We’re not done,” Ellis says. “For the first time in 20 years, the membership has approved a PAC for school board races. We are all going to be actively participating. This giant will not go back to sleep.”

By Dina Martin

Meet your local negotiators

LOCAL CHAPTERS like Elk Grove and Calexico are settling while San Francisco is considering going on strike and others are at impasse. Meet a few colleagues among the many who are working hard to enhance your teaching and working conditions and professional compensation.

JEAN MANNING Monterey County Office of Education Teachers Association



Time spent before bargaining starts?

Two or three hours before each bargaining session. (As a county office of education unit bargaining chair, she represents special education staff, alternative education teachers, migrant education teachers and Head Start teachers, as well as charter teachers.)

Major issues on the table?

Caseload and class sizes for alternative education teachers, and caseload sizes for charters. Our chapter members provide support to qualifying students in all of the 24 school districts in Monterey County.

What is the best thing local members can do to support their bargaining team?

Attending the chapter meetings and participate. We need more support. We have too few people doing too many tasks.



GREGORY SOGHOIAN Kings Canyon Education Association

Time spent before bargaining starts?

Probably 100 spent on a very thorough review of the contract, line by line, plus surveys, plus keeping my eyes and ears open.

Major issues on the table?

Teacher evaluations, personal leaves, health care costs. We aligned teacher evaluation to the latest California standards. We reached an agreement to provide each member with \$2,000 to help with health care costs.

What is the best thing local members can do to support their bargaining team?

Stay involved with the association — it's a big deal for us. The bargaining team is driven by member concerns. We need to hear from you.



BARRY WELSCH Teachers Association of Long Beach



Time spent before bargaining starts?

We've been together as a team for ten years. We spend a few hours on budget analysis with our executive director Joe Boyd (CTA staff) and then probably meet for about eight hours before going to the table and for an hour or two before each session.

Major issues on the table?

Health coverage is a huge issue but we're also dealing with cuts to our Head Start unit; the board voted to do away with the program after next year.

What is the best thing local members can do to support their bargaining team?

TALB members know how important organizing is. Members participate, show solidarity, and support our issues. They have before—we had thousands come to rally at the district office around health benefits a few years ago.



The one and only community college ESP chapter Welcome, Lake Tahoe Community College Classified!

DIANE LEWIS didn't start out as a union organizer. She didn't come from a union family, and she wasn't a union member in her previous job in broadcast journalism. But the Lake Tahoe Community College library technician has undergone a transformation. Even her e-mail address uses "Norma Rae" after the factory worker turned labor organizer immortalized on film by actress Sally Field.

"I'd never been a union member, but I understood pretty quickly when I got here that we needed to organize. Right now we are among the poorest-paid classified groups in the state, and that's something we'd like to change," she said.

That advocacy served her well over the past year as she helped to organize the Lake Tahoe Community College Classified Employees Union into a chapter of CTA's education support professionals.

They are in the process of negotiating their first contract. "This 'meet and confer' business we had in place had no teeth," Lewis said. "We just couldn't get anything done." Their to-do list includes improved health and welfare benefits, the development of a grievance process that works, and binding arbitration.

While Lewis and her union colleagues acknowledge that conditions under a previous college president ignited the need to organize, they can see the advantage for everyone. A visit by CTA President Dean Vogel in May only confirmed their opinion.

Vogel provided the educator's perspective on the challenges that K-12 schools and community colleges face in California during a community event sponsored by the new union. In the face of top-down policy decisions and crippling budget cuts (which will only get worse if the governor's tax initiative is not passed by voters in November), Vogel discussed the need for educators to reach out to friends, neighbors, students and the community to talk about what is going on in their schools and colleges.

Noting that the public continues to cite teachers, educators and those who work in schools and colleges as the most trusted voice in education, Vogel said, "The community recognizes you as the ones who are holding this together. How willing are we to stand together to support the needs of our communities?"

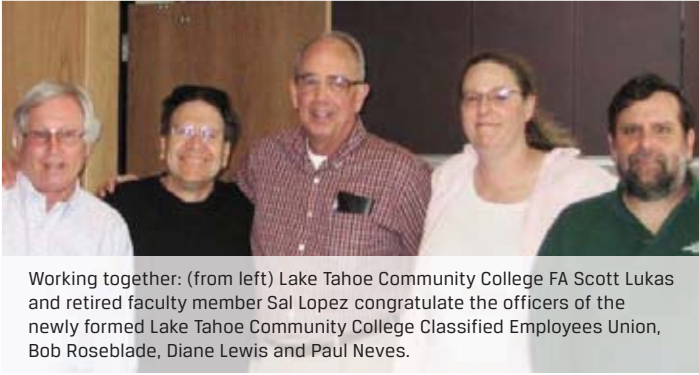
Vogel's remarks prompted lively discussion and an exchange of contact information among the Lake Tahoe area college classified staff, faculty, K-12 educators and college administrators.

CTA Education Support Professionals Day — May 22



Remember to recognize the contributions of school support staff. Education Support Professionals (ESP) include the paraeducators who work directly with students, the clerical service staff who deal with parents, and the custodial and maintenance professionals who make our schools run. They are all important to the success of our schools.

Find this poster, an e-card and more at cta.org/espdays.



