

california  
**educator**

OCTOBER 2015 VOLUME 20 ISSUE 3



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IS  
THE NEW  
GREEN**

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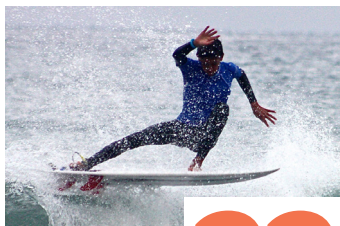
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**YOUR OPINIONS AND LETTERS ARE WELCOME!** There is a 250-word limit, and all letters will be edited. If you send photos or other materials, identifications and permissions are required. Letters must include your name along with your address, daytime telephone number or email address. Email [editor@cta.org](mailto:editor@cta.org).

## MEMBER ACTIVISM GETS RESULTS

On Oct. 1, Governor Brown signed AB 375, a bill sponsored by my chapter of CTA.

This legislation explicitly prohibits California school districts from denying new parents from using their sick leaves while taking maternity or paternity leave they are entitled to under the California Family Rights Act.

Some of our chapters have basic family leave provisions. Now, we all will. Our members are now guaranteed access to their sick leave *and* differential pay for the 6-8 weeks of postpartum medical leave, as well as the poorly titled “child bonding” leave, which has always guaranteed job protection and medical benefits, but has never guaranteed pay.

This also ensures that we will no longer penalize adoptive families and foster families by denying them access to their sick leave or differential pay when they welcome children into their homes. Again, many of us have some provision for this, but few have 12 weeks guaranteed with access to differential pay.

I am extremely proud of this work, and it came directly from me and the struggles of my members. I was able to meet and work with my Assembly members and my senators and staff from the governor’s office. It was a wild adventure. I still can’t believe it worked out.

### Jennifer Thomas

President, San Jose Teachers Association

## LOAN FORGIVENESS

I can’t speak for all educators, but many know of the student loan forgiveness programs. I have Parent Plus loans for my children. I filled out the

## GET YOUR PINK PLATE NOW

Remember our story in October 2013 about Deborah Bordeau, Oakley Union Teachers Association and fifth-grade teacher? She and four other breast cancer survivors were working on getting approval for a Breast Cancer Awareness specialized license plate in California. AB 49 was signed into law last year, and now the California Pink Ribbon License Plate is ready for ordering.

Proceeds from its sale benefit the Department of Health Care Services’ “Every Woman Counts” program, which provides free clinical breast exams and mammograms to California’s underserved women.

But there’s a catch: The Department of Motor Vehicles requires a total of 7,500 pre-orders before they will produce the plate. The program will expire if not enough plates are ordered by August 2016.

So show your support and order now. “This plate will be a daily reminder on our roads that early detection saves lives,” Bordeau says. “It’s also a way to support someone who might be fighting breast cancer or to honor a loved one who lost their battle with the disease. All in all, it’s a win-win for our state.”

[pinkplate.org](http://pinkplate.org) #pinkplate



appropriate documents, and next year (2016) I’ll have paid 10 years on the first of the loans.

What the student loan servicing officials do not spell out to educators is that the loans must be consolidated first and then the clock commences from that date — which requires another 10 years of paying on time. After a lengthy conversation, the federal loan specialist informed me that by the time I qualify I will have paid off the loan myself.

I have been a public servant 31-plus years (22-plus as a teacher) in a low-socioeconomic area (Highland Park, Los Angeles — a school that was reconstituted, now a “School to Watch”), and thanks to a shameful, poorly written program, I will *not* benefit one cent! My

children’s loans will be paid by me at the current interest rate of 7.99 percent. By the way, I easily qualified for the program.

But, there’s *no* free money! In my opinion, it’s just a shameless scam!

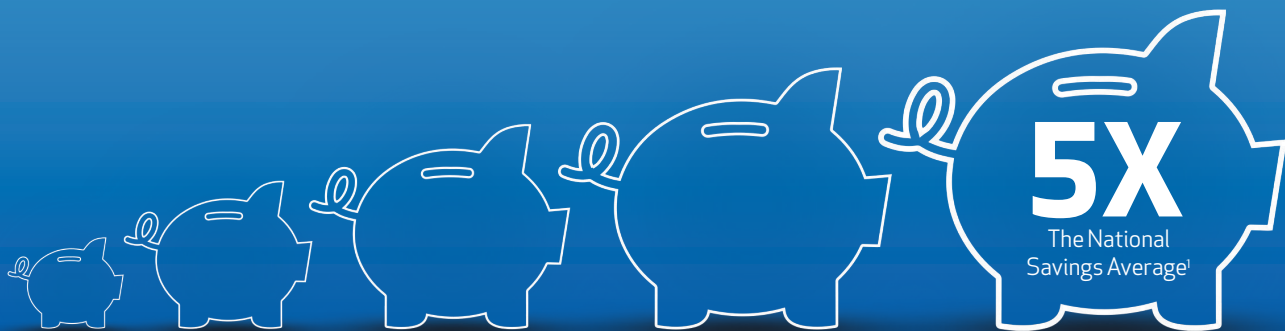
### Gemma Marquez

United Teachers Los Angeles

**Editor’s note:** *Contrary to the advice given in our September article, a “direct consolidation loan” may be necessary under certain conditions. Always review the requirements and be sure to ask, “If I consolidate, will I still be eligible for a forgiveness program?” Get the answer in writing. See [studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/consolidation#should-i](http://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/consolidation#should-i).*



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# Changing the Conversation

We are the ones on the front lines challenging our students every day. We are there when they're perplexed and questioning, and we are there when their eyes light up after they finally get it. Helping kids reach that "aha!" moment is one of the joys of being a teacher — when our experience, expertise and understanding of the whole child come together.

So it troubles me when educators are deliberately left out of the education reform conversation, especially since we are the experts when it comes to what works to improve student learning.

That's why one of my goals as president is to make sure CTA and educators are at the forefront of changing the public conversation about our schools and colleges, the role of educators, and the role of our union. And we are well on our way.

We are developing innovative approaches to student learning and advocating for fewer tests and more time to learn. CTA members and chapter leaders throughout California are becoming local experts on designing and facilitating effective and meaningful teacher professional development. Districts and unions are joining forces to have a real impact on student learning. (As an example, see our story on CTA's Instructional Leadership Corps on page 54.)

Seen through a big-picture lens, CTA is leading the charge to change the conversation about standardized testing, local control, school funding and union involvement.

We have long talked about the dangers of **high-stakes testing**, and it seems that we've been getting through to parents and politicians. We have another opportunity now that test results for the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments in both English language arts and mathematics for grades 3-8 and 11 have been released. There are a number of things to let parents know:

- This is just one set of test scores, and not a true measurement of student achievement.
- Results cannot be compared to previous statewide assessments, since this is only the first full year of implementation.
- The new California standards are still being implemented for students and educators.

You can see more about these test scores and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) on page 41.

A new era of **local control** is giving educators a more influential role, and we are stepping up. The Local Control Funding Formula, which CTA supports, provides real opportunities for local educators to sit down with parents, community members and the administration to design the best possible educational experience for their students.



▲  
Instructional Leadership Corps members representing the Fullerton Elementary Teachers Association and Fullerton School District at the September convening.

Regarding **school funding**, voters listened as we shared stories about what years of budget cuts did to our schools and colleges. They passed Prop. 30 in 2012, the largest tax increase in California's history. Thanks to your activism and hard work, this year our schools and colleges saw the single largest increase in school funding.

Prop. 30 taxes are temporary, however, and we have a long way to go. California still ranks 46th in the nation in per-pupil funding.

That's why CTA is currently working in coalition with other labor unions and community groups to develop a 2016 funding initiative to ensure everyone pays their fair share. One of our coalitions, the Alliance for a Better California, has filed an initiative to extend Prop. 30. While the sales tax portion would expire as planned, the proposal would continue to tax the wealthiest Californians for 12 years. Students and schools would get the resources they need, and those who can afford it would continue to pay their fair share. Adequately funding our schools must be an ongoing discussion we have with lawmakers and voters.

All this work and more is changing the conversation. Together, we are ensuring that all of California's children get the quality education they deserve.

**Eric C. Heins**  
CTA PRESIDENT  
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Subscription to the *California Educator* is \$10 per year, available to persons or institutions not eligible for CTA/NEA membership.

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#### MISSION STATEMENT

The California Teachers Association exists to protect and promote the well-being of its members; to improve the conditions of teaching and learning; to advance the cause of free, universal, and quality public education; to ensure that the human dignity and civil rights of all children and youth are protected; and to secure a more just, equitable, and democratic society.

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CTA strong.

Photo by Scott Iskowiz

## This family has your back

**THERE IS A WELL-KNOWN** saying that you can't choose your family, but our story on members' actions during the horrendous Valley Fire in southern Lake County last month (page 56) proves it wrong.

When Middletown Teachers Association President Dan Renninger was evacuated from his home, he sent his wife to safety and chose to stay more than a week at the evacuation center to help his chapter members. "I'm close to all our teachers," he explained. "Many of them helped me and my family over the years, so I wanted to be there for them." Out of 77 members, 32 lost their homes.

Konocti Educators Association President Nicole Sabatier said she "couldn't be more proud" of CTA in how it took care of its members during the fire, from expedited processing of CTA Disaster Relief Fund grants, to members offering up their homes, extra bedrooms and living room couches to displaced colleagues.

The fire and many similar disasters brought forth myriad selfless and heroic acts, and great generosity of spirit. It also made clear that CTA is a family — one that you choose, one that has your back when you need it.

Our cover story this month (page 26) looks at students and educators in the small agricultural towns hit hardest by California's drought — a grim reality unknown to most of us. Lack of water makes a difficult life that much harder: Families lose their livelihoods; children lose amenities such as home showers, green playing fields at school, and much more; schools lose enrollment; and communities lose residents. As one teacher put it, "We are all praying for El Niño."

We also feature some unusual classes that educators teach (page 22), including digital literacy in elementary school, street law for high school seniors, and surfing in Orange County (of course!). On page 31, we zero in on middle school dropouts and what's being done to keep kids at this critical age in school.

Our story on how a landmark California desegregation case inspired a new book by LA high school students (page 49) is eye-opening, both for its historical revelations (many scholars believe the case set the stage for *Brown v. Board of Education*) and for a lesson on teaching complex topics in collaborative and innovative ways.

You'll want to review our tips for fruitful parent-teacher relations (page 59), especially concerning parent-teacher conferences. One tip is to be ready to discuss the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress test scores; see suggested talking points on page 41.

And don't miss our wrap-up of the Instructional Leadership Corps' (ILC) recent activities (page 54). Besides building a network of "teachers teaching teachers," ILC is fostering communication and strong connections — a must for any family.

**Katharine Fong**

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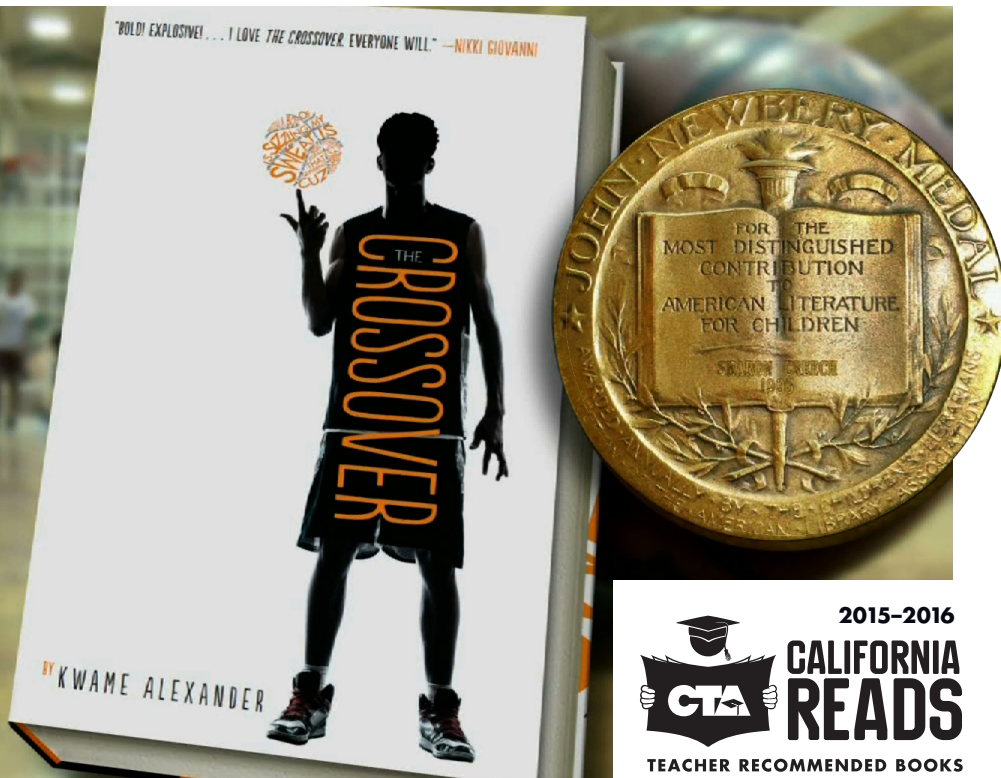


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## Throwback Thursdays

What was your favorite book when you were a kid? Maybe it's still one you read to your students or recommend to others. The California Reads team shares beloved, inspiring titles that stirred us in years past every Thursday on Facebook, from *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* to *The Giving Tree*. Give us your suggestions on K-12 books that moved you at [facebook.com/californiateachersassociation](https://www.facebook.com/californiateachersassociation), [editor@cta.org](mailto:editor@cta.org) or [@CATeachersAssoc](https://twitter.com/CATeachersAssoc) and we'll showcase them on [#tbt](https://twitter.com/tbt) too. [#californiareads](https://twitter.com/californiareads)



## OUR FAVORITE BOOKS

**Read This Now** Students in grades 9-12 will love *The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander. The California Reads 2015-16 selection is the story of twins Josh and Jordan, both junior high basketball stars growing up on and off the court with the help of their supportive parents. The novel is told in verse, and Alexander's words move from pulsing and aggressive ("With a bolt of lightning on my kicks... The court is SIZZLING. My sweat is DRIZZLING. Stop all that quivering. Cuz tonight I'm delivering") to funny, introspective and heartbreaking. For other recommended books, see [cta.org/californiareads](https://cta.org/californiareads).



**SEE  
ME  
AFTER  
SCHOOL**

**SHOW US WHAT YOU DO** after the last bell rings and you could be a winner. Do you tutor? Coach? Take salsa lessons? Maybe you volunteer at your church or your community, head to a CTA workshop, or just decompress at the local café (probably while grading homework).

Send up to three photos of you in action after school hours to [editor@cta.org](mailto:editor@cta.org). Be sure to put "See Me After School" in the subject line. Include your name, your chapter and a description of the photos. Enter by Nov. 25. We'll pick three winners based on creativity, photography and interest; each will receive a \$50 gift card for school supplies.





**NOVEMBER 1** OPT-OUT DEADLINE  
**Voluntary dues contribution**

Voluntary annual contributions by members support CTA Foundation's grants/scholarships and CTA's advocacy efforts. New members are automatically enrolled in the default contribution of \$10 for the CTA Foundation and \$10 for advocacy. Members may change their allocation or opt out. New members have 30 days from the date of enrollment; previously enrolled members have a window from Aug. 1 to Nov. 1. Find out more: [cta.org/contribution](http://cta.org/contribution)

**NOVEMBER 20**  
APPLICATION DEADLINE  
**GLBT Guy DeRosa Safety in Schools Grants and Scholarships**

This program provides grants to support projects and presentations that promote understanding and respect for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons, as well as scholarships for members enrolled in a teaching/counseling credential or graduate program who understand the importance of GLBT educators as role models. Find out more: [cta.org/scholarships](http://cta.org/scholarships)

**Mental Health Boost**

Student suicide is preventable. That's the message from the California Department of Education (CDE), which notes that suicide is the third leading cause of death for adolescents and young adults ages 15-24. To address the problem, Superintendent Tom Torlakson and the CDE are recommending Kognito At-Risk Gatekeeper Training for educators. The one-hour online simulation helps you identify, approach and refer students at risk of psychological distress. The training is free. See [california.kognito.com](http://california.kognito.com).

CDE is also giving students access to Friend2Friend, a new mobile app for kids 13 and up to learn about mental health and practice how to help a friend who is struggling. Students can go to [kognitocampus.com/peer](http://kognitocampus.com/peer) and under "create a new account" use "calfriend" as the enrollment key.

**NOVEMBER 16-20** EVENT  
**American Education Week**

"Great Public Schools: A Basic Right and Our Responsibility." American Education Week is celebrated the week prior to Thanksgiving week and includes special observances to honor parents, education support professionals and substitute teachers. Find out more: [nea.org/aew](http://nea.org/aew)

**DECEMBER 7-13** EVENT  
**Computer Science Education Week**

CSEdWeek is an annual program dedicated to inspiring K-12 students to get interested in computer science. Its focus is for students to participate in Hour of Code (a one-hour introduction to computer science and programming). Lesson plans are available for classrooms with or without computer access. Find out more: [csedweek.org](http://csedweek.org)

**JANUARY 5**  
NOMINATION DEADLINE  
**CTA Human Rights Awards**

These awards promote the development of programs for the advancement and protection of human and civil rights within CTA. Any active CTA member, chapter, caucus or Service Center Council may nominate a member, chapter or Service Center Council. Find out more: [cta.org/humanrightsawards](http://cta.org/humanrightsawards)



**NOVEMBER 13-15**  
CONFERENCE  
**GLBT Conference**

*Fairmont Hotel, San Jose*

GLAAD-award-winning

comedian **Marga Gomez** is the featured speaker at CTA's seventh annual Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Conference. Gomez has written and performed in 11 solo plays produced nationally and Off-Broadway, and her television appearances include LOGO's "One Night Stand Up," PBS and HBO's "Comic Relief." The conference is open to all CTA members and addresses issues affecting the entire membership, students and the community. Find out more: [cta.org/conferences](http://cta.org/conferences)

Friend2Friend



# What's new at cta.org

## [cta.org/breastcancer](http://cta.org/breastcancer)

### OCTOBER IS BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Breast cancer rates tend to be higher in California teachers, but we are making great strides in finding a cure. Stay informed.

