

california  
**educator**

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2022 VOLUME 26 ISSUE 4

*Teachers on  
surviving the  
surge, shortages  
and more*

PAGE 18

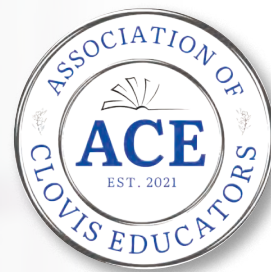
# Remaking the Grade

EDUCATORS CONSIDER  
MORE EQUITABLE WAYS TO  
ASSESS STUDENT LEARNING

PAGE 30

*In Clovis, educators  
organize for a real voice*

PAGE 24



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# california educator

VOLUME 26 ISSUE 4

**Have a gifted artist or writer in your class?** Enter student work in the CTA César E. Chávez and Dolores Huerta Education Awards Program. Details on page 11 and at [cta.org/chavez-huerta-award](https://cta.org/chavez-huerta-award).  
Artwork by student Eveline Garcia; teacher Blanca E. Munoz; Napa High School.



## #WeAreCTA

### OUR VOICE, OUR UNION, OUR PROFESSION


WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW

#### MAGAZINE

##### BLACK LIVES MATTER

Training for educators on "Making Black Lives Matter at School" centers work in love and empathy. **PAGE 42**

##### CLOVIS: A UNION IS BORN

Educators organize a union for the first time. **PAGE 24**  [cloviseducators.org](https://www.facebook.com/cloviseducators.org)

##### TOYS BRING JOY

Lance Gunnensen's community engagement project goes beyond teaching woodworking. **PAGE 51**

##### VERY SPECIAL EDUCATORS


Educators with disabilities often bring additional expertise to the job. **PAGE 16**

#### DIGITAL


##### TALES FROM THE TRENCHES

Snapshots of educators working in and surviving the pandemic. **PAGE 18**  
[cta.org/tales](https://cta.org/tales) #CTAIFT


##### CTA'S TUESDAY TAKEOVERS

for Racial and Social Justice offer multiple webinars that welcome all.  [cta.org/reac](https://cta.org/reac)

##### COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Hear CTA/NEA leaders, educators talk about their benefits for our students.  [cta.org/communityschools](https://cta.org/communityschools)

##### CATCH UP WITH CTA VIDEOS


Watch our latest.  [youtube.californiateachers](https://youtube.californiateachers)

#### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

##### GROW LEADERSHIP SKILLS

New chair of CTA's Ethnic Minority Early Identification & Development program shows how it's done. Apply now! **PAGE 12** [cta.org/emeid](https://cta.org/emeid)

##### CALLING ALL INNOVATORS


Got a good idea for a class or school project? Apply for a CTA Institute for Teaching grant by March 31. **PAGE 9**  
 [cta.org/ift](https://cta.org/ift) #CTAIFT

##### GOOD TEACHING CONFERENCE

GTC South supports excellent teaching practices and runs March 18-20. Deadline to book is Feb. 24. **PAGE 9**  
[cta.org/conferences](https://cta.org/conferences) #CTAGTC

#### MEMBER BENEFITS

##### WHY YOU NEED A 403(B)

Your CalSTRS pension will only cover half the income you'll need in retirement. Learn about CTA's plan.  [enroll.ctaretirementplan.org](https://enroll.ctaretirementplan.org)

##### TIPS ON INVESTING

Everything you need to know about investing and growing your money. [ctainvest.org](https://ctainvest.org)

##### STAYCATION GIVEAWAY

The winner of California Casualty's contest wins \$10,000. Members only; enter by Oct. 14. [membergiveaway.com/cta](https://membergiveaway.com/cta)



## Birth of a Union

Clovis educators organize for a voice in decision-making that impacts their students and schools.

**PAGE 24**

## The Move to Reform Grades

Educators, districts consider how to fairly evaluate what students have learned.

**PAGE 30**



## Tales From the Trenches

What teachers are dealing with, and how they are coping, right now.

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Student-made toys bring joy
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Works by our members

From top: Members of the Association of Clovis Educators; stock photo; in January, Hayward High School's line for voluntary COVID testing stretches from the parking lot to the street and down the block.



**LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK.** We accept signed email and letters; we excerpt user posts from CTA social media platforms and [cta.org/educator](https://cta.org/educator). Content subject to editing for clarity and space. Photos must have permissions. Opinions expressed by writers are not necessarily those of CTA. [Editor@cta.org](mailto:Editor@cta.org); [#WeAreCTA](https://twitter.com/WeAreCTA)



## CTA Year in Review 2020-21

**LAST YEAR**, CTA continued to lead the charge for the resources all students need and the public schools they deserve. Check out our Year in Review ([cta.org/cta-year-in-review-2020-2021](https://cta.org/cta-year-in-review-2020-2021)), showcasing CTA's work to teach, support and protect students, promote public education, and build a just society. We did it together — **#WeAreCTA!**

### Highlights:

- Ongoing state and local advocacy to ensure student and educator safety and health in our schools and communities.
- Actions to denounce hate and violence against all people and groups, and support for communities under attack.
- Recognition and celebration of members, their dependents and our allies, through awards, grants and scholarships.
- Assistance for members who suffered losses due to wildfires, flooding and other disasters.
- Advocacy in support of legislation and policies that benefit students, educators, families and communities.