Working together: (from left) Lake Tahoe Community College FA Scott Lukas and retired faculty member Sal Lopez congratulate the officers of the newly formed Lake Tahoe Community College Classified Employees Union, Bob Roseblade, Diane Lewis and Paul Neves.

Lewis recognized that the past few months have been an adjustment period for the board and for the new union, but she agreed with Vogel. “He speaks my language. We need to be talking to each other. This room shows me that we’re together,” she said.

“This just tells me that we all need to band together to make things better,” said Paul Neves, president of the new chapter. “We have to have a decent classroom environment for our students and faculty — and classified staff provides that support. I think that with our faculty and staff represented by CTA, our whole school will be stronger.”

By Dina Martin

Read about Robert Hill

“I LOVE TO ADVOCATE for those who can’t. I love the challenge to make our work environment the best for all involved.” That thinking plus his leadership and can-do attitude earned Robert Hill the honor of the 2012 California Teachers Association Education Support Professional of the Year.

Read more about this Ventura Classified Employees Association member on the CTA website at www.cta.org/roberthill.



Robert Hill



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HERE ARE LETTERS about inspiring educators from CTA's "Thank You, Teacher!" Project. If you have notes to share, please send a copy to the "Thank You, Teacher!" Project, CTA Communications Dept., 1705 Murchison Drive, Burlingame, CA 94010, or e-mail them to Dina Martin at dmartin@cta.org.

ELLEN GERVASE, a retired lifetime CTA member, recently heard from Melba, a middle school student she taught during her first year of teaching in 1969. That student is now 49 and a mother of two. Gervase comments, "Her lovely note serves as a reminder to all educators that we do indeed touch the lives of our students. One may never, never know the impact teachers have on their students, unless of course they are fortunate to have a student like Melba."

“ You are someone I have never forgotten. You were the best teacher I ever had, and the reason for this is because you believed in me and made me feel like I could do anything I set my mind to do. I know sometimes you might not feel like people see you that way, but just remember, you had one student who thinks the world of you.”

CAROL LASQUADE, a counselor in the College of the Desert EOPS program (Extended Opportunity Programs and Services), is always pleased when her students continue with their education. She received a note from one of them who is now earning her master's degree. "I keep her card on my bulletin board," Lasquade says. The student sent the note just before she graduated UCSB in 2011.

“ Dear Carol,
As my graduation date is approaching, I begin to think of all the people who helped me along the road, and you are one of the first persons that come to mind. You were by my side during each step of the way, and I cannot begin to explain how much that meant to me. It is because of your help that I will be pursuing my master's degree this fall at Boston College.”

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Sarah Tucker comes home to teach at the deaf school she attended.



Hearing the language of love

PRECHOOLERS PLAY in their classroom's make-believe "garden shop," busily putting plastic plants into pots, pouring imaginary water and gathering silk flowers into pretty bouquets.

"What color are the flowers?" asks their teacher, Sarah Tucker. "Can you say pink? Blue? Are you making a beanstalk you can climb up, like Jack?"

Tucker is talking to them in both American Sign Language and spoken English. The youngsters reply back with sign and speak aloud in English.

Like the flowers in the nursery, students are blooming under the tutelage of Tucker, who is their teacher in Deaf and Hard of Hearing Preschool Special Day Class at Chris Jespersen School in San Luis Obispo.

Years ago, the San Luis Obispo County Education Association member was a deaf child in a similar program in the district. Tucker loves being able to work with her former childhood mentor, Diane Hunt-Roberts, a speech language pathologist. She taught Tucker about speech fluency, articulation and sentence structure, as well as not being afraid to ask for help when

learning a new word and how to pronounce it.

"To this day, I am grateful for all her hard work she invested in me," says Tucker. "Without Diane's dedication and perseverance, I would not have clear articulation or understanding of how to pronounce words in order to carry on a conversation with my hearing peers and co-workers. Now Diane and I work together as a team to meet our students' needs."

When Tucker was younger, she had no exposure to a deaf adult role model. She assumed that when she turned 5, she would hear like everyone else.

"It is important to be a role model to my deaf students and show them that when they grow up, they will still have a hearing loss, but they can be successful any way they choose," she relates.

Tucker incorporates language and communication through American Sign Language and auditory-oral reinforcement. Her teaching style involves role-playing, so students can put together pictures, vocabulary, ideas and concepts, connecting them with the real world.

As a child, Tucker's biggest challenge was educating her peers — and some teachers — that she just was like any other student, with the exception of a hearing loss. She believes some of her students will also be faced with this.

"I can help students overcome challenges by discussing my personal experiences growing up, being a role model for them, and encouraging them to be proud of their hearing loss," she says. "I love seeing them gain confidence in themselves and becoming self-reliant, so they will be able to advocate for themselves when they are older."

"I always wanted to be a teacher for deaf and hard of hearing children because of my positive educational experience in San Luis Obispo," adds Tucker. "After six years of teaching in Colorado, it has been a tremendous honor to make a full circle and come back home to teach."

By **Sherry Posnick-Goodwin**
Photos by **Scott Buschman**

BONUS

See a video of Sarah at www.cta.org/sarahtucker.



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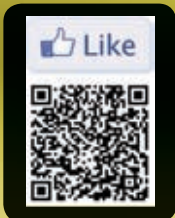
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