## [cta.org/scholarships](http://cta.org/scholarships)

### SCHOLARSHIPS FOR MEMBERS AND DEPENDENTS

CTA offers a variety of scholarships to members and their dependents. Applications for many of them will be available mid-October.

## [cta.org/ift](http://cta.org/ift)

### IFT SUPPORTS YOUR INNOVATIVE IDEAS

CTA's Institute for Teaching has announced the 2015-16 recipients of grants for 39 projects that help create a culture of success.

## [cta.org/highered](http://cta.org/highered)

### UNIQUE STATEWIDE AFFILIATES

Learn about CTA's higher education affiliates — the California Faculty Association (CFA), which serves CSU faculty, and the Community College Association (CCA).

## [cta.org/membercenter](http://cta.org/membercenter)

### MEMBER ENGAGEMENT CENTER: NEW LOOK, NEW IDEAS

CTA's redesigned Member Engagement Center is chock-full of back-to-school and ongoing classroom tips and resources for both the newbie and the seasoned educator.

## Video



**SERIOUSLY, WHAT HAVE AMERICAN UNIONS EVER DONE FOR US?** Quite a bit, as it turns out. Watch this entertaining video from MoveOn to find out. [#unionswork4u](http://#unionswork4u) [front.moveon.org/seriously-what](http://front.moveon.org/seriously-what)

## Social Buzz

### YOU KNOW YOU'RE A TEACHER WHEN...

We posted this gem the second week of September. As of press time it had a record 7,100 shares. Among the many comments:

**CARMEN JULIA SOLIS** Great and real. All of them apply to me. I'm proud of being a teacher. I would add: When you are asleep and you hear your students' voices inside your mind.

#### **MELISSA MINCHER DEIS**

Planning period, hahahahaha!

#### **KIMBERLY LONG SHEARER**

And a valium lick!

**KATHY VISIN** Since I've retired, I get to use the bathroom when I choose. But I've been doing some subbing and realize that I'm not trained like I used to be!

**SARA ILSLEY COOPER** Staples was my "happy place"! Now I just walk up and down the rows aimlessly admiring what I no longer need (but still want... just because).

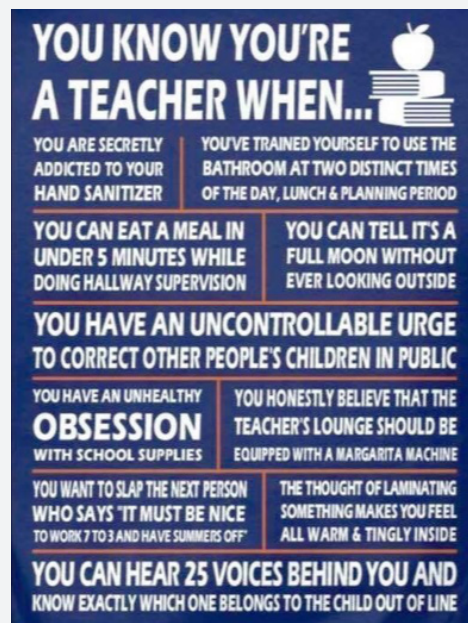
#### **VIRGINIA ESCOBAR** Try 32 voices!

**DORENDA PHILLIPS** So very true. As a PE teacher, I can hear 50 voices behind me, and know who is out of line. Love this list! Can I get it laminated?

#### **CHRISTINE LAWRENCE MOOERS**

I personally see nothing wrong with having a margarita machine in the staff room.

**KEN KELLY** I fully understand the full moon bit.



**FLAVIA BURGOS** Amazing, the life of a teacher. Excellent while it lasted. For those of us who can, it is time to enjoy not having to keep repeating some of those habits. When I go to the bookstore, I always find a book for my grandkids. Not giving up on education. Never. We need to continue contributing. Amen.

**MARY TOLMIE** Working with young children is like rounding up kittens or herding bees all day. Rewarding but exhausting!

**BEVERLY BOOTHE** Once a teacher, always a teacher!





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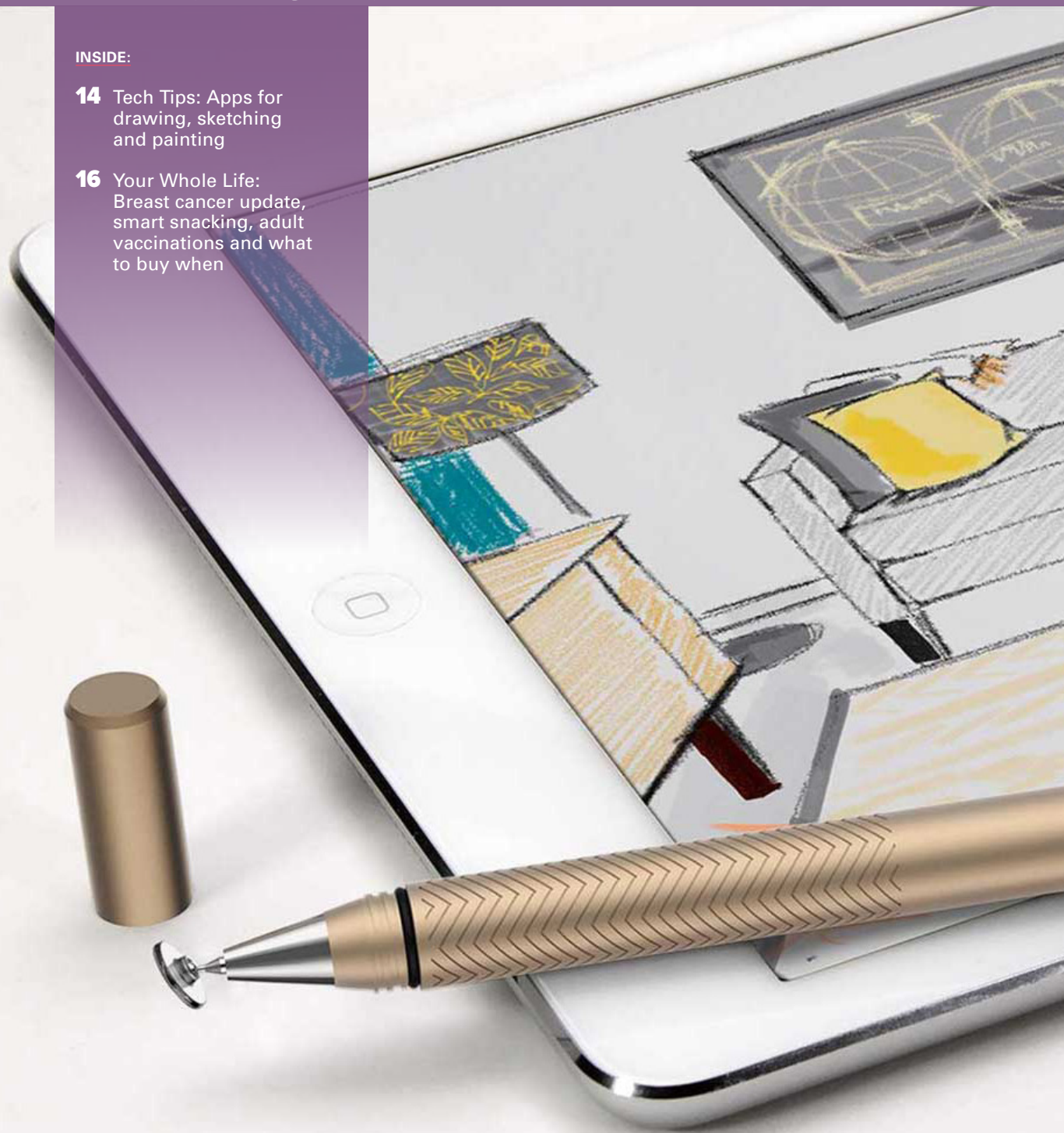
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# Know&Tell

## INSIDE:

- 14** Tech Tips: Apps for drawing, sketching and painting
- 16** Your Whole Life: Breast cancer update, smart snacking, adult vaccinations and what to buy when



The pad and pencil has gone by the wayside, replaced by a tablet or touchscreen device and a high-performance stylus. Read more on **page 14**.





# Top Drawer

By Terry Ng

Apple's iPads are a boon for artists, thanks to their high-definition screens and responsive displays. The highly anticipated **iPad Pro**, with its 12.9-inch screen, and the companion stylus **Apple Pencil** are due out in November and expected to make a splash.

Meanwhile, it's clear that sophisticated drawing apps and a variety of styluses have now replaced those ancient tools — pencil and paper. Here are some of the best of the bunch:



## Procreate

**\$5.99** DRAWING APP

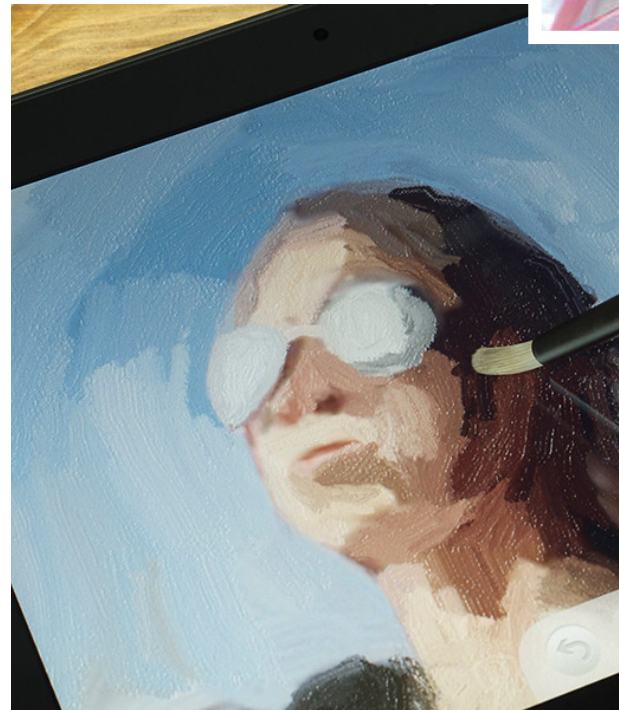
This app is the most powerful and intuitive digital illustration app available for iPad, packed with 120 incredible brushes, advanced layer blending, 64-bit performance, and a uniquely powerful brush engine.



## Pencil by FiftyThree

**\$49.95** STYLUS

Advanced technology meets beautiful design to keep you in the flow, without needing to switch tools. Features surface pressure, erase, blend (with fingers!), and adaptive palm rejection (so you can rest your hand on the screen without disturbing the image).



## Sensu Artist Brush & Stylus

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◀ **Adonit Jot Pro Fine Point**

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▶ **Tayasui Sketches**

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▶ **Artstudio** **\$4.99** *DRAWING APP*

Artstudio is a comprehensive sketching, painting and photo-editing tool that uses advanced drawing algorithms and features a beautiful new user interface and powerful new graphics engine to make creating works of art faster, easier and more fun.

Got a favorite that's not here? Tell us [@CATeachersAssoc](#) [#drawingapps](#)

What to Buy When

**WE ALL LOVE** research by *Consumer Reports* and others that note when the best deals can be had on major purchases. For example, October is good for winter coats, November is time for baby products, and December is when you should buy small and large appliances.

In this day of flash sales and online bargains, though, some items are good buys in more than one month.

A sampling:

- **TVs:** January, March, November, December.
- **Toys:** January, November, December.
- **Small consumer electronics** (such as MP3 players, DVD and Blu-ray players): March, May, June, September, December.
- **GPS navigators:** November, December.
- **Bikes:** September, October, November.

When it comes to school books, the two best times to shop are at the end of the school's fiscal year, usually June or July, and at the end of the calendar year. Most publishers and distributors will make deals, as they know your funds are limited and must be spent before the end of the year, and they're trying to unload taxable inventory.

For more good buys and when to buy them, see [bit.ly/1PjYFyk](http://bit.ly/1PjYFyk).

# YOUR WHOLE LIFE

Tips and trends for a smarter, healthier you

## Breast Cancer Update

About 60,000 American women are diagnosed annually with Stage 0 breast cancer, known as ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS) and the earliest form of the disease.

**MANY UNDERGO MASTECTOMIES**, sometimes double mastectomies. But a new study of more than 100,000 women with DCIS over 20 years shows that treatment may make no difference in outcomes.

In other words, surgery — whether a mastectomy or a less invasive lumpectomy — did not increase patients' survival rates. While African American women and women 35 and under were found to be at higher risk, DCIS mortality rates are relatively low at 3.3 percent.

The study, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association Oncology* in August, has medical professionals questioning whether women with DCIS are being subjected to overly aggressive or unnecessary treatment.

"Given the low breast cancer mortality risk, we should stop telling women

that DCIS is an emergency and that they should schedule definitive surgery within two weeks of diagnosis," wrote Laura Esserman of UC San Francisco in an editorial accompanying the report.

Still, researchers have not been able to distinguish between DCIS cells that remain static (as they do in most cases) and those that will become invasive cancers. So while treatment options range from surgery to radiation, hormone therapy and watchful waiting, many doctors are expected to continue to recommend lumpectomies.

Moving forward, says Tina Dur Clarke, research scientist at the Cancer Prevention Institute of California and the Stanford Cancer Institute, "Our top priority is research to find the molecular markers that determine which cells become invasive."

## Big Shots

**THINK VACCINATIONS ARE** for kids? Grown-ups need them too, in a big way: Vaccine-preventable illnesses cause more deaths in American adults each year than

either breast cancer or traffic accidents. Educators and school health care professionals, in particular, should make sure they're up to date on their vaccinations: influenza; tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis; measles, mumps and rubella; and varicella.

Even if you were vaccinated as a child, you may need a booster shot, because immunity wanes over time. New vaccines developed against old diseases can also benefit you. Vaccinations against pneumonia and flu are especially important for people at high risk, such as those with heart and pulmonary disease, diabetes, and alcoholism.

And depending on lifestyle, occupation and age, you may also need hepatitis A and B, meningococcal, HPV and zoster (shingles) vaccines. (Pregnant women and adults with suppressed immune systems should not receive certain vaccines.)

Go ahead, schedule that flu shot now. For more information, see [neahealthyfutures.org](http://neahealthyfutures.org).

#flushotnow





# Snack Alert



Tell us @CATeachersAssoc #notcrankyinclass



**SMART SNACKING CAN** help you stay focused all day long and avoid getting foggy, light-headed or (heaven forbid) cranky in class.

Frequent breaks for foods that balance complex carbohydrates, protein and fat provide your body and brain with a steady supply of glucose. This means your blood sugar level remains stable instead of spiking and dropping as it does when you grab junk food. A few easy and fast suggestions from NEA Member Benefits ([bit.ly/1NqdVuc](http://bit.ly/1NqdVuc)):

1. **The Elvis:** Peanut butter and banana on whole grain. (The fried version was the King's fave.)
2. **The Classic:** A red apple (reds boast the most antioxidants), an ounce of low-fat cheese such as string cheese, and five whole wheat crackers.
3. **Lite 'n' low:** Raw veggies and hummus.
4. **Brain boost:** Six ounces plain Greek yogurt with ¼ cup low-fat granola.
5. **Power pair:** Pistachios and dried apricots.
6. **Tried and true:** Low-cal, low-sugar energy bars.
7. **The Go-to:** No-nitrate, low-sodium roasted turkey on whole grain.

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\*National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Digest of Education Statistics, 2011.

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\*The 2% cash back on grocery store purchases and 3% cash back on gas purchases apply to the first \$1,500 in combined purchases in these categories each quarter. After that, the base 1% earn rate applies to those purchases.

\*\*You will qualify for \$100 bonus cash rewards if you use your new credit card account to make any combination of Purchase transactions totaling at least \$500 (exclusive of any fees, returns and adjustments) that post within 90 days of the account open date. Limit one (1) bonus cash rewards offer per new account. This one-time promotion is limited to new customers opening an account in response to this offer. Other advertised promotional bonus cash rewards offers can vary from this promotion and may not be substituted. Allow 8-12 weeks from qualifying for the bonus cash rewards to post to your rewards balance.

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Photo courtesy Humboldt State University

## INSIDE:

- 20** Point/Counterpoint: Should students evaluate teachers?
- 21** Member Spotlight: Chiroptera expert — that's bats, to you

## Crazy For Bats

**IN MOVIES** they fly through windows, bite people on the neck, suck their blood and turn them into vampires. In real life, people fear their bite will cause foaming at the mouth and death by rabies. And if someone acts crazy, they have bats in their belfry.

Has any other creature been so misunderstood?

Perhaps not, but bats are beloved by Joe Szewczak, Humboldt State University biology professor, researcher of the winged creatures that can inspire fear whenever they flutter in the night. Turn to **page 21**.

Humboldt State University biology professor **Joe Szewczak** conducts research on a silver-haired bat.



# Should students evaluate teachers?

**YES** **FEEDBACK IS HELPFUL** in all professions. We can learn how to better serve our students

through feedback. It can help us improve how we communicate with them.

The most effective way to be evaluated by students is to ask them. They are really honest, but you have to ask the right questions to get the feedback you need. I ask my students what they learned in class each day. If they explain some of the things they learned, I know I taught them effectively. If no one can tell me anything, I understand I need to find a way to make my teaching more memorable with the next lesson.

I have not been graded or rated by students online or on an evaluation form. I have received verbal accolades and informal notes from students and parents letting me know I helped them learn. I have also had students who were children of past students, and that is the best evaluation of all, because they want their children to be in my class due to the positive effect I had on their lives when they were my students.

Some fear being evaluated because they think the emphasis will not be on how they teach, but instead on their popularity based on personality. And once something is on the Internet everyone may believe it — even if it is a lie.

It's true that a teacher evaluation could be misused by older students who do not like a teacher. But if they do not like that teacher, my question would be: *Why?* What could be done to change the minds of those students? Are they just being brats who do not want to learn? Or do they have legitimate concerns that need to be addressed?

We should not view feedback as a threat. It's just another way for us to become better at educating our students.