## OUR 2021-22 INNOVATORS

I am so grateful that you highlighted Stephanie Yellin-Mednick in the Innovation Issue ("School Nurse Steps Up to Lead," December/January). She is the best nurse lead chair that UTLA has ever had. Her commitment and energy toward reaching her leadership and nursing goals are one and the same, and this makes her a powerful union leader.

**PABLO MURRILLO**

*United Teachers Los Angeles*

When I read the article "Making Dreams Possible," I felt the passion of Aba Ngissah! Teaching is a profession where one person can affect so many lives. I felt that happening as the article described Aba's resourcefulness and persistence. Thank you, Aba, for representing the teaching profession so well!

**DEBRA MILLER OSORIO**

*Faculty Association of Rancho Santiago CCD*

**Editor's Note:** We omitted the photo credit in our profile on Josefa Bustos-Pelayo ("The Joy of Reading"). Ma Ly took the photo.

## Schools: A Human Perspective

I was very impressed with Jennifer Yoo-Brannon's "Your Voice" article ("We Must Make Schools Human Again," December/January). It was very well written, but more importantly, the content was right on target. She "gets it." I was fortunate to have in my 40-year career two principals like the one she described. Good job, Jennifer! You're what we need these days in education, and CTA/NEA as well.

**ELAYNE SHIOHAMA**

*CTA/NEA-Retired*

EDITOR IN CHIEF Katharine Fong  
 STAFF WRITER Julian Peebles  
 CTA SOCIAL MEDIA EDITOR Elizabeth Barcelos  
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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 for all students; to ensure that the human dignity and civil rights of all children, youth and adults are protected; and to secure a more just, equitable and democratic society.

#### EDITORIAL INFORMATION

*California Educator* is published for the information and edification of CTA members. The editorial philosophy is governed by the policies of CTA. Articles and advertising reflect that philosophy. Letters to the editor may be sent to [editor@cta.org](mailto:editor@cta.org).

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CTA/NEA membership dues for the fiscal year (Sept. 1, 2021, to Aug. 31, 2022) are \$955, including a \$20 refundable contribution (see [cta.org/contribution](http://cta.org/contribution) for details). \$22.38 of CTA annual dues is designated for CTA/ABC political activities to support state and local candidates and/or initiatives, and \$15.00 of CTA annual dues is designated for independent expenditures, totaling \$37.38 not deductible for income tax purposes. Please consult your tax adviser.

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

#### CALIFORNIA TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

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# WE CAN MOVE MOUNTAINS

**EDUCATORS HAVE FACED** unprecedented challenges over the past two years, and CTA members have risen to those challenges with inspiring strength and success. One thing that has proved true again and again is that our collective strength is a force to be reckoned with, and that local organizing works.

Whether it has been our work at the state level as we've fought to keep students and educators safe, or your strength in your local chapters as you've negotiated MOUs and contract agreements to accomplish the same goal, the successes we've had are directly attributable to collective power through organizing. Right now, lawmakers are considering a union-led proposal to restore paid COVID-19 sick leave.

The pandemic exposed many of the inequities and unsafe conditions workers across the country face, and has helped spur a union renaissance. Union workers have fared better than others. Support for unions is at its highest level in decades; according to a recent Gallup poll, 65 percent of Americans say they support unions, and more non-union workers than ever say they would be willing to join a union.

CTA has been part of that renaissance. In addition to our work during the pandemic, we've helped educators successfully organize new unions at charter schools and in previously unrepresented school districts. This inspiring work shows that the union movement is alive and well.

Currently, one of the most exciting efforts is organizing around community schools. CTA members have taken the lead on this issue, and it's exciting to see the community schools model in California expand, especially with \$3 billion in new state funding available over the next five years. If we do it right, California could see up to a third of our public schools become community schools.

CTA is working closely with state leaders, local chapters and community stakeholders to further this work. We see community schools as the future of public education. They are a unique vehicle to:

- Improve public education in historically marginalized communities.
- Address racial injustice.
- Increase parent, youth and community involvement in schools.
- Expand democratically shared leadership.
- Initiate innovative approaches to learning.