**ANN MURRAY**, *Twin Rivers United Educators, teaches kindergarten at Village Elementary School in North Highlands, Sacramento County.*



Thanks to the Internet, many students are currently evaluating their teachers, using websites such as [ratemyteachers.com](http://ratemyteachers.com). We asked two CTA members whether they think it's a good idea. Tell us what you think: [#ratetheteacher](http://#ratetheteacher)



**NO** **I DON'T THINK** students should evaluate teachers. Most, especially those who are younger,

don't understand the extent of what a teacher's job really is. They lack the maturity to understand the qualities of a good teacher and don't have the tools — or even the correct academic language — to explain why they think a teacher is good or bad. They usually decide based on their emotions and whether they think their teacher is being nice or friendly when it comes to determining whether someone is doing a good job in the classroom.

Students retaliate with online evaluations if they receive a poor grade or if they don't like something their teacher said to them. And it's not just students as individuals; they get their friends to do the same thing, even though they may not have had that particular teacher. It's not just websites like [ratemyteachers.com](http://ratemyteachers.com); students are saying things about teachers on social media.

I have seen teachers suffer when social media posts say that they are bad teachers. It is very hurtful. Someone might be strict and still be an effective teacher, but negative feedback can make them feel like they are a failure and not successful. It erodes a teacher's confidence.

When students give negative evaluations, new students enter the classroom with an expectation of having a bad teacher. They start off with a bad attitude. This has a negative impact on the classroom climate.

When students are in college, it's appropriate to evaluate their professors. They are adults and more mature. They are old enough to understand what it takes to be an effective teacher. But if someone is a child or teenager, they don't have that level of maturity. And if someone doesn't understand the scope of the job, they shouldn't be evaluating you on it.

**STEPHANIE COSEY**, *United Teachers of Pasadena, teaches adult living skills at Wilson Middle School.*







# The Real Bat Man

**“I DON’T THINK** bats should frighten anyone,” says Joe Szewczak, biology professor at Humboldt State University and bat expert. “However, that comes from knowing them well. Fear affects perception. Some people run away frightened, thinking that bats are chasing them. Typically the bats over their heads were probably attracted to the insects above their heads and were doing them a favor.”

Szewczak, California Faculty Association, notes that bats have lower rates of rabies than other species, such as raccoons or foxes. He is vaccinated against rabies and regularly checks his antibodies to confirm protection.

It must work. A few years ago, for the Discovery Channel, he hosted a segment on vampire bats that was filmed on location in Belize. He recalls: “I had the rather unique fortune to lie awake in the dark feigning sleep as five vampire bats shared a meal from one bite on my elbow and two on my toes. I quietly provided a narrative of the experience over the hour that they fed. Not many people can say they have descended a trophic level below a fellow vertebrate and survived.”

*Hmmm.*

“Bites count as just one way that anyone who works with an animal gets to know them better,” adds Szewczak. “I have a long list of bites from different taxa, and in my opinion, bats have one of the least damaging or annoying bites. Besides, once you get the feel for handling them, you don’t often have to make that comparison.”

Szewczak, who has a Ph.D. from Brown University, teaches animal physiology, human physiology, and biology of the Chiroptera — also known as bats, which are often mistaken as rodents. He has the utmost respect for bats, which are the only mammal to achieve powered flight and among the few that use sonar echoes to find their way around.

Szewczak has studied many bat species, looking at migration patterns, social communication, endangered species, and how to reduce fatalities caused by energy-producing wind turbines. He and colleagues recently completed a two-year trial that proved high-intensity ultrasound emitted from turbines can steer

## In Joe Szewczak’s words:

**Why are bats so darn fascinating?** I imagine it comes with their perceived mystery and ability to do things we can’t, such as fly, and do that in the dark. Scientific investigation has revealed far more fascinating traits, such as the ability of hibernating bats to delay pregnancy until the spring, live more than 40 years, survive near-freezing body temperatures, and go two and a half hours without breathing.

**What about vampire bats?** Of the approximately 1,200 extant bat species, just three occupy the specialized niche of hematophagy (blood consumption), and only in the American tropics. I find it fascinating that more species have not occupied this niche in other parts of the world. I would think that any vampire bat would salivate to see the smorgasbord of meals spread out across the African savanna. Vampire bats have an anticoagulant in their saliva, by the way, that scientists named draculin. They also have a clot-busting antithrombogenic, under investigation as a medication for stroke victims. And the real kicker — they have a vasodilator that keeps the blood flowing freely from the small incisions they make. They then lap it up like a kitten drinking milk — not by sucking, as goes another common misconception.

**What’s your advice to people who encounter bats?** Treat bats like exposed electric wires: You can’t tell if it’s dangerous by looking at it, but it can’t hurt you if you don’t touch it.

**What do you still want to discover?** Bats save farmers \$23 billion annually in reduced crop damage and pesticide use. Many of the dominant trees of tropical rainforests depend upon bats for either pollination or seed dispersal. Those are just some of the beneficial eco-services that bats provide. I hope to continue contributing to what we understand about these miraculous animals and develop methods to help us better support them, so that we can always share our planet and skies with them.

bats away from death. He has also investigated whether bats really get tangled in women’s hair — and found it to be mostly a myth.

—*Sherry Posnick-Goodwin*



**OFF THE  
BEATEN PATH**

We want to know: Do you or someone you know teach a unique or unusual class? Tell us about it at [editor@cta.org](mailto:editor@cta.org). [#unusualclasses](https://twitter.com/unusualclasses)



# YOU TEACH WHAT?

Some class subjects go beyond the norm

By Sherry Posnick-Goodwin  
Photography by Scott Buschman

**TELL A STRANGER YOU TEACH** math, English, social studies or PE at a public school and you're likely to receive a nod and a few polite questions.

But some classes will get a bit more of a reaction. In fact, the typical response to unusual class subjects might be "You teach *what?*"

We searched high and low for some uncommon course offerings throughout California, the state where residents are proud to be different. We found, among others, a course relating to a high school fish hatchery, and scuba diving classes. Here are a few more.





## SURFING / CERAMICS

**TEACHING EITHER SURFING** or ceramics might be accompanied by the title of *dude*. But Brian Schultz is anything but laid-back when it comes to enthusiasm for teaching. He's been coaching the boys' and girls' surf teams for the past 13 years at Capistrano Valley High School in Mission Viejo and teaching fine arts there for 17 years.

Since the Capistrano Valley surf team joined the Capistrano Coast League 14 years ago, the girls have won eight league championships. The boys have won four over the past 13 years. The school has qualified for the Scholastic Surf Series

Far left:

**Brian Schultz** shows his form; left: the surf teams at Capistrano Valley High School; right: Schultz.



State Finals for the past 12 years and has won the boys' long board division four times and the girls' short board competition twice.

"The overall championship has eluded us for the past 10 years. We have been runner-up six times, but this might be our year," says Schultz optimistically.

Teaching surfing is a big responsibility, covering one to two miles of beach with 30 to 35 kids in the water, says the Capistrano Unified Education Association member. There's also fundraising to support the sport.

A native of Orange County, Schultz says surfing has always been a part of his life. He never went pro, but jumped at the opportunity to replace a retiring surfing coach while continuing to teach ceramics.

He finds both jobs joyful and creative.

"I was told once to find a job you love to do and you'll never work a day in your life. And that's the way I feel about teaching students to surf and create artwork. I absolutely love what I do."

## GUNSMITHING

**BRINGING FIREARMS ON CAMPUS** is outlawed in most schools, but it's no cause for alarm at Lassen Community College. In fact, the school's gunsmithing class in rural Susanville is a bit like "Duck Dynasty." There are guns everywhere, being worked on by men with beards, caps and suspenders.

Established in 1945, the Lassen program is the oldest gunsmithing school in the U.S. It offers associate in science degrees in firearms repair and general gunsmithing, as well as certificates of accomplishment in pistolsmith, riflesmith, long guns, and gunsmith machinist and metal finishing. The school has a two-year program and also offers one- to two-week short summer courses in basic machine shop, barreling, law enforcement armory and more.

The instructors are Lassen College Faculty Association members John Martin and Buck Bauer (his real name). Some students in the class reverently refer to the duo as "gun gods." Students, mostly men, range from new high school graduates to veterans, retirees looking for a second career, and hobbyists. Police officers from across the country sign up for short courses.

There is a waiting list of 200 to enter the two-year program, which accepts 22 new students a year and is extremely rigorous. All students have to supply their own firearms — which can include antiques. They are not supposed to bring ammunition to class. To test the weapons, blanks are fired into a special cylinder.

Andrew Mason enrolled in the program because he enjoyed repairing

Instructor **Buck Bauer**, left, with Samuel Kemp in the machine shop.



pistols, machine guns and sniper rifles when he served in the U.S. Marines.

"I loved it and wanted to make a career out of it, so here I am," he says.

Bauer grew up in a hunting family and entered shooting competitions at a young age. He graduated from the gunsmithing program in 2006. Last year he became a full-time instructor.

"It's a great program," he says. "It takes a lot of patience and a lot of practice. Most of the class is hands-on. We look at how well the gun works, whether it looks good, and whether it's up to industry standards. We're the best program in the country, and we want to keep it that way."



### WINE STUDIES

**BEING THE F. KORBEL & BROS.** professor of wine business at Sonoma State University is a tough job, but someone has to do it. In this case it's Armand Gilinsky, who just completed his first of three years in a professorship supported by Korbel Champagne Cellars.

International travel and sipping fine wines are part of the job for Gilinsky, whose goal is to cultivate research and projects around the world that advance the wine industry and its leaders, says the California Faculty Association member. He spent this summer teaching about wine in Germany, and has traveled to France for research. Upcoming vino visits will take him to Italy and Australia.

"I was humbled by the appointment," says Gilinsky, who is the author of more than 40 published case studies and articles relating to the wine industry. "It is incredibly generous, yet so appropriate, for Korbel

to lend its name and funding to this professorship that gives faculty time to develop projects that help the wine industry, as well as those who seek careers in it."

His new role means less time for teaching regular business classes at Sonoma State, where his students mull over case studies he created, including one about Naked Wines, an online retailer that raised millions through online "crowdfunding" and set the industry topsy-turvy.

Gilinsky was named the first director of the university's Wine Business Institute when he was just 20 and wasn't old enough to imbibe legally. That was 40 years ago. And his career, like fine wine, has become more flavorful and robust. His next goal is to create a wine business case study book that examines changes in the industry. His students will be involved in the research, which will advance their knowledge of the business world.

"Everyone asks me if I get free champagne, and the answer is no, I have to pay for it myself," he says. "But I get to learn about pathbreaking research by traveling the world and meeting interesting characters in the wine industry. What more could I want?"

◀ **Armand Gilinsky** discusses the finer points of the wine industry.

### DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

▶ **Holly Baxter** teaches young students how to be Net-savvy.



**"BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU** write and how you write it," Holly Baxter cautions elementary school students. "Remember that with technology, nobody can hear your voice."

She asks students to stand at the front of the class and say

"thank you" three different ways: sincere, sarcastic, and questioning. Baxter points out that it's easy to understand the meaning in speech, but with technology it's easy to misinterpret the tone, which can result in anger or hurt feelings.

The Oak Park Unified School District counselor bravely goes where few educators have gone before in teaching students about the digital universe.

"We need to frontload import-





## STREET LAW

**EVER HEAR THE STORY** about “The Case of the Shipwrecked Sailors”?

It’s a true tale from the late 1800s of three sailors cast adrift on a life raft with no food or water, who agreed to draw straws to determine who would be killed and eaten so the other two could survive. The sailor who designed the plan drew the short straw and was killed, despite renegeing on the deal. Five days later, the two survivors were rescued by a passing ship. They were brought ashore in England and tried for murder.

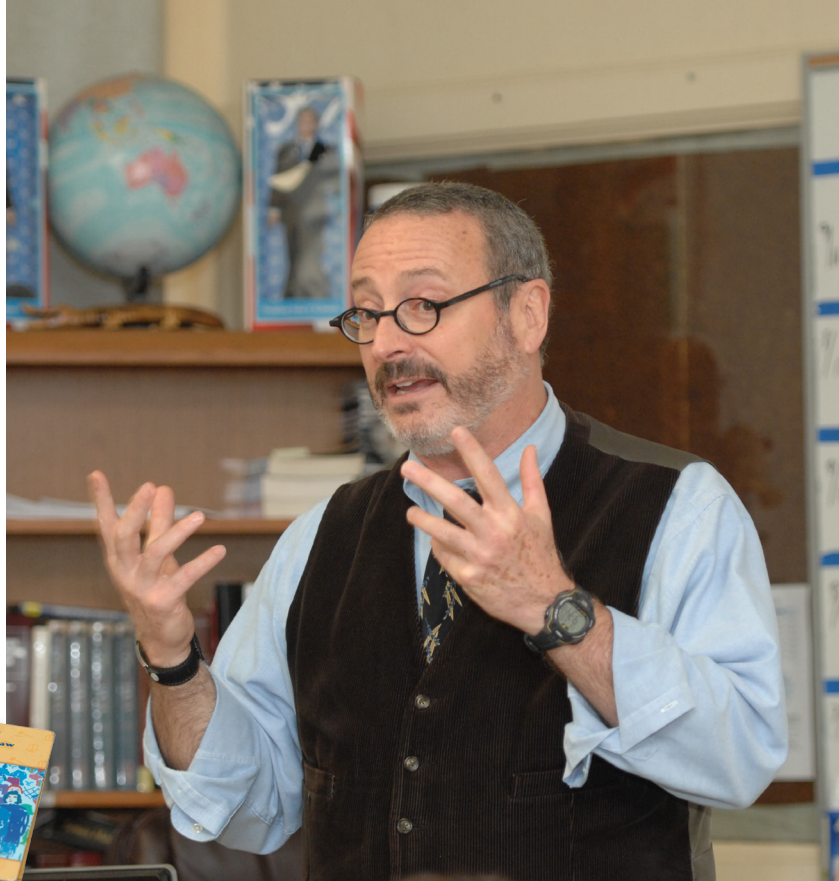
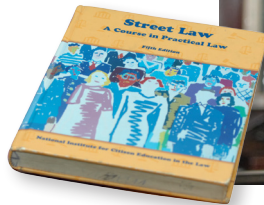
“It’s a moral and legal dilemma,” Chris Voisin tells McClatchy High School seniors. “In a life-or-death situation, is it better for one to die and two to survive? Is there a different law for those who are out at sea? Can an act be legal but immoral?”

Welcome to Street Law, an A-G class that Voisin has taught for 11 years. The class covers the basics of criminal law, torts, criminal procedures, family law and consumer law, says Voisin, an attorney who practiced for 22 years before becoming a teacher.

“I created the class because I want my students to become better thinkers and read things more carefully,” says the Sacramento City Teachers Association member.

Voisin’s oldest son is incarcerated in Oklahoma, and he is used as an example of bad decision-making and how the law works.

▶  
**Chris Voisin’s**  
class covers  
criminal,  
family and  
consumer law.



Voisin makes students aware of things they may not realize. He says many of them think they will never be caught breaking the law or get in trouble from associating with lawbreakers. For example, if one of three college roommates is dealing drugs out of the house and gets caught, the other two could also be held accountable.

Students discuss issues of liability, privacy, email confidentiality, and when to be a good Samaritan and come to somebody’s rescue.

“I grade students on their analysis and thought process more than correct answers,” says Voisin. “I look at how they come to their conclusions. This class helps create disciplined thinkers. It might even save lives.”

ant information before handing our kids a computer or phone,” says Baxter, Oak Park Teachers Association. “It’s not something we can do after the fact.”

Students learn everyone has a digital “footprint” and that what goes online is permanent, even if it’s negative or embarrassing. They learn how to prevent identity theft and avoid online stranger danger. They learn that cyberbullying can have tragic repercussions. They also learn that not everything they read on the Internet is true.

Baxter doesn’t want to make students afraid; she wants them to develop common sense.

“The Internet is a great place to learn and connect with others in a positive way. But they also need a healthy dose of reality and safety. Just the other day while a student was playing an online game, a window popped up asking for him for his name and address. He knew what to do, which was to block that user. Because of this class, he understood it was an unsafe situation.”

Baxter tells parents the best parental control isn’t software — it’s *them*. The best way to ensure cyber safety is have a computer in the living room or on a kitchen table — and not in a child’s bedroom, she advises.

“Our kids are stepping into a whole new world that we weren’t part of growing up. We have to work together to make sure their experiences in this world are positive and safe.” ■



# BROWN IS THE NEW GREEN

Devastating ripple effect on communities, schools and students

By Sherry Posnick-Goodwin  
Photography by Scott Buschman

Dale Kennedy sadly surveys the playing fields at Grant Elementary School, part of Kings Canyon School District in Fresno County. The once-green fields have turned brown and dusty. In the distance are farm fields that lie fallow and irrigation ditches filled with cracks and weeds instead of water. Smoke fills the air from the Rough Fire raging in the hills of Fresno County, which spread rapidly from bone-dry conditions. School staff and community members from “the hills” who have begun to evacuate to the lowlands drive past the school.



▲  
**Dale Kennedy** touches bone-dry dirt at Grant Elementary; the school's once-green baseball field.





The worst drought in state history is “like the Oklahoma Dust Bowl,” says Dale Kennedy, Kings Canyon Teachers Association (KCTA) president. “It’s hit our community hard. We depend on agriculture. If you eat stone fruit, such as peaches or nectarines, there’s a high probability that our community members picked it or packed it or own the fields where it’s growing.”

The drought has devastated the farmlands of the Central Valley, extending from Fresno to Bakersfield, and threatened the very survival of communities that have been the backbone of California’s agricultural industry for decades. In some towns, wells are drying up. The water shortage has forced farmers to reduce crops they plant, so farmworker families are moving away, reducing school populations. The Alpaugh Unified School District in Tulare County keeps students indoors during “dust days.”

But the disaster has also brought communities closer together. Porterville Unified School District, for example, has opened shower facilities outside of school hours to

students lacking water at home. The district holds community “water drives” to collect bottled water and fosters conservation with “Brown is the New Green” signs.

The state does not track the numbers of students schools have lost due to the drought. But to cope with declining enrollment, districts can request relief from the state, which recently began viewing the drought as a natural disaster. So far only Firebaugh-Las Deltas Unified School District has filed for relief, after losing 120 of its 2,400 students in the last two years because of the drought.

In Kings Canyon School District more than 250 students have left due to the drought, says Kennedy, who teaches sixth grade at Thomas Law Reed Elementary School. The drought eliminated parents’ jobs in most cases.

“It’s hitting us hard in the classroom,” says Kennedy, noting that 90 percent of students in his district and the Central Valley are poor and Latino. “Our students and everyone in the community are worried sick.”

## FAMILIES STRUGGLE

His daughter, Julie Kennedy, teaches English at nearby Orange Cove High School and is also a KCTA member. During a vocabulary exercise, she asks students to come up with one or two words to describe the impact of the drought on their lives. Among the phrases are “struggling families,” “less jobs,” “stressed out” and “unforgiving.”

“It’s rough,” she says. “The drought has impacted this school in myriad ways, in addition to the campus being less beautiful. Some students moved away over the summer. Many of my students say their parents are losing a significant amount of money, and they are just plain suffering economically. Yesterday at a yearbook meeting, kids were saying they can’t afford to buy yearbooks and may not be able to afford prom because their parents are prioritizing. It’s hard, because these kids deserve the same things as any other student in California.”

Students believe most people in the state have no idea how hard the Central Valley has been hit by the drought or how much their community is suffering (see page 29). Teachers like Julie Kennedy want to get the word out.

“I want the people of California to know that our farmers are excellent and efficient users



▲  
Clockwise from top left: Rosemary Zavala, teacher **Julie Kennedy**, Ubaldo Perez, Nancy Reyes, Jose Estrada, Daniel Fonseca, Jose Villicana. Kennedy’s students at Orange Cove High show descriptions of the drought’s impact.



▶  
**Jeff White**  
 leads a class  
 discussion on  
 the water table  
 and drought  
 at El Monte  
 Middle School.



of water,” she says. “We are struggling here, but not because we are careless with water.”

Her students have become more environmentally conscious. Some confide they have turned in neighbors for washing their cars or watering their lawns.

### TEACHABLE MOMENTS

“Let’s take a close read at this recent article about the drought,” Jeff White says to sixth-graders in his enrichment class at El Monte Middle School in Orosi. “If you don’t know a word, put a circle around it.”

The headline of the *USA Today* article they are reading is: “California drought cost 2.7 billion in 2015.” The article cites a UC Davis study that finds the four-year drought has cost 21,000 jobs, with the biggest hit in agriculture, which will lose \$1.84 billion this year.

Students learn what a “ripple effect” means in the economy, that “fallow fields” happen when farmers don’t plant crops, and that satellite images show groundwater is drying up in the Central Valley at an alarming rate.

The drought has provided many excellent opportunities to teach youngsters about science, conservation and the environment, observes White, president of the Cutler-Orosi Unified Teachers Association.

**“Our farmers are excellent and efficient users of water. We are struggling here, but not because we are careless with water.”**

**JULIE KENNEDY**

Most students in town have water, but in East Orosi, located two miles from the town center, there hasn’t been water in two years. The school district is building a pipeline on district property that will bring water to East Orosi residents. Groundbreaking is scheduled in the near future for the project.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

**Coolcalifornia.org** suggests ways educators and students can help conserve:

### TEACHERS

- Designate at least one staff person to manage all conservation ideas contributed by staff and students, conservation discussions, and any meetings related to water conservation.
- Educate students about water conservation such as turning off water while washing hands, brushing teeth and doing dishes. See [water.ca.gov/education/wffcatalog.cfm](http://water.ca.gov/education/wffcatalog.cfm) for conservation and drought curriculum materials.

### STUDENTS

- Create and post water conservation signs with school permission, in bathrooms, the cafeteria, classrooms and places where students congregate.
- Plant an eco-friendly garden; ask your teacher if you can replace plants that need a lot of water with native plants adapted to local climate and rainfall.
- Be on the lookout for wasted water; tell your teacher to speak to the custodian/building engineer if you see leaky faucets, drinking fountains or toilets.

White’s class discussion shifts to lakes in the area, some of which have disappeared. The lakes were the result of dams built when there was too much water.

“We don’t have that problem anymore,” White says. “But they say a storm is coming with a Spanish name that’s El Niño.”

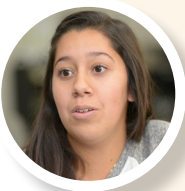


# THE HARDEST HIT: STUDENTS SPEAK

**THE EXTENT OF THE SUFFERING** in some communities caused by extreme drought is largely unknown to most of us. The impact of the disaster is not only altering school enrollments and town populations, but families' livelihoods, health and stability as well. Students are among the hardest hit.



"We are farmworkers in the fields," says **Jose Estrada**, a senior at Orange Cove High School in Kings Canyon School District. "We're not doing great. So far the oranges are not the regular size and the grapes in the vineyard fall off at the slightest touch. We're managing, but our income is less. We've cut back a lot when we go to the grocery store and are only getting the necessities."



**Nancy Reyes**, a junior at Orange Cove, says her family can hardly afford to buy fruit that they pick in the fields. Her father, a farm labor manager, has noticed an exodus of farmworkers from the area.



"The drought has had a major impact on my family," says **Daniel Fonseca**, a junior at Orange Cove. "Most all of us work in the fields. We go to my grandma's house on Sundays, and all the uncles and aunts are stressed out. All I hear is: 'How are we going to pay for that?' It's tough for them and for my dad, too, because his hours were cut."



School sports have suffered, says **Ubaldo Perez**, a junior and football quarterback at Orange Cove. "It's gotten hotter and hotter, and that impacts how long we practice and how long we can wear our gear on days when it's too hot. On some days the air quality is so bad that we can't practice. Here we still have turf, but at other schools we're playing on dried-up patches of dirt. I'm worried that if it gets hotter and drier, certain sports will be eliminated."

Scientists predict an unusually strong El Niño this winter, a phenomenon where warmer than average waters in the Eastern equatorial Pacific affect weather around the world. It may bring much-needed rain to parched areas of California.

## PRAYING FOR EL NIÑO

In some households on the outskirts of Porterville, people turn on the tap and nothing comes out. Wells have gone dry; residents must truck in water tanks.

"If you live within the city itself, you have water, but outside the city limit you are on your own," says Henry



"It's really depressing," says **Leslie Ontiveros** (left), a junior at Granite Hills High School in the Porterville Unified School District. She says her family constantly runs out of water and has tanks trucked in, which is expensive for her mother, a single mom. "I go to my aunt's house or to friends' houses to shower."

**Yazil Iniguez** (right), also a junior at Granite Hills, moved to Porterville three months ago from Ducor after her family's well dried up. One of six children living with a single mom, she says the family lacks water again and is considering selling their house because her mother is having a hard time finding work.

"My mom is thinking of going to another state where they don't have this problem. We sometimes shower with buckets and use our neighbor's water hose. People don't realize what it's like out here."



Jane Kisling

Franco, a history teacher at Monache High School and president of the Porterville Education Association (PEA). "You either have your own well or are part of a private utility company. You can own a house, but it's not worth anything if it doesn't have water."

Jane Kisling, a law and justice pathway lead teacher and AVID coordinator for Granite Hills High School, is hoping her family farm survives after some of its wells went dry. Her husband and sons work on the farm, which grows almonds and alfalfa. The family took out loans to drill new wells, and

she is hoping they will turn things around.

"But it's nothing compared to what my students are experiencing,"





says the PEA member, noting that students at her school are the most impacted in Porterville. “If there are no oranges to pick or grapes to harvest, what will happen to them?”

“The wells started drying up last year,” says Richard Lambie, a career pathways and PE teacher at Granite Hills. “Many of our students are without water, so our district became very proactive and let us open up the locker rooms an hour before school so students can shower. We also have huge jugs of water in our cafeteria for students. Students volunteer for the Excel Club to collect water and help staff water drives that deliver water to families in need, similar to food drives. Teachers bring bottled water to athletic events so students stay hydrated.”



Henry Franco

The campus, once green and lush, has turned brown. Trees are watered with buckets to keep them alive. “Brown is the New Green” signs have been posted to keep up morale. Some schools have installed non-flush urinals to save water.

As terrible as the drought has been, the hardship has united the town and the school community, say students and staff with pride.

Yazil Iniguez, a junior at Granite Hills, says students try to stay positive and focus on school. “One way or another, we’ll get through it,” she says. Her classmate Leslie Ontiveros, also a junior, tries to be upbeat as well; she is currently working on a community service project to encourage conservation and collect bottled water donations.

“I know at my school we are thinking of ourselves more as a family these days,” says Lambie. “Everyone is stepping up, including students, teachers and community leaders. At my church, we’ve done a lot of praying. We’re all praying for water. We’re all praying for El Niño.” ■



**Richard Lambie** says Granite Hills High School opens its shower rooms an hour before school starts so students without water at home can shower.

## WHAT’S WORKING

**SCHOOLS HAVE BECOME** creative in efforts to conserve water. Among their actions:

- Cheerleaders at Vintage High School in Napa (below) held a “Waterless Car Wash” to raise money for their cheer and dance program. Instead of soap and water, the Crusherettes used an eco-friendly cleaning solution. The event was a hit with customers.
- Sunny Hills and Troy high schools in Fullerton drained leaking swimming pools to comply with state-ordered cutbacks. Both schools’ swimming and water polo teams practice elsewhere.
- Five South Bay high schools switched to artificial turf to upgrade athletic fields and save water, including the Field of Dreams at Fremont High School in Sunnyvale.
- Students involved with university farms across the state are switching to drought-resistant crops. Student farmers at CSU Chico are importing hay from Oregon to cope with the lack of edible grass for livestock.







▶  
Counselor  
**Lora Palacios** pays  
a visit to the home  
of 13-year-old  
Dianna, who has  
not been  
attending school.

# Making It Through Middle School


Early action  
and outreach  
helps prevent  
young dropouts

By Sherry Posnick-Goodwin  
Photography by Scott Buschman



Thirteen-year-old Dianna is sitting on the couch watching TV on a Monday afternoon when Lora Palacios knocks at the door. Dianna reluctantly invites her into the small in-law unit she shares with her father, grandparents and others in East Los Angeles. Large portraits of the Virgin Mary adorn the walls of the tiny but spotless living room. Dianna stares sullenly at her feet.

“I’m worried about you not going to school,” says Palacios, a Pupil Services and Attendance (PSA) counselor at Belvedere Middle School in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). “School is important. I want you to do better. What’s going on?”

Dianna, who has depression and self-esteem issues, wasn’t succeeding in regular classes, so she enrolled in an independent study program. However, she has 



not been doing her assignments from home or meeting with her teacher as required.

(Independent study, an alternative program for students who have conflicts in attending public school on a daily basis, requires one hour of direct one-on-one instruction per week with a teacher at an LAUSD campus.)

Her father offers excuses. She can't wake up. She doesn't like school. Geometry is difficult, so she can't do her homework.

Palacios points out that Dianna is not doing her schoolwork in English, social studies and other subjects, either. She has also stopped meeting with her therapist. Dianna and her father recently attended a School Attendance Review Board (SARB) hearing with school officials and a representative of the district attorney's office about the unexcused absences. If she continues to miss school, her father could be fined or arrested, because state law requires students to attend school until 18.

Dianna continues staring at her feet. She mumbles that she'll try to do better. Her father says he'll be stricter. But Dianna is at risk of joining the numbers of middle school dropouts in California, says Palacios, a member of United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA).

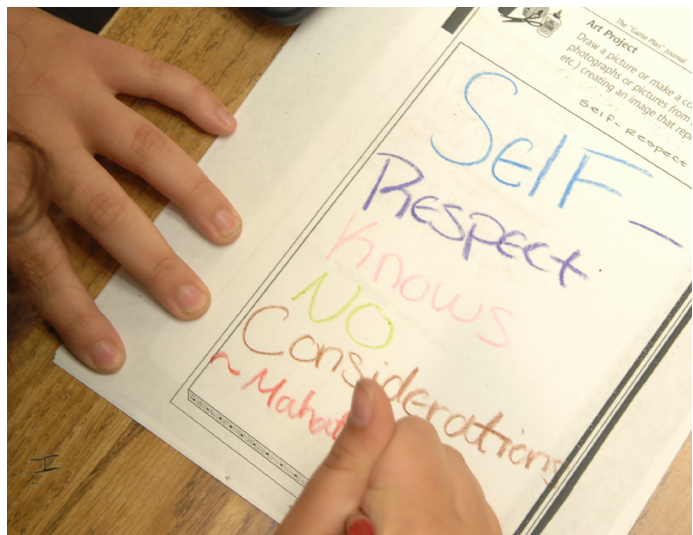
## AN OVERLOOKED PROBLEM

The majority of dropouts leave in high school, but thousands never make it to ninth grade. With most prevention and recovery efforts focused on high school, middle schoolers often slip through the cracks.

In 2011, California became the first state to acknowledge middle school dropouts — with 17,257 eighth-grade students exiting the school system at that time, which was a 3.49 percent dropout rate. Currently, the state does not track the number of middle school dropouts. Legislation passed in 2009 requires the state to compare all students who start in seventh grade to those who enroll in high school two years later to track them, but it's an unfunded mandate and it hasn't happened. Black students and Latino students (like Dianna) are the most heavily impacted, with high school graduation rates of 76 percent and 68 percent respectively, in 2013.



▲ Woodland Hills Academy teacher **Kimberly Montsinger**, right, works with Nyah Villareal-James.



Middle schoolers drop out for various reasons. They may struggle in their classes, lose interest in school, join gangs, have problems at home, or suffer bullying. They may be taking care of a sick relative or younger siblings while their parents work.

Math has become much more difficult at the middle school level, and some educators — including Kimberly Montsinger, a math and study skills teacher at Woodland Hills Academy — think it's a factor.

▲ Willis Jepson Middle School works on ways to motivate students with attendance problems.



“There’s been a huge push downward of math curriculum,” says Montsinger, UTLA. “Students in middle school are now required to know what I needed to know in high school. They feel like they are going to spend the next three to four years catching up. They feel like failures and want to give up. There’s a snowball effect, and if we don’t catch them now, they won’t graduate.”

Parents mistakenly believe children don’t need them in middle school as much as they did in elementary school, and often take a step back, says Montsinger. But students, going through hormonal upheaval and peer pressure, need their parents more than ever.

“At this age, parents need to be *more* involved,” Montsinger says. “I see students who could drop out at any minute if given the opportunity.”

**“They feel like failures and want to give up. If we don’t catch them now, they won’t graduate.”**

**KIMBERLY MONTSINGER**

The problem isn’t just in urban areas, says Alex Coursey, an English teacher at Technology Middle School in Rohnert Park who spent the previous two years teaching at an alternative middle school.

“It’s not recognized as much of

a problem in rural areas, but sometimes you see students one day and they’re just gone the next day,” says Coursey, Rohnert Park-Cotati Educators Association. “You don’t know if they have moved or transferred to another school or what happened.”

He believes students feel lost and experience culture shock when they go to middle school after being in a close-knit elementary school environment for so long.

“There’s a lot more drama at middle school. Sometimes there is so much going on at home that school seems like a secondary issue. They may have sick or addicted parents. Some are even head of their household.”

Research done at Johns Hopkins University shows that in high-poverty environments, it’s possible to identify students in middle school who will exit before graduation. Warning signs include failing math or English, not attending school regularly, and misbehavior. The more indicators, the more likely a student won’t earn a diploma.

LAUSD has the highest number of seventh- and eighth-graders dropping out, notes The Hechinger Report. The district installed a new data system to

## Impact of Budget Cuts

**DUE TO BUDGET PROBLEMS**, school districts have drastically cut the number of counselors like LAUSD’s Lora Palacios — as well as social workers and attendance clerks. This has made it difficult to monitor dropouts and offer interventions, says David Kopperud, education programs consultant for the California Department of Education.

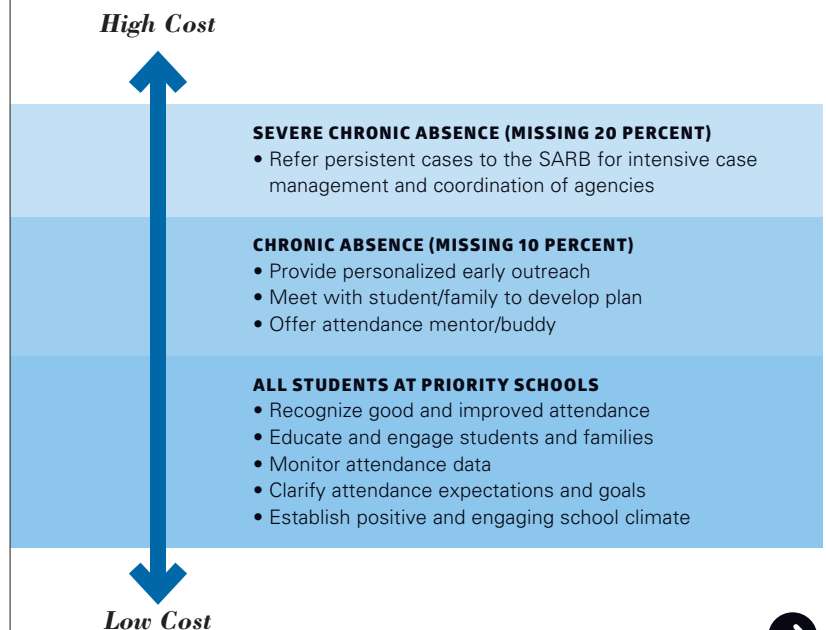
“Huge cuts in the past meant student support services were decimated,” he says. That may change under the Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs), which must set goals and establish action plans in eight priority areas, addressing chronic absenteeism, school climate, and students’ sense of “connectedness,” among other issues.

With funding tied to LCAPs, Kopperud believes, schools will hire back counselors and social workers, which could reduce the dropout rate. He has seen a few districts already do so. In addition, some of the money saved as a result of Prop. 47, which requires misdemeanor or instead of felony sentences for certain drug and other offenses, is mandated to support truancy and dropout prevention programs.

The state has identified 11 “Model School Attendance Review Board (SARB)” districts, including Long Beach Unified and Corona-Norco Unified, which have effective policies for improving attendance and preventing dropouts. They use a three-tiered approach (see chart below). Investment in the first two tiers — recognizing good and improved attendance, parent and student engagement, personalized early outreach, etc. — has proved effective and less costly than tier 3.