The new year started with some good state budget news: The governor's proposal once again provides record education funding for pre-K through community colleges. It means local educators will be able to negotiate uses for school funding that will benefit students and strengthen our profession and our schools.

We have tremendous opportunities ahead of us, but also some challenges. California is facing a severe educator shortage, exacerbated by the pandemic. We need to continue to organize against threats to public education, as extremists push for voucher schemes and try to rewrite history by taking honesty out of the curriculum.

Our organizing shows that we can move mountains when we work together. I've no doubt that we can meet these challenges, and that we can continue to organize for positive change in public education. Our union is healthy and strong. With your involvement, we're even stronger.

**E. Toby Boyd**

CTA PRESIDENT

@etobyboyd



# LOVE, EMPATHY, JOY

IT'S STRIKING THAT the training “**Making Black Lives Matter at School**,” created by CTA leaders and Black female educators, centers the work of educators in love and empathy.

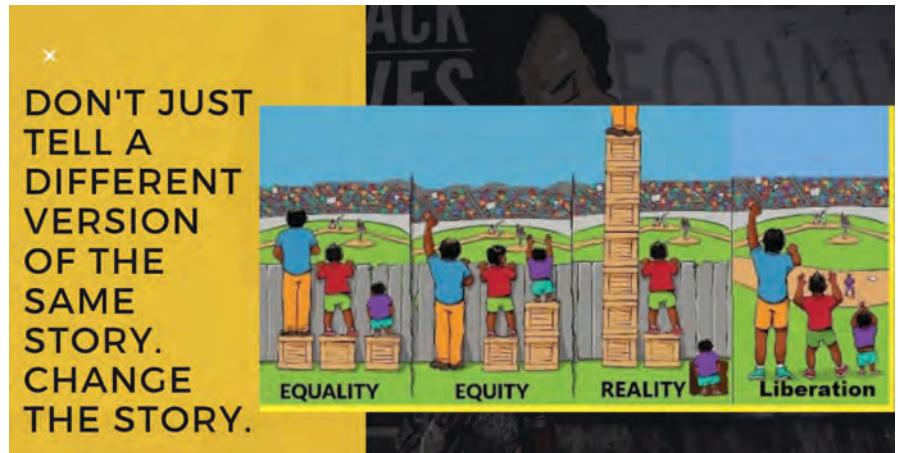
Through that lens, breaking down misconceptions and learning about Black Lives Matter and racial justice opens the heart as well as the mind — and affects everyone, not just those who are marginalized. “Showing that Black lives matter at school is really about centering our most marginalized students,” says CTA Board member Erika Jones, who co-developed and leads the training. “When you center the most marginalized and create an educational environment where they can succeed, you have created an environment where all can succeed.”

As described in our story on page 42, the training asks educators to identify ways to bring racial justice and equity to their schools so that they are embedded into the culture, going well beyond a focused week or month.

Equity is also behind educators’ efforts to consider different ways of assessing student learning, as “**Remaking the Grade**” (page 30) examines. Some school districts have already moved away from traditional grading systems based on points for assignments completed and sometimes attendance or behavior in class, to a flexible one that lets students show what they know, perhaps by making up late assignments or retaking tests. Such grading reform, proponents argue, recognizes, for example, that students who live in poverty (often students of color) have more challenges. Penalizing them for turning in late assignments or their behavior is unfair.

The situation has been exacerbated by the pandemic, of course, which has put great strain on students and educators. “**Tales From the Trenches**” (page 18) is part of our continuing series of snapshots of

▼ A slide from the “Making Black Lives Matter at School” training (see story, page 42).



what educators are dealing with and how they are coping as they face an ongoing virus, severe staffing shortages, and other complications. Their voices chronicle educators’ evolving experience as we enter year three of COVID-19.

In Clovis, northeast of Fresno, educators’ voices are raised as they organize a new union (“**ACE Is the Answer**,” page 24). The story looks at how the Association of Clovis Educators has been coming together after educators realized, sometimes painfully, that their voices were not being heard by their district. “Educators need a meaningful seat at the table,” says ACE member Kristin Heimerdinger. “A union is the best way to ensure a strong future for our students and schools for years to come.”

One educator who has been doing his best to make sure students have a strong future is Lance Gunnensen, a CTE teacher whose students have made toys and given them to younger children during the holiday season for 18 years. This past year, his project was amplified and scaled up with the help of a CTA Community Engagement Project Grant awarded to four chapters in El Dorado County (page 51). It’s an example of what collective educator vision, hard work, and community participation can do: Bring joy.

**Katharine Fong**

EDITOR IN CHIEF  
[editor@cta.org](mailto:editor@cta.org)



# CalPATH

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February / March 2022

# CALENDAR



## ▲ A YEAR OF PURPOSE, A LIFETIME OF PRACTICE

**FEBRUARY IS** Black History Month. The 