“You can’t engage with middle school kids in only a punitive way, or you lose them,” says Kopperud. “You want to form relationships so they can be open with you about what’s going on, so you can address their specific problems to help them re-engage with school.”

### IMPROVING ATTENDANCE



Source: California Department of Education





track at-risk students, but the rollout has been problematic.

It may be impossible to know exactly how many middle school students drop out before ninth grade, says Palacios, “but if you wait until they are in high school for dropout prevention, you’ve waited too long.”

### “WE DON’T GIVE UP ON THEM”

“If they’ve stopped coming to school, we don’t give up on them,” says Palacios. “We make every attempt to bring the child back to school.”

That means Palacios is constantly knocking on doors, talking to parents about the importance of school, handing out “truancy letters,” arranging tutoring so youngsters catch up, and finding mental health services for those with emotional problems. Sometimes there are hearings with the district attorney’s office.

Returning to school isn’t easy for truants, so it’s important to be encouraging and congratulate students for taking “baby steps,” says Palacios. For example, when Damien arrives late after unexcused absences, she calls him into her office and says, “I’m so happy you’re here,” instead of scolding him.

Parents are a huge part of the problem, she shares. Some feel guilty because the home environment is unstable, so they let their child stay home and feign illness. Sometimes she asks for a doctor’s note or has a school nurse confirm whether a child is really sick.

“We try to stress that learning habits are important for getting these children ready for the workforce. My fear is that they won’t be able to take care of themselves by holding a job or making decisions helpful to their success. I ask parents, ‘If your child doesn’t come to school, who’s going to take care of him for the rest of his life? Who will provide for him?’ I want them to think about that. In five years, it will be a reality.”

▲  
At Willis Jepson Middle School, **Alyson Brauning** teaches at-risk eighth-graders, focusing on goal-setting and motivation.

### EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

*Why try?*

It’s a philosophical question, and also the name of a unique intervention class for eighth-graders with attendance problems, low grades and behavioral issues at Willis Jepson Middle School in Vacaville. The WhyTry class, which focuses on increasing motivation and goal-setting, is part of the school’s Early Warning System, which predicts and identifies at-risk students by looking at their GPA, attendance and demerits. The system’s three tiers of interventions to get back on track are tutoring and mentoring, behavioral counseling, and WhyTry.

A pilot California Department of Education program,

## 6 STRATEGIES to lower the dropout rate

- **Build** a positive school climate. Reward good behavior.
- **Foster** connections. Let students know someone cares whether they show up.
- **Communicate** with students and their families about the importance of attendance.
- **Learn** about the strengths and challenges in your school community. Learn about community resources.
- **Collaborate** with colleagues — nurses, counselors, social workers — to intervene when needed.
- **Alert** school staff if a student misses more than two days.





▲  
Technology Middle School teacher **Alex Coursey** with Tyker Paul and Bruno Roland.

the Early Warning System also looks at patterns in elementary school, such as absenteeism and low grades, which can raise red flags.

In the past, a teacher might confer with a counselor about a student not doing well, the counselor would look into the problem and get back to the teacher, and it could be well into the semester before alarm bells went off. Now interventions happen immediately, says WhyTry teacher Alyson Brauning.

“We’re looking at many factors including social and emotional well-being, motivation and connectedness to school,” says Brauning, Vacaville Teachers Association. “We’re looking at how well students handle stress. I think we’re being progressive. We’re focusing more on students. We’re doing a much better job.”

“WhyTry helps me prepare for high school and the real world,” says Richard Magana, whose grades have gone from D’s to B’s. “It helps my attitude.”

Kazandra Torres once had F’s, but is now passing her

classes. “It’s helped me feel more motivated and set goals for myself. My short-term goal was getting my grades up. My long-term goal is graduating from high school.”

### MEETING EMOTIONAL NEEDS

“What are your triggers? What gets you upset?”

Kimberly Telphy, a counselor at Arrowview Middle School in San Bernardino City Unified, poses the question to a group of middle school boys during a district-mandated anger management group meeting.

Royal says it’s a trigger when others “talk smack” about him. Robert confides that he has a hard time accepting criticism from teachers.

“You’re not a puppet on a string, and you can’t allow people to control what you do,” says Telphy, San Bernardino Teachers Association. “So, who has control when you’re angry?”

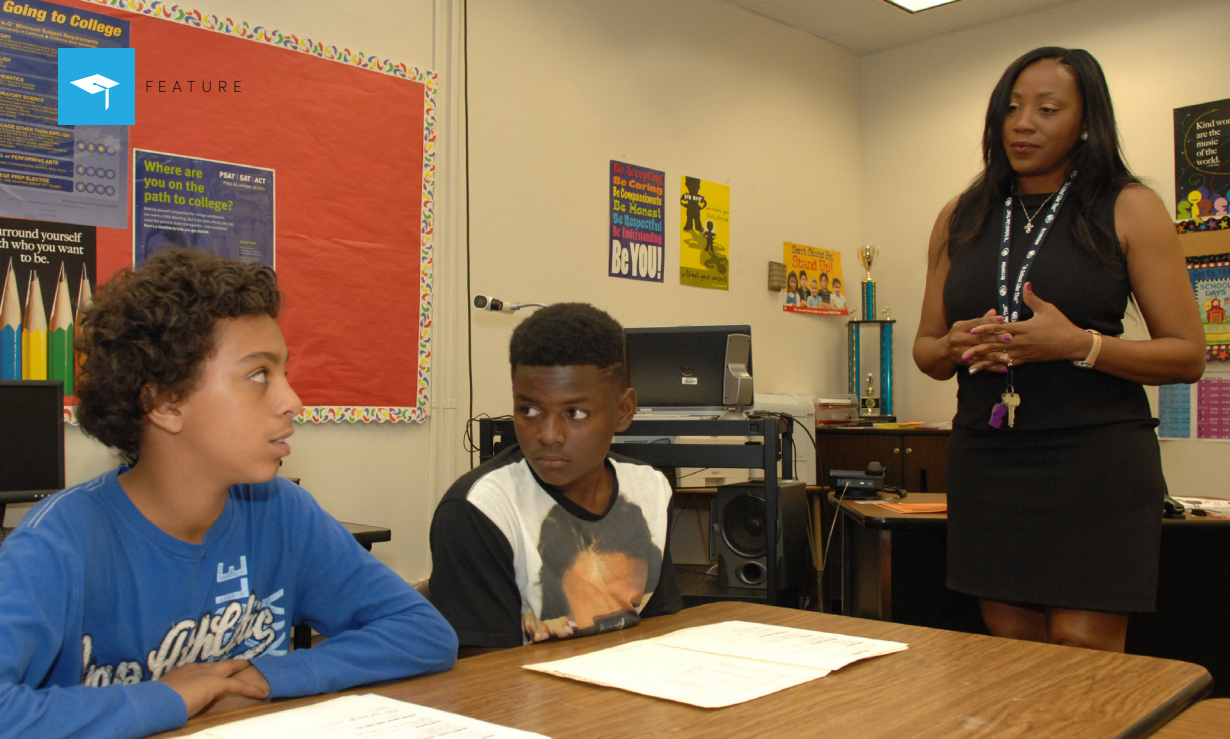
“*We do,*” the boys answer in unison.

They act out scenarios of being provoked, and instead of reacting angrily, they walk away from the situation or respond calmly. Pedro says with pride that he is “mastering self-control.”

Helping students talk about their feelings and navigate emotional and social issues helps them succeed academically and stay in school, ➔

**“We’re being progressive. We’re focusing more on students. We’re doing a much better job.”**

ALYSON BRAUNING



◀ **Kimberly Telphy** at Arrowview Middle School encourages students to talk about emotional and social issues, which helps them succeed academically and stay in school.

says Telphy, who observes that middle school is a time when emotions take over.

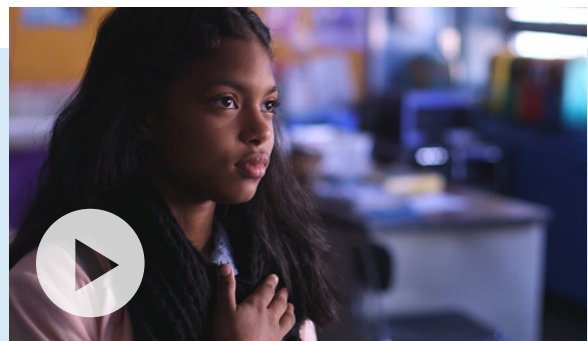
“They tend to be angry toward a parent who’s not there. They will become angry if their dad isn’t in their life or they are being raised by a grandparent. It affects them academically. Sometimes they give up and feel like no one cares. As counselors, our job is to let them know someone does care. I’ll tell them, ‘Your parents love you.’ I will call a meeting with parents. Half the time parents may not realize what their children are going through.”

Telphy says she has put her own spin on the anger management meetings, using materials the district provides as well as some of her own. Some students are referred by administrators or parents; some she recruits into the group after sensing their anger and hostility.

Her district has created Operation Student Recovery to address truancy, which sends out teams of teachers and community members to knock on students’ doors if they aren’t at school. Sometimes adults or teens who answer the door are embarrassed; other times they are pleased that someone took the time to show they care.

“Our goal is to involve parents,” Telphy says. “We want to help students learn to accept consequences. We want to teach students how to respond to distractions and remove themselves from certain situations. We also want to let students know we are here for them — and school can make their lives better.” ■

*Editor’s Note: A few months later, Dianna has shown improvement, says Palacios. Both of her parents are spending more time with her and showing strong support. She is continuing with the independent study program to receive high school credit for ninth grade. Palacios recently rewarded Dianna and her father with tickets to a Los Angeles Dodgers game to recognize the strides she has made.*



Video 🎥

## Middle School Moment

A segment in the 2012 PBS *Frontline* program “Dropout Nation” examined the “Middle School Moment,” a time when, according to Johns Hopkins researcher Robert Balfanz, a series of “ABC” indicators can predict how likely a student is to drop out of high school: **A**ttendance, **B**ehavior and **C**ourse performance. Specifically, in high-poverty schools, if a sixth-grader attends less than 80 percent of the time, receives an unsatisfactory behavior grade in a core course, or fails math or English, there is a 75 percent chance that they will later drop out of high school — absent effective intervention. See the segment at [pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/education/dropout-nation/middle-school-moment](https://pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/education/dropout-nation/middle-school-moment).



# Advocacy

INSIDE:

- 38** New Bills Signed Into Law
- 40** Catching Up With Court Cases
- 41** Making Sense of CAASPP Test Scores
- 42** Bargaining Roundup



Informational picket by teachers at Lorenzo Manor Elementary School in San Lorenzo Unified School District. See story on **page 42**.



# Legislative Update

**THE CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE** is officially in recess and hundreds of bills — including CTA-supported bills — have been signed or vetoed by Gov. Jerry Brown.

## CTA-SUPPORTED BILLS THAT THE GOVERNOR HAS SIGNED INCLUDE:



- **Workers' Comp and School Board Permission**

CTA-supported **AB 915** by Assembly Member Chris Holden (D-Pasadena) removes the prohibition on school personnel leaving the state in emergencies without school board permission while receiving workers' compensation benefits.

- **American Indian Language-Culture Credential**

CTA-supported **AB 163** by Assembly Member Das Williams (D-Carpinteria) requires the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) to issue to a candidate who has met specified requirements and is recommended by a federally recognized tribal government, a credential with an American Indian language and/or culture authorization. The educator would then be able to teach these subjects in California public schools and in adult education courses.

- **Affirmative Consent**

CTA-supported **SB 695** by Senate President Pro Tem Kevin de León (D-Los Angeles) is designed to prevent sexual assaults and requires public high schools in California to teach students about affirmative sexual consent. Affirmative consent is clear, unambiguous consent by each party before sex.

- **Sex Education**

CTA-supported **AB 329** by Assembly Member Shirley Weber (D-San Diego) expands and makes sexual health education mandatory at public high schools. The measure adds a requirement that the instruction include information about different sexual orientations.

- **Suspension of High School Exit Examination**

CTA-supported **SB 172** by Sen. Carol Liu (D-La Cañada Flintridge) suspends the administration of the high school exit exam (CAHSEE) and removes the CAHSEE as a condition of receiving a diploma of graduation or a condition of graduation for each student completing 12th grade for the 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years. The bill also requires the superintendent of public instruction to convene an advisory committee to provide recommendations on the continuation of the CAHSEE.

- **College and Career Access Pathways Partnerships**

CTA-supported **AB 288** by Holden creates a dual enrollment program for high school students who are not college-ready to become college-ready by the time they graduate from high school. The bill authorizes community college districts to create College and Career Access Pathways that provide community college courses solely to participating high school students.

- **California Racial Mascots Act**

CTA-supported **AB 30** by Assembly Member Luis Alejo (D-Watsonville) prohibits the use of a racial slur as a mascot that may be hurtful and degrading to the people it portrays.

- **California New Motor Voter Program**

CTA-supported **AB 1461** by Assembly Member Lorena Gonzalez (D-San Diego) requires the Department of Motor Vehicles and the secretary of state to establish a new program to increase opportunities for voter registration. The



California New Motor Voter Program (CNMVP) requires the secretary of state to establish procedures to safeguard the confidentiality of the program, and would charge with a misdemeanor any unauthorized use of information contained in records associated with the program.

• **Maternity and Paternity Leave**

AB 375 by Assembly Member Nora Campos (D-San Jose) allows teachers to receive differential pay during the currently unpaid 12-week leave. Differential pay is the difference between the certified employee’s salary and the cost of their substitute.

**BILLS OF INTEREST VETOED BY THE GOVERNOR INCLUDE:**

• **Beginning Teacher Induction Programs**

CTA-supported AB 141 by Assembly Member Susan Bonilla (D-Concord) required school districts to provide beginning teachers with a CTC-approved induction program at no cost to the teacher. The bill also required school districts receiving federal Title II Part A funding to provide induction programs to new teachers holding a preliminary credential at no cost.

• **Ethnic Studies**

CTA-supported AB 101 by Assembly Member Luis Alejo (D-Watsonville) required the development of a model curriculum in ethnic studies aligned to the A-G requirements at the University of California, established an advisory committee, a majority of whose members are educators in this field, and mandated all school districts provide ethnic studies as an elective for grades 7-12.

• **Charter Schools Operation**

CTA-co-sponsored AB 787 by Assembly Member Roger Hernández (D-West Covina) prohibited a charter school from operating as, or being operated by, a for-profit corporation. This measure was part of a package of bills designed to increase charter school accountability, transparency and accessibility to all students.

**BILLS DEFEATED BY CTA AND MEMBER LOBBYING EFFORTS**

- SB 799 by Sens. Jerry Hill (D-San Mateo) and Steve Glazer (D-Orinda), which would have repealed a law passed last year to ensure that school district funds are used in classrooms and not kept in overly large reserve accounts, failed to make it through the Legislature during its final hours in session. It will likely resurface in January when the session reconvenes.
- AB 1048 by Assembly Member Catharine Baker (R-San Ramon) would have repealed the school district reserve cap adopted last year. During tough financial years, school district reserves did little to mitigate the impact on students; in fact, some districts increased their reserves.
- AB 734 by Assembly Member Young Kim (R-Fullerton) would have extended the reach of the parent trigger law to county offices of education. The law has been disruptive to students and ignited controversy among parents, schools and the community.
- AB 1044 by Baker would have significantly eroded educators’ rights by removing teaching experience from statute as a consideration during layoffs, and robbed students of experienced teachers they need to succeed.
- SB 381 by Sen. Bob Huff (R-Diamond Bar) would have allowed districts to deviate from considering teaching experience during layoffs of certificated employees in a fiscal crisis.
- AB 1078 by Assembly Member Kristin Olsen (R-Modesto) would have significantly changed the teacher evaluation process by shifting to the State Board of Education the authority to set policy for school districts to use in developing evaluation procedures. It also called for an annual evaluation and assessment of overall performance.
- AB 1248 by Assembly Member Rocky Chávez (R-Oceanside) would have extended educators’ probationary period to three years along with other changes to the probationary and evaluation process.

# Cases in Court

## Updates on critical cases that impact education

**CTA AND ITS PARTNERS** have been subjected to ongoing, well-funded and orchestrated attacks that undermine students' ability to gain a solid public school education and teachers' efforts to deliver it. They are also designed to weaken unions and stifle the collective voice of working men and women.

The most prominent of these in recent months have been the legal cases *Vergara v. California*, *Bain v. CTA* and *Friedrichs v. CTA*. *Friedrichs* will be heard by the U.S. Supreme Court this session (see update in a future issue). An update on the other two:

### ***Bain v. CTA***

**Filed: April 2015. Ruling: Dismissed, September 30, 2015.**

*Bain* argued that members' First Amendment rights were being violated because they were compelled to pay dues to vote in union elections, and that conditions of union membership coerced them into supporting "political or ideological" viewpoints they don't share.

In dismissing the case, Los Angeles federal Judge Stephen Wilson ruled that it would be, in fact, unions' right to freedom of association through self-governance that would be violated if plaintiffs prevailed. He concluded that the plaintiffs failed to show that state law influenced the union's membership policies (necessary for a successful First Amendment claim).

"The *Bain* lawsuit rests on sensational and entirely incorrect claims," says CTA President Eric Heins. "Every educator is entirely free to decline membership. Members of CTA also have the option of not having any of their dues money spent for political candidates. It's as simple as checking a box on their membership form."

Only union members can vote in union elections. Educators who opt out of membership still must pay "fair share fees" that cover the cost of union efforts on their behalf.

*Bain v. CTA* was filed in April by four teachers with support from lobbying group StudentsFirst, founded by education reform proponent Michelle Rhee, and law firm Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher, which is also representing Silicon Valley millionaire David Welch and the *Vergara* case plaintiffs.

### ***Vergara v. California***

**Filed: May 2012. Ruling: Five statutes in the state Education Code struck down, June 2014. On appeal.**

California's 2nd District Court of Appeal will hear oral arguments this fall on *Vergara*, following a June 2014 ruling by Judge Rolf Treu of Los Angeles County Superior Court that threw out teacher job protections such as tenure rights, due process, and rules regarding hiring and layoffs.

On Sept. 16, some of the nation's top legal scholars, education policy experts, civil rights advocates, award-winning teachers, school board members and administrators filed five amicus "friend of the court" briefs. They highlight the numerous and serious flaws that would harm students in last year's decision, and urge that it be reversed.

The suit was brought by a group of high school students funded by Students Matter, a Bay Area nonprofit created by David Welch and financed partly by LA billionaire Eli Broad; its advisory committee includes StudentsFirst. The suit argues that the state deprives plaintiffs of a quality education due to laws guiding core teacher employment rights, which plaintiffs say keep ineffective teachers in classrooms.

CTA and others contend that without these rights, it would be harder to attract and retain quality teachers, and that the ruling ignores all research that shows experience is a key factor in effective teaching.

Prominent civil rights organizations that filed briefs, including Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, Education Law Center, Equal Justice Society, and Southern Poverty Law Center, urged the court to reverse the "plaintiffs' attempt to lay blame at the feet of the tenure system for disparities that are the product of other factors, including chronically inadequate funding for education."

More than 90 top national education researchers and scholars, including Diane Ravitch, Richard Ingersoll and Eva Baker, wrote that the decision failed to establish a causal link between the challenged statutes and alleged problems the suit purports to address. They were highly critical of the plaintiffs' proposal to rely on standardized test scores and interpretation of the scores as the main criteria for teacher layoffs due to budget cuts.

Perhaps most devastating to the decision was the brief filed by some of the top legal scholars in the country, including Charles Ogletree (Harvard Law School), Dean Erwin Chemerinsky and Catherine Fisk (UC Irvine Law School), and Pam Karlan (Stanford Law School). "In this case," they wrote, "the trial court substituted its judgment about desirable education policy and the best way to improve education for students without regard to the harms its policy choice might cause and without regard to the evidence or the law about the cause of educational inequities and the likelihood that the court's injunction would redress it. The trial court exceeded its role in our constitutional system and its ruling must be reversed."

A ruling on the appeal is expected sometime in 2016.

More information: *Vergara v. California*, see [cta.org/Vergara](http://cta.org/Vergara); *Friedrichs v. CTA*, see [americaworkstogether.us](http://americaworkstogether.us).



# Making Sense of CAASPP Test Scores

Talking points when meeting with parents

The California Department of Education released results for the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments in both English language arts and mathematics for grades 3-8 and 11 in early September. The tests are part of the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP).

Test results of individual students are mailed to parents within three weeks, and parents are likely to have questions about them. As you meet with them, whether at parent-teacher conferences or other times, you can talk about what the scores really mean and why they do not give a complete picture of their child's ability.

### Key points to remember:

- One test score should not be the sole indicator. Instead, we must look at multiple measures.
- Results cannot be compared to previous tests.
- Standards are still in early stages of implementation.
- Involvement of parents and the community is instrumental to student success.

Students are more than one test score. As an educator, you have a better sense of how your students are doing through all the work going on in your classroom. It's important to have those conversations with parents.

The test scores reflect the first full year of implementation of the online Smarter Balanced tests aligned to new California standards, and set new baseline scores. Results cannot be compared to previous statewide assessments.

The new standards are still being implemented for students and educators. As you know firsthand, textbooks aligned to these standards have not been approved by the state and are not yet available to students, educators and schools.

Emphasize to parents that everyone — including educators, parents and the local community — must continue to work together to ensure students have the resources they need to succeed. California's educational

▶ Sample CAASPP test score report from the California Department of Education.

**STUDENT SCORE REPORT**

*Using Assessments to Help Students Learn*

LOCAL ID #: 12357  
STUDENT #: 444444444  
GRADE: 5  
DATE OF BIRTH: 02/01/1996  
TEST DATE: SPRING 2014

Dear Parent/Guardian of Emily King:  
The 2015 California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) included new tests for English language arts/literacy and mathematics. These new, online assessments have replaced former tests in these subject areas to provide better information and help students learn.

New assessments are part of California's comprehensive plan for supporting high-quality teaching and learning. That plan includes more challenging academic standards for English language arts/literacy and mathematics designed to better prepare and challenge students. This report shows Emily's achievement on these new tests. The scores should not be compared to results from the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program tests in these subject areas. Because this is the first year that all California students in grades 3-8 and 11 are taking these new tests, Emily's overall scores may be viewed as a basis from which to compare the performance in future years.

Additionally, children in grades 5, 8, or 10 took a science test. Emily's results on California's science assessment can be found on the back of this report.

For a complete picture of your child's progress, I encourage you to discuss these results with Emily's teachers.

Sincerely,  
*Tom Torlakson*  
Tom Torlakson  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

**Emily's Results on California's Assessments**

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS/LITERACY**  
Emily's overall score is: **2508**

2301-2441 Standard Not Met	2442-2501 Standard Nearly Met	2502-2591 Standard Met	2592-2701 Standard Exceeded
----------------------------------	-------------------------------------	------------------------------	-----------------------------------

Emily met the achievement standard and demonstrated the knowledge and skills in English language arts/literacy needed for success in future coursework.

Emily's performance on the four areas that comprise this overall score can be seen on the back of this report.

**MATHEMATICS**  
Emily's overall score is: **2279**

2219-2454 Standard Not Met	2455-2527 Standard Nearly Met	2528-2579 Standard Met	2579-2700 Standard Exceeded
----------------------------------	-------------------------------------	------------------------------	-----------------------------------

Emily did not meet the achievement standard and needs substantial improvement to demonstrate the knowledge and skills in mathematics needed for success in future coursework.

Emily's performance on the three areas that comprise this overall score can be seen on the back of this report.

▶ The bar around a score indicates the extent to which the score might have been different had the test been taken again.

**More information about Emily's scores can be found on the back of this report.**

To learn more about these tests, visit the CAASPP Summative Assessments Web page at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ass/assmain.asp> and request at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ass/assmain.asp> and your School Accountability Report Card (SARC) on the CDE SARC Web page at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ass/assmain.asp> or ask for a copy of the SARC at your child's school.

system is still implementing a new school funding formula that focuses on local involvement and control. And it is still transitioning to rigorous new learning standards that require students to develop critical-thinking skills needed for college and careers.

“With the state’s school funding formula and more community control over targeting resources,” says CTA President Eric Heins, “students, parents, educators and administrators are working together in exciting ways. It’s a work in progress, but it’s also a work about real progress that’s being made by educators, parents and communities coming together to help all students fulfill their dreams.”

See [cde.ca.gov](http://cde.ca.gov) for more resources to help you have conversations with parents.

### Get the CTA Insider!

CTA Insider is our monthly e-newsletter with the latest educational news, CTA activities and member benefits you need to know. Sign up now at [cta.org/professional-development/publications](http://cta.org/professional-development/publications) and don't miss a thing.



# Bargaining Roundup

Details of these stories at [cta.org/bargainingupdates](http://cta.org/bargainingupdates)

## ▲ SAN LORENZO TEACHERS DECLARE IMPASSE, TRY TO STEM HIGH TURNOVER

San Lorenzo Unified School District educators declared a bargaining impasse Oct. 13 as Superintendent Fred Brill continued to shortchange students and educators at the bargaining table despite the district’s windfall of millions in new state funding.

Teachers are asking for lower class sizes, especially for English learners and students with special needs. The school board and Brill have refused to agree to lower class sizes, even for the neediest students. The 10,000-student district is offering only a 1.5 percent salary schedule increase and is unwilling to provide teachers with the same health benefits package provided to administrators. Teachers are asking for a 6.2 percent salary increase and health benefits parity.

This year, school started with more than 25 unfilled educator vacancies, four times as many as two neighboring districts in Castro Valley and San Leandro. More than 70 educators left the district at the end of last school year — 30 of them went to higher-paying jobs, and another 30 were let go at the end of the year for not meeting standards for quality teaching.

“How can a district with more than a \$25 million windfall not provide a highly qualified teacher in every classroom from day one of the school year?” asks Donna Pinkney, president of the 580-member **San Lorenzo Education Association**.

Pinkney says San Lorenzo has a windfall from the state’s Local Control Funding Formula of more than \$25 million in the last three years and an increase of ongoing revenue for this school year of more than \$8 million. Spending on certificated management has increased by \$1.4 million during the last three years. Brill is one of the highest-paid superintendents in Alameda County.

“San Lorenzo teachers are among the lowest paid in Alameda County, resulting in the district being unable to hire teachers, and students being hurt by high teacher turnover,” Pinkney says. “The school board and Superintendent Brill are refusing to make a long-term investment in teachers by making competitive salaries a budget priority, and that’s harming the students and the community.”

On Oct. 1, hundreds of educators held informational picketing at all 15 school sites, to mobilize parents as well. (See photo above.)

“The San Lorenzo Education Association is standing up for students and fighting for the future of the San Lorenzo Unified School District,” Pinkney says. “There is no more important expenditure than investing in a stable and highly qualified team of educators to work directly with our students.”

Pinkney says the union was planning an Oct. 20 protest rally at the school board meeting if no settlement was reached. See updates online at [Facebook.com/SanLorenzoEducationAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/SanLorenzoEducationAssociation).

## SANTA MARIA EDUCATORS FIGHT FOR PROFESSIONAL RIGHTS

The **Santa Maria Joint Union High School District Faculty Association**

continued bargaining in September with the district on salary and professional rights issues. Despite a more than \$11 million revenue increase this year, from \$77 million to \$88.8 million, the district is offering no salary increase to its educators. It is also proposing to eliminate department heads in an effort to thwart the current practice of having those positions elected by their colleagues. Faculty Association President Mark Goodman says the district can and should do much better; the association is seeking an 8 percent raise. District administrators have already given themselves and other district employees a raise, but they are holding firm to no raise for teachers.

## SAN JOSE TEACHERS OK CONTRACT

A newly ratified contract means students will benefit from the restoration of smaller class sizes while educators’ salaries will increase — a boost to morale in San Jose’s East Side Union High School District, the largest high school district in Northern California.

“The perseverance of our members really paid off with a win-win contract for students and all educators,” says Marisa Hanson, president of the 1,200-member **East Side Teachers Association**. “It took a bargaining impasse and two state mediation sessions for this district to finally understand that



educators deserve raises to help heal cuts we agreed to accept during the recession. This is a great step in the right direction.”

The three-year contract was approved with an overwhelming 92.6 percent yes vote of district educators on Sept. 30. It provides a 4.25 percent raise this school year retroactive to Aug. 1, 2.25 percent next year, and reopened salary negotiations in the third year. In addition, school site athletic directors won annual stipends of \$4,539. Teachers mobilized at an August school board meeting, where several spoke out about financial hardships caused by the cuts in years past.

The new contract, which is expected to be approved by the school board Oct. 15, will end eight years of the union allowing the 24,000-student district to maintain class sizes that averaged three more than the contract allowed in order to save the district the cost of having to hire more teachers during hard times. The district will be allowed one student over the class size cap this school year, and the cap must be met during 2016-17. The district committed to new talks in the third year to reduce the caps.

This means English classes can have 31 students this year, and math classes 33. Also, for the first time, the district agreed that special education classrooms must average between 10 and 12 students. In all classrooms where class size caps are exceeded, the teachers in those classes are paid an extra small amount. Health benefits will continue to be fully paid by the district, but negotiations would be restarted on benefits if the average annual rate increase for coverage exceeds 15 percent.

### **BLACK OAK MINE TEACHERS: STOP SHORT-CHANGING STUDENTS**

Black Oak Mine Unified School District, according to an investigation by CTA and the **Black Oak Mine Teachers Association** (BOMTA), deliberately hid \$400,000 from teachers and students. This information came to light during a Sept. 29 state mediation session. The

### **MT. DIABLO EDUCATORS: NO FOR-PROFIT CHARTERS**

**Mt. Diablo Education Association** (MDEA)

is embroiled in a battle to block the expansion of for-profit Rocketship charter schools into Contra Costa County. Rocketship submitted a charter petition to the Mt. Diablo Unified School District (MDUSD) school board in July for a K-6 charter in the Monument corridor, a low-socioeconomic area of the district serving primarily Latino families. Rocketship turned the delivery of the charter petition into a media event, complete with a busload of students and parents in purple Rocketship T-shirts from the San Jose area and its own camera crew to film the event.

After thorough study, the MDUSD board rejected Rocketship’s charter petition in early August. Rocketship then appealed to the county board of education.

MDEA staged a rally against Rocketship expansion at the Sept. 16 board meeting, attended by more than 150 MDUSD teachers, parents and members from surrounding locals. Many teachers spoke passionately about the good work being done at their school sites, and these sentiments were echoed by parents — including Spanish-speaking parents. Parents spoke about teachers’ respect for their culture, traditions and language and offered as evidence the excellent ELD programs provided at their community schools and the culturally focused events celebrated at all community school sites.

The board of education is scheduled to vote on the Rocketship charter petition at its Oct. 21 meeting. If it is voted down, Rocketship will most likely appeal to the State Board of Education. MDEA is already making plans for an anti-Rocketship rally in Sacramento should that happen.



district, headed by Superintendent Robert Williams, acknowledged its actions, but refused to settle the contract.

The difference between the two proposals is \$90,000. Williams contended the district would “go over a fiscal cliff” if it acquiesced to BOMTA’s demands, and cannot afford to give its teachers a cost-of-living raise.

Meanwhile, the unfair labor practice charges filed in March by BOMTA have merit, according to the state Public Employment Relations Board, and formal hearings will take place in January. BOMTA contends that the district, in unincorporated El Dorado County, has been bargaining in bad faith.

CTA launched an investigation into the district’s use of public funds for legal counsel fees that are supporting illegal bargaining tactics.

BOMTA and the district have been negotiating since October 2014 and are at odds on how to spend Prop. 30 money approved by voters to provide a quality education for students. Teachers are asking for a nominal pay increase.

“We care about our students and our community,” says BOMTA President Bill Sammons. “We want to resolve this. Not only is teacher morale plummeting, but this ongoing choice not to bargain in good faith hurts the kids in our classrooms.”

### **STUDENT-CENTERED ORGANIZING BRINGS SUCCESS IN VAL VERDE**

After several weeks of escalating activities, including rallies at mediation sessions, marches, and packing Val Verde Unified School District



## Advocacy

(VVUSD) board meetings with concerned parents and educators, the **Val Verde Teachers Association** (VVTA) reached agreement

with VVUSD. The three-year agreement, ratified by a 628-141 vote, will assure that Val Verde's teachers will remain in their community as districts ramp up competition for new educators across California.

Provisions include an off-schedule bonus for 2014-15 of 4 percent, a 7 percent increase for the 2015-16 school year that includes 1 percent added to the health benefits cap, and an additional 3.5 percent increase in 2016-17 to be paid out in whatever designation VVTA requests, including using a portion of the monies for health and welfare benefits improvements. Agreement was also reached to extend the work day five minutes and add one additional



non-instructional day for training and curriculum planning.

Throughout the organizing campaign, Val Verde's teachers

emphasized the adverse impact of delaying settlement and voiced concerns that talented educators were pursuing employment in other districts because of noncompetitive local pay. (Many districts in Riverside County, where VVUSD is located, are continuing a policy of refusing to release employees from their contracts because they cannot fill the vacancies.)

VVTA President Albert Trudel believes community support for educators was the difference in this negotiations cycle. "As our parents and community made their voices clear in calling for settlement, the district has responded with what we believe is a fair and responsible agreement."



**Long Beach City College Certificated Hourly Instructors** (LBCC CHI) joined the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO — one of several Community College Association (CCA) chapters that have done so. CHI was recognized as a new affiliate union at the federation delegates' meeting in September. From left: Rusty Hicks, executive secretary-treasurer, LA County Federation of Labor; **Karen Roberts**, CHI president and a CCA board member for part-time faculty; and **Vivian Malauulu**, CHI member and candidate for the Long Beach City College Board of Trustees.

"La Verne provided the tools to make me an effective educator."

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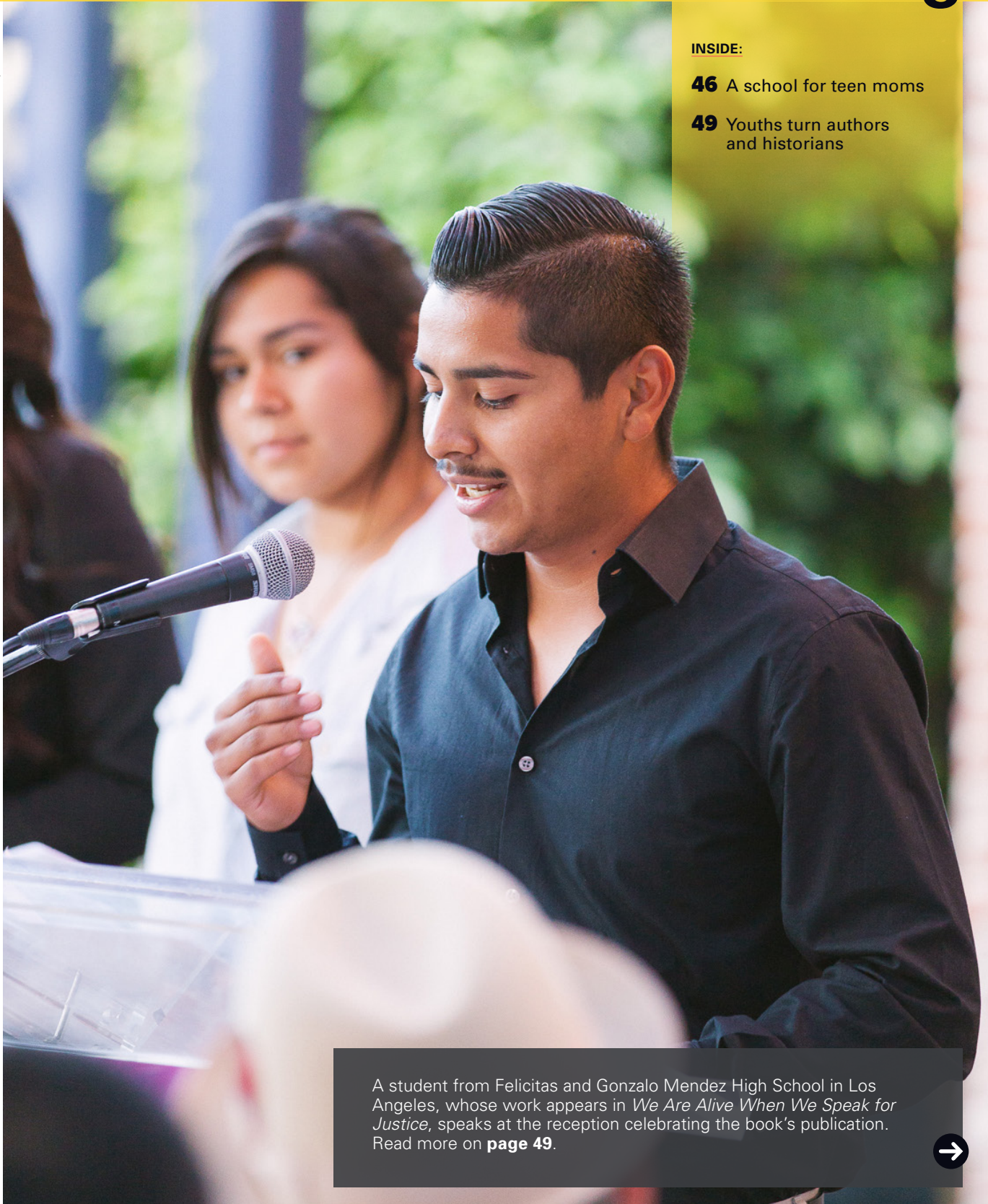
# Learning

INSIDE:

**46** A school for teen moms

**49** Youths turn authors and historians

Photo courtesy 826LA.

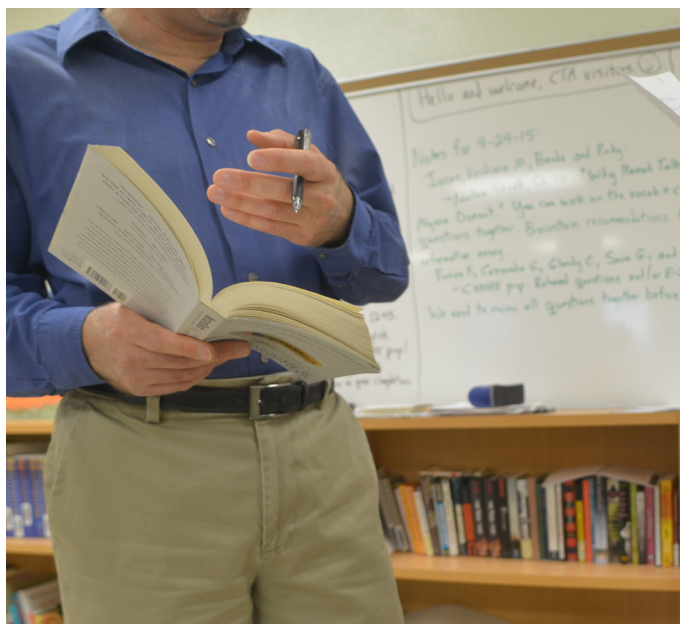


A student from Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez High School in Los Angeles, whose work appears in *We Are Alive When We Speak for Justice*, speaks at the reception celebrating the book's publication. Read more on **page 49**.





**Simon Lakkis** teaches English and parenting classes at McAlister High School. He tells his students “they are just as capable as any other student in any other high school.”



# A Nurturing Education

In supporting teen moms, McAlister High staff delivers

By Sherry Posnick-Goodwin Photography by Scott Buschman

*“In regular high school, the other girls would just stare at you and everyone judged you,” says Crystal Ramos, 17. “When I felt sick, nobody understood. It was just too much.”*

Being pregnant in a regular high school was so stressful that Ramos transferred to McAlister High School, a small alternative campus in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) for pregnant and parenting teens. She gave birth to daughter Darla a few months ago, and continues her studies there, planning to earn a diploma soon.

It’s not easy. While other teenage girls think about proms, the latest hair and clothing styles, and hanging

out with friends over the weekend, Ramos is focused on coming up with enough money to pay for rent in the apartment she shares with her boyfriend, buying diapers, and finding child care.

“I want to be a role model for my daughter,” says Ramos. “I want to succeed. I want to prove to people that they were wrong when they said that I would drop out. I want to get a job, go to college and become a nurse.”





► Students study core classes, electives and parenting classes.

Stephanie Villalobos is 16 years old and five months pregnant. She also hated attending regular high school with a baby bump. When she felt nauseous, others accused her of faking it. People stared and talked about her. She figured the stress was bad for the baby, so she transferred to McAlister.

Getting to school each day is a challenge; it requires two buses and one hour of travel each way. But Villalobos says it's worth it because she wants to finish school and avoid joining the 70 percent of pregnant teens who drop out in the United States.

McAlister High School has several satellite campuses throughout LAUSD, including the Central Site Ramos and Villalobos attend. It has been helping pregnant and parenting teens for decades. Students range from sixth to 12th grade and receive a combination of direct instruction and online learning. The school day is from 8 a.m. to 12:30, so students have time for doctor appointments and can care for their children in the afternoon. Core classes, electives and parenting classes are all part of the curriculum, with the goal of preparing students for a diploma — and motherhood. Most of the campuses, including the Central Site, do not offer child care.



But McAlister High School does offer moral support, encouragement, understanding — and a place where students don't have to hide their condition or fear being judged, say United Teachers Los Angeles members who work there.

◀ **Robin Vander Meeroos**, who teaches history, science, health and PE, says she "loves this population."

"We don't do a lot of lecturing or moralizing here," says school nurse Elaine Bayan. "Enough people are already doing that. Our job is to educate them."

Cindy Posadas, 19, had her daughter Jayleen a year ago and has continued with her studies at McAlister. She will soon earn her diploma.

"The teachers are great here and want to help everyone," says Posadas. "You can do the same work as a regular school, but you get extra support."

Not everyone believed that she could continue with school after motherhood, and Posadas is pleased to prove them wrong.

"Some people say that when you become pregnant, you're not going to go to school anymore. But that's not true. I want to go to community college. Eventually, I would like to become a social worker."



## A different kind of school

McAlister High School isn't your typical high school. The Central Site is located on a portion of an elementary school. Students are rewarded for good attendance with diapers and gift cards to buy baby supplies. Guest speakers discuss topics such as breast-feeding, car seat safety, the hazards of lead paint, and parenting skills. Some guest speakers are former students who share success stories.

There have been students as young as 13. Many of the girls have boyfriends who are older, incarcerated, or both. Most of the pregnancies were unplanned. Some have been a result of rape. Some students have come back a second time, despite receiving instructions from school staff on birth control. The population of the school fluctuates; the Central Site usually has under 100 students, with a staff of four teachers and one counselor.

A teacher at McAlister must be compassionate, nonjudgmental, and able to teach more than one subject. It also helps to be an optimist who can convey a sense of hopefulness to students whose families are often angry and disappointed with them.

Simon Lakkis, who teaches English and parenting classes, believes he is truly making a difference.

"I like teaching here because classes are small, and I can give students individual attention to help them catch up, graduate, and hopefully continue on to college. I tell them it will be hard for them after their babies" →

**"We don't do a lot of lecturing or moralizing. Enough people are already doing that. Our job is to educate them."**

*Elaine Bayan*

are born, but once their babies are older, they'll have time to pursue higher education and a career. They may be pregnant or parents, but they are just as capable as any other student at any other high school."

"I love my students and I love this population," says Robin Vander Mei-Roos, who teaches history, science, health and PE.

"We have some students who are coming from schools where they took AP and honors classes, and others who are 18 years old with only 10 credits toward graduation. But suddenly they are going to be mothers, and they have to get it together. It's a catalyst that motivates them to think of their future."

For some girls who are headed down a wrong path, motherhood can be the factor that turns their lives around, says Vander Mei-Roos, because now they have a baby to care for. Other students who were on an "upward trajectory" and then became pregnant may become depressed and "have the wind taken out of their sails," she observes.

"It will require some juggling, but they can do it," she says. "It will definitely be a huge challenge. But these kids are, for the most part, resilient."

Eloisa Ledesma often reminds students that young parenthood can be the beginning, not the end, of a happy life. She has been in their shoes; she was a student at McAlister in 1981, when she was pregnant with her son. Now she is the school's secretary.

"I try to talk to them and motivate them," she says. "And I love it when they bring their babies to visit."

## Parenting skills are paramount

"There is no safe level of alcohol or drugs when it comes to babies," Lakkis tells students during a parenting class. "Drugs such as meth, cocaine and marijuana can cause learning disabilities and brain damage. Problems may not show up until a child starts school."

One of his students asks if drugs also affect sperm, and Lakkis ponders the question. He says that drugs are bad for everybody, but there is more to worry about if an expectant mother ingests them than a father before conception.

"I want my students to be good parents," says Lakkis. "I want them to learn how to be nurturing and also how to set limits with their kids. I want them to be able to offer their children intellectual stimulation. I tell my students to read, because when their child sees Mommy reading, he or she will also want to read. I also tell them to read to their child and talk to their child and make learning fun for them."

Child development classes help students understand what to expect regarding their child's physical, social, emotional and intellectual development in the first five years. And even though they may be children having children, students will be better prepared to meet the needs of a newborn, toddler and eventually school-age child.

A pregnant student who wishes to remain anonymous says the parenting class has taught her how to eat healthier and take care of herself so her son, whom she plans to name Nathan, will have a better chance of being healthy. She recently eliminated junk food from her diet and is eating more fruits and vegetables.

"We're young, but we want to do the best we can," she says. "That's why we're here." ■



▲  
Office worker  
(and former student)  
**Eloisa Ledesma.**

# Right to an Education

**PREGNANT TEENS WERE** shunned and expelled from school decades ago. But Title IX, which passed in 1972, stipulates that pregnant and parenting students have a right to a quality education just like any other student. Nonetheless, it can be tough going to traditional schools, where students are penalized for missing classes for pregnancy-related medical reasons and shamed by peers and sometimes by staff. A recent report by the American Civil Liberties Union says that schools often place "barriers" in the way of pregnant or parenting teens, so that they drop out or wind up in alternative settings such as McAlister.

California does not keep records of how many pregnant or parenting students are enrolled in public schools. Until recently, these students were able to enroll in the California School Age Families Education program (Cal-SAFE). Founded in 2000, the program was considered highly effective, with more than 73 percent of Cal-SAFE students graduating from high school, according to a report from the Legislature. But Cal-SAFE programs have been cut from many districts.

Eliminating these programs may save money in the short run, but in the long run it may prove expensive. A study out of Northeastern University found that high school dropouts cost taxpayers \$292,000 over the course of their lives. And a lack of support for teen moms makes life more difficult for their babies, who already face challenges of poverty, unstable homes and health issues.

**Should school districts reinstate Cal-SAFE or similar programs? Tell us what you think @CATeachersAssoc.**





◀ Young author Rafael German Jr. proudly holds up the book, inspired by the *Mendez* case, to which 57 high school students contributed essays, narratives, fiction and interviews.

# The Mendez Effect

High school students turn authors for book inspired by landmark California desegregation case

By Carol Kearns Photos courtesy 826LA

In March 1945, five Mexican-American families filed a class-action suit in federal court against the segregation policies of four Orange County school districts. The landmark *Mendez v. Westminster School District* case led to California becoming the first state to desegregate public schools, and many scholars now believe it set the stage for *Brown v. Board of Education*, the unanimous U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1954 that declared school segregation to be unconstitutional.

Inspired by their study of the *Mendez v. Westminster* case, 57 history students from Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez High School in Boyle Heights released their anthology *We Are Alive When We Speak for Justice* in June.

Published 70 years after the class-action suit was filed, the collection of personal narratives, essays, interviews and historical fiction reflects “the themes and spirit of

the case,” says teacher Benjamin De Leon, United Teachers Los Angeles. Narratives include descriptions of the struggle to learn Spanish after growing up in the U.S. and life in the foster care system. Essays take on the need for a minimum wage and events in Ferguson, Missouri. Interviews are with local community leaders.

The reception celebrating the book’s publication



► Students saw the book for the first time at the reception celebrating its release.

was held on Olvera Street in Los Angeles, just blocks from the federal court building where *Mendez v. Westminster* was filed, and was another marker recognizing the significance of the case. After decades of obscurity, re-examination of *Mendez* is prompting many scholars to view it as the precursor to *Brown v. Board of Education*. In 2007 the U.S. Postal Service issued a *Mendez v. Westminster* commemorative stamp. Mendez High, which opened in 2009, was named after the lead plaintiffs. In 2010 the State Board of Education included *Mendez* in its Curriculum Frameworks for instruction. And in 2011, Sylvia Mendez, who as a young girl was a named plaintiff in the suit, received the Presidential Medal of Freedom. (She wrote the foreword to the book.)

### Putting history and experiences into words

*We Are Alive When We Speak for Justice* grew from a unique collaboration among Mendez High history teacher De Leon, two faculty members from CSU Los Angeles, and two directors of the nonprofit tutoring and writing center 826LA.

Last fall, De Leon set aside more than a month for his fifth- and sixth-period history classes to make an in-depth study of *Mendez v. Westminster* and selected events in neighborhood history. The special unit was to be a starting point to encourage thinking about civic and social issues, and a springboard for students to further develop essential literacy skills and discover more about their own interests.

Beginning in January, with the help of volunteer tutors, the students spent two days a week for seven weeks on the writing process — brainstorming, writing, sharing, revising and editing. While *Mendez* was the focal point of the detailed study, students were not restricted by topic or genre.

De Leon credits the 826LA staff for the idea of essay prompts that were varied and open-ended, such as: “What do you gain from being in environments where people are different from you?” “What are the strengths and weaknesses of your neighborhood?” “Think of someone in your community who has fought hard for change. Why did they do it? And how?”



◀ “We hope this book will change perspectives of how students are seen,” said one young author.

The final collection of writings that emerged reflects an eagerness by students to engage with issues beyond their classrooms. While some writings explore history and events — including the history of Boyle Heights and the 1968 East Los Angeles Chicano student walkouts — others share personal experiences. (See sidebar, page 52.)





▲  
Sylvia Mendez was lead plaintiff in *Mendez v. Westminster*.

“For some kids,” says De Leon, “this is the first thing they have ever written. It’s very empowering.”

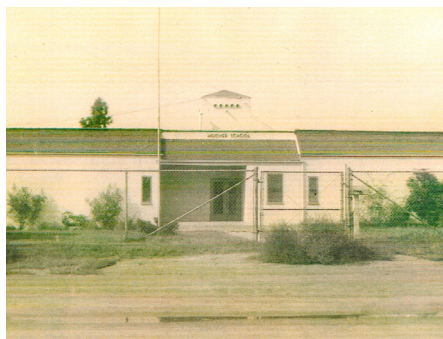
De Leon’s history classes are a required subject, so student authors are an academically diverse group. “I have students who would do well in AP [Advanced Placement] classes,” he explains, “and some who have IEPs [Individualized Education Programs for special education].”

## A book blossoms in Boyle Heights

The idea for the book began to take shape when education professor Jennifer McCormick, California Faculty Association, CSU Los Angeles, contacted the Echo Park-based writing and tutoring center 826LA to suggest the *Mendez* case as a focal point for its annual Young Authors’ Book Project. She had done research on the case and thought it would be a good subject.

Every spring 826LA, whose mission is to support students in developing their creative and expository writing skills, recruits and trains volunteers to work with students at a selected school, which culminates in the publication of a book.

“It is very unusual for us to approach a school with such a specific project,” says Marisa Urrutia Gedney, director of education



◀ Hoover School at the time was the school for Mexican-American children.

## A Groundbreaking Case

**IN SEPTEMBER 1943**, 9-year-old Sylvia Mendez and her two brothers went with their aunt and three cousins to enroll at the 17th Street School in Westminster, their neighborhood school. School officials allowed her aunt’s children, who were half-Mexican, fair-skinned and had a French surname, to enroll. But the dark-skinned Mendez children were turned away and told to go to Hoover, the “Mexican” school, 10 blocks away and in another district.

Mendez’s parents, Gonzalo and Felicitas, hired civil rights attorney David Marcus to sue the district. Marcus made a bigger case, and in March 1945 filed *Mendez v. Westminster*, a class-action lawsuit against four Orange County school districts, seeking an injunction that would order the schools to integrate.

*Photos courtesy Sylvia Mendez*



▲ Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez sued for the right for their children to attend school without segregation.

at 826LA and coordinator for the volunteers at target Eastside schools. But when she heard McCormick’s suggestion, “I just knew we had to do this at Mendez High School.”

De Leon’s response to the proposal was emphatic: “Absolutely!”

McCormick’s colleague, history professor Chris Endy, came on

board to help with lesson plans. Emilie Coulson, project director for 826LA, was the fifth member of the team. The educators met to work out details at the end of summer break.

Endy felt the development of lesson plans for the unit was a perfect research project for his Honors College students in the fall, and asked De Leon what would be useful for his class.

De Leon suggested re-enactments. “Acting can liven up a classroom and connect with those students who learn more kinesthetically. When kids have to dress up and speak in the vernacular of the day, acting is a fantastic way to bring history alive.”

So Endy’s students read the *Mendez* trial transcripts and pared the material down to its essential points.

“One of the best ways to truly learn history,” says De Leon, “is to work with primary source material. Everything from descriptions to emotions, and even tone and word choice, can bring



history to life in a way that secondary text material simply cannot.”

De Leon’s high school students acted out the proceedings in class and were debriefed afterwards. “Some of the language used was very jarring,” says De Leon.

“It was very exciting for the college students,” says Endy. His students also created lesson plans for a local history of the Boyle Heights area, addressing the effect of redlining and white flight in shaping the neighborhood as it is today.

### Finishing touches

When the writing process began in January, tutors from 826LA met with De Leon’s fifth- and sixth-period classes in the school library. The ratio of tutors to students for the Mendez High project was about one to three.

The writing process finished in March, and a volunteer student editorial board reviewed the work.

*We Are Alive When We Speak for Justice* was published professionally by 826LA. At the June reception for the book, Sylvia Mendez took the podium.

“I travel the country sharing my story and talking with students,” she read from her foreword. “I want to inspire them and you, as the readers, to fight for what is right, for what is equal, and to be triumphant in the face of adversity.”

Explaining his goals as a teacher, De Leon expresses a similar sentiment. “Beyond academics, my goal is for my students to simply become good human beings who are caring, compassionate, and who see themselves as proactive actors and agents of change in this world, capable of doing great things for themselves and for others.” ■

*Carol Kearns is a journalist, writer and retired elementary school teacher. To purchase We Are Alive When We Speak for Justice, see [timetravelmart.com](http://timetravelmart.com).*

▲  
Marisa Urrutia Gedney,  
Sylvia Mendez,  
Emilie Coulson and  
Ben De Leon.

**“I want to inspire you to fight for what is right ... and to be triumphant in the face of adversity.”**

Sylvia Mendez



### Excerpts from the book

**Kenia Garcia**, in her narrative “Will Equality and Justice Ever Walk Through the Door?” uses her cousins’ challenges with autism to make broader observations. “A perfect society does not exist, but it can become better as the years keep passing. The key to making our world a better place is to teach people how to accept and understand one another without caring about what makes them different.”

**Jackeline Gomez** (above, left), in her essay on the study of history, “Dig and Ye Shall Find,” writes: “After thinking about history, I realized that it doesn’t take someone conquering the world to change it. Students are also capable of doing it.”

**Yareli Rojas** interviewed Sylvia Mendez for the book, and notes the pride she felt as she learned about the case. “I was actually quite impressed that my own Latino community gave the first step to change segregation in California and the nation,” she writes in “Legacy.”

**Ramiro Suarez**, in “Hazard Park,” describes a neighborhood confrontation: “Four of them surround us like a pack of wolves, and more and more gangsters are coming. ... We are used to this. I live right across the street from a whole serious gang. We moved to that house when I was very young and as soon as I was about 12, the gangbangers tried to get me to do stuff, like deliver weed. ... My parents always told me to do the right thing and not hang around those affiliated gang members, and even though they asked again and again, I didn’t do it. ... [I knew] they were always getting arrested and harassed by the cops. I didn’t want to get arrested.”



# CTA & You

## INSIDE:

- 54** ILC Events: Teachers teaching teachers
- 56** When Disaster Strikes, CTA Has Your Back
- 58** NEA Recommends Clinton for President
- 59** Fostering Good Parent-Teacher Relations

Photo credit: Flickr Commons/Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Salli Curchin



Lake County resident **Bridget Sargeant** thanks Staff Sgt. Janneth Rendon and Spc. Steven Garivay. California National Guard military police helped local authorities escort residents back to homes they had evacuated because of the Valley Fire. CTA and other entities also assisted affected members and communities. See story on **page 56**.







◀ The Martinez Teachers Association and Martinez Unified School District roundtable at the ILC Convening.



▲ **Arron Jiron**, S.D. Bechtel Jr. Foundation; **Jon Snyder**, Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education; **Eric Heins**, CTA president; and **Justo Robles**, manager, CTA Instruction & Professional Development, at the ILC Convening.

# Building a Movement

'Teachers teaching teachers' continues with Instructional Leadership Corps

The Instructional Leadership Corps (ILC) is moving into its second year with a bang, with two successful events in September.

At the first, 80-plus ILC supporters met at CTA headquarters in Burlingame at its Second Annual Convening.

The crowd included teachers, chapter presidents, principals and superintendents, and was welcomed by CTA President Eric Heins. Because of ILC, “for the first time I’m hearing about teachers being taught by teachers, and that’s really exciting,” Heins told them. “ILC is on the leading edge in making implementation of the California standards work for our students.”

ILC is a collaborative effort of CTA, the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE), and the National Board Resource Center at Stanford University. It is in the second year of a three-year project to build a statewide network of accomplished teachers and other education leaders who support implementation of the California Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English language arts and mathematics, and the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS).

## Successful Collaborations

“ILC is professional development at its finest,” said speaker Linda Darling-Hammond, the Charles E. Ducommun professor of education emeritus at Stanford University, noting that ILC is on target to train and serve more than 50,000 educators over the three years of the grant. “You are building a professional learning community. You are building a movement.”

Small-group roundtables focused on examples of successful collaborations at sites across the state. Members from Washington Unified

The ILC and Washington Unified School District roundtable at the ILC Convening.





**Clydean Moore**, Rialto USD;  
**Therese Tibbits**, Bear Valley USD;  
**Jessica Villalpando**, Orange USD,  
 at “Teachers Teaching Teachers.”



“Teachers Teaching Teachers” participants (and their takeaways), from left: **Aurora Johnson**, Moreno Valley USD; **Alexandra Whitimer**, Compton USD (“Ask questions of the students before you give them directions”); **Beverly Yerian**, Palm Springs USD (“Engineering is where it’s at”); **Melanie Schlager**, Fullerton Joint Union HSD (“Use a comic strip and humor to poke fun at the subject matter and get students engaged”).

School District, for example, offered professional development workshops on technology use in the classroom in partnership with the district, CTA and school sites. The Monterey County team organized two-part, half-day weekend workshops for educators to address Common Core instructional shifts in English language arts and math.

## Deep Dives Into Topics

The following Saturday, some 125 educators met at CSU Fullerton for an action-packed day to discuss, strategize and exchange ideas about instructional practice around the CCSS and NGSS. The conference, “Teachers Teaching Teachers,” was presented by ILC and allowed participants to take deep dives into such workshops as “Getting Started With STEM by Introducing Engineering in the TK-12 Grade” and “Unlocking Text Complexity Using Socratic Seminar and Critical Thinking.”

Many workshops focused on collaboration and teamwork, and educators walked away with keen insights as a result (see photos).

For more information about ILC including trainings and activities, see [cta.org/ilc](http://cta.org/ilc). ■

*Karen Taylor, Regional UniServ Consultant, Instruction and Professional Development, contributed to this report.*

## TAKEAWAYS



**Shawn Gibson**, Fontana USD, at “Teachers Teaching Teachers”: “Let kids be creative, don’t force-feed it to them. Collaboration is key to get all students involved.”



**Jill Torres**, Student CTA, CSU Fullerton, at “Teachers Teaching Teachers”: “Do more student collaboration in the classroom.”



**Elizabeth Garcia**, Corona-Norco USD substitute, at “Teachers Teaching Teachers”: “Infuse tech into CCSS math. Engage students in the classroom with technology.”

▶  
Near and far right:  
Devastation from  
the Valley Fire.  
Credit: California  
Casualty



▶  
Lucerne in Lake  
County shows its  
support during  
the Valley Fire.  
Credit: Wikimedia  
Commons/Frank  
Schulenburg



# HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT

CTA offers assistance after fires, other disasters

By Katharine Fong

**THE VALLEY FIRE**, along with other destructive wildfires this year, disrupted the lives of thousands, including students, educators and their families. While the process of healing and rebuilding has begun, the disasters have highlighted the strength of our members and various CTA assistance programs that can help.

“Most everyone got out with just their clothes,” says Dan Renninger, president of the Middletown Teachers Association (MTA), of the Valley Fire, which tore through southern Lake County in September, destroying everything in its path. Renninger was concerned about his family and community, of course, but also worried about his chapter members.

“I sent my wife to Sacramento,” he says. “I stayed in the Kelseyville evacuation center. I’m close to all our teachers. Many of them helped me and my family over the years, so I wanted to be there for them.” Of 77 MTA members, 32 lost their homes.

Renninger stayed at the center for eight nights. He got access to a classroom at Kelseyville High School, where he set up a database that initially kept track of MTA members and their needs, but grew to be a resource for the Middletown Unified School District and incorporate more than 150 district employees.

He is quick to credit CTA Board member Jerry Eaton, CTA’s Regional UniServ staff George Young



and California Casualty's Christy Forward for their help and service during that time, saying simply, "They were incredible."

Nicole Sabatier, president of the Konocti Educators Association, says she "couldn't be more proud" of CTA in how it has taken care of its members. Her local has 160 members, and almost all of them were affected by the fire.



## DONATE TO THE FUND

Thanks to members' goodwill and generosity, those in need can turn to CTA for assistance with dignity. For information on contributing to CTA's Disaster Relief Fund, go to [ctamemberbenefits.org/drf](http://ctamemberbenefits.org/drf).

all the time saying, "What is the union doing for me? Why am I paying dues?" [Now] people have positive things to say: "My union supported me and did it in an expedited way. This is what our union does for us because it cares."

CTA partner California Casualty was also out in force during the fire. Claims representatives were in touch with evacuated CTA members the weekend the fire broke out, and met with them the following Monday (and are continuing to do so). By Wednesday, field marketing managers Christy Forward and Tami Phillips were at evacuation centers providing information along with comfort, water, granola bars and more as they searched for other policyholders.

Both contacted CTA leaders in the area, who sent their members email about how to contact California Casualty, how to make a claim, and how to get immediate financial help. The company also initiated a calling program to check on policyholders' well-being and status.

A number of active and retired CTA members insured with California Casualty lost their homes, but quickly received checks for immediate relief and living expenses.

Amid the feedback the company received was a Facebook message from a retired educator: "We lost our house to the Valley Fire in Lake County. I reported my claim and received a phone call a few hours later. California Casualty has *always* been great to me and my family. The claims people have always been supportive. *You guys rock!*" ■

*California Casualty communications specialist Mark Goldberg contributed to this story.*

## WHERE TO TURN FOR HELP

- 1 CTA's Disaster Relief Fund** provides financial assistance to members who have experienced significant losses due to natural disasters. This pertains to both homes and school sites. Money for the fund, which is administered by the FACT Foundation, comes directly from member contributions, and can be used to pay bills, purchase necessities and repair damages. Four types of grants are available:

  - Standard Grant — CTA members may receive up to \$1,500 for significant economic hardship related to damage to their primary residence, displacement or disruption in required utilities.
  - Catastrophic Damage Grant — Recipients of the Standard Grant may be eligible for up to another \$1,500 if damages exceed \$50,000.
  - Temporary Displacement Grant — A grant of up to \$500 may be available for members who are displaced from their primary residence as the result of a disaster, but do not meet the requirements for a Standard Grant.
  - School Site Grant — Members may receive up to \$500 for damage to their classroom.

To get more information, check eligibility, apply for a grant, or donate to the Disaster Relief Fund, see [ctamemberbenefits.org/drf](http://ctamemberbenefits.org/drf).

- 2 NEA Member Benefits' Disaster Relief Program** provides financial resources and special accommodations to members who are in FEMA-declared disaster areas. These range from a premium waiver for one full year to participants in NEA Life Insurance and other NEA programs, to accessing your NEA retirement account to help pay for emergency expenses. See [neamb.com/disaster-assistance.htm](http://neamb.com/disaster-assistance.htm) for more.
- 3 California Casualty** is a CTA and NEAMB partner, and offers high-quality service on auto and home insurance policies tailored to educators and CTA members. See [ctamemberbenefits.org/calcas](http://ctamemberbenefits.org/calcas) for details. Members affected by the Valley Fire or other wildfires can contact the claims department at 800-800-9410.



## CCTC Approved Reading and Literacy Added Authorization

UC San Diego Extension offers the CCTC Approved Reading and Literacy Added Authorization (previously referred to as Reading Certificate) which is a comprehensive program of study that provides students with a solid foundation in the research and methods of reading instruction.

The Reading and Literacy Added Authorization program is geared towards teachers with the potential to become leaders and mentors in the area of reading. It will provide educators with the right tools to improve student achievement.

### Program Highlights:

- The program provides participants with the skills to develop a research-based program of reading instruction for implementation in their own classrooms or as a resource for other classroom teachers
- This certificate is aligned with the requirements and standards established by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC).
- **100% online**

To view credential requirements, the program FAQs and to download an application please visit our Reading Instruction at [extension.ucsd.edu/teachreading](http://extension.ucsd.edu/teachreading)

## 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:

- CCTC-Approved Clear Credential Program
- CCTC Approved CLAD Through CTEL Program
- College Counseling Specialized Certificate
- Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) Specialized Certificate
- Teaching Adult Learners Professional Certificate
- Teaching Online Certificate
- Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Professional Certificate
- Professional Development/Salary Point Coursework

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

[extension.ucsd.edu/education](http://extension.ucsd.edu/education)

## NEA Recommends Clinton for President



**ON OCT. 3**, the National Education Association recommended former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in the Democratic primary for president of the United States.

"Clinton is a strong leader who will do what is best for America's students," said Lily Eskelsen García, NEA president, in making the announcement. "For more than four decades, Clinton has fought to make sure all children have a fair opportunity to succeed regardless of their ZIP code. Clinton will continue to advocate on behalf of students, educators and working families because she understands the road to a stronger U.S. economy starts in America's public schools."

Clinton won the recommendation of the NEA Board of Directors with a 75 percent yes vote.

"The teachers and educators of the NEA shape our future," said Clinton, after learning of NEA's support. "By opening new horizons for children, they spark new ideas, innovations and industries. Our educators are the front-line fighters building a stronger and more prosperous America — and I know it is not an easy job."

The NEA announcement notes that Clinton has a proven record as a supporter of public education and working families that goes back decades, including her work at the Children's Defense Fund, as the first lady of Arkansas and first lady of the United States. As a U.S. senator she earned an A grade in NEA's Congressional Report Card. She also earned NEA's highest honor, the Friend of Education Award, at its 1999 convention.

NEA points out that Clinton is a strong advocate for early childhood education, and has a long history of fighting to close the opportunity gaps for America's schoolchildren. She advocated for Title I equity resources and for fully funding the federal portion of special education. She recently proposed a plan to help undergraduates pay tuition at public colleges without needing loans. And she has said she will reduce the role of standardized tests in public education.

"As president, I will fight to defend workers' right to organize and unions' right to bargain collectively, and I will ensure that teachers always have a voice and a seat at the table in making decisions that impact their work," Clinton said. "I'm honored to stand with the National Education Association to support teachers and education support professionals and grow our economy."

*For information about NEA's recommendation process, and to find out where the 2016 candidates stand on education issues and workers' rights, see [strongpublicschools.org](http://strongpublicschools.org).*





# Meet the Parents

## Tips for fruitful parent-teacher relations

By Cynthia Menzel and Karen Taylor

Communication between parents and teachers is key to student success, so connect with parents early and often, not just at the official parent-teacher conference. Here's a checklist of key information to share with parents:

### AT THE START OF THE SCHOOL YEAR:

**Contact information.** Give parents specific times and day(s) that you are available to be contacted by phone or email.

**Establish positive contact and relationships with parents and guardians early on** in the school year, through email, a text reminder system, a newsletter or a class website.

**Content.** You do not need to include content standards, but a brief overview is helpful so parents know what to expect.

**Homework policy.** Make sure your policy aligns with the district/site's policies. Be clear about your expectations regarding late assignments (helpful later in the school year in case of any problems/confusion).

**Attendance policy.** Make sure your policies align with the district/site's policies. Be specific about your definitions and consequences regarding tardiness/absences.

**Behavior expectations.** Send home a copy of the rules, consequences and any reward systems so parents know what to expect.

**Technology.** Share your expectations, but understand that some families may not have computers or printers at home and have a game plan to accommodate these students.

**Website/online communications.** Keep parents in the loop by posting assignments, due dates and updates, and sharing class work on a class/school website or online communications system if possible (again, have a plan for families who do not have access to technology). If you intend to post information about individual students that can be seen or accessed by others, have parents sign a release form to avoid problems down the line.

### AT THE PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE:

**Encourage both parents to attend when possible.**

Misunderstandings are less common if both parents hear what you have to say, and you'll be able to gauge the kind of support both parents give the child.

**Allow enough time,** at least 20 minutes. Greet parents/guardians/stepparents at the door by name. Give yourself a short break between conferences.

**Arrange seating so everyone is equal** and you have no physical barriers between you. Use positive body language. However, keep in mind cultural differences about eye contact and seating arrangements.

**Open on a positive note** about the child's ability, work, or interests. Focus on strengths as well as needs. Identify problems and concerns with examples. Suggest specific things parents can do at home to help, and ways you will proceed at school.

**Have a plan, and prepare in advance** to answer specific questions about a child's ability, skill levels and achievements. Assemble grades, test scores, student work samples and attendance records.

**Ask for parents' opinions.** Then hear them out, even if the comments are hostile or negative.

**Be prepared to help parents understand the CAASPP** (California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress) student score report (see page 41). Avoid the use of acronyms and jargon.

**Use Google Translate or the help of a district translator** with families who do not speak English or have limited English.

**Summarize the discussion** and steps you and the parents will take at the end of the conference. Keep a record. If you and the parents make specific plans or set a course of action for the child, follow up in writing in a day or two.

For more ideas for parent-teacher conferences, go to [cta.org](http://cta.org) and search for "parent teacher conferences."

# Hidden Haunters

In each sentence below, a Halloween-related word is fiendishly concealed. For example, in “The bog really stinks,” the word “ogre” is hiding (**og** really). Ignore spaces and punctuation marks. How many can you find? Answers at bottom of page.

1

The trick-or-treaters were wolfing down their favorite candy.

---

2

They loved eating Hostess Twinkies.

---

3

However, citrus fruits like lemons terrified them.

---

4

The sous-chef ran Ken Steinberg’s kitchen while he was away.

---

5

We avoid the neighbors’ dog because we know it chases people.

---

6

Cordelia Fiske let one of the visitors have an apple.

---

7

I reconstruct, I revamp, I refurbish.

---

8

Have a delicious mango blintze!

---

9

That stuck-up ump kind of ruined the ball game for me.

---

10

The suspense is killing me — this is the maximum mystery I can stand!

---

11

I had to gasp — I’d erased my computer’s entire memory.

---

12

There in my backyard was an elephant, OMG!

---

13

Sometimes it’s hard to control laughter.

---



**Extra Credit answers:** 1. Werewolf (were wolfing) 2. Ghost (eating Hostess) 3. Monster (lemons terrified) 4. Frankenstein (sous-chef ran Ken Steinberg’s) 5. Witch (know it chases) 6. Skeleton (Fiske let one) 7. Vampire (revamp I refurbish) 8. Goblin (mango blintze) 9. Pumpkin (stuck-up ump kind) 10. Mummy (maximum mystery) 11. Spider (gasp I’d erased) 12. Phantom (elephant OMG) 13. Troll (control laughter)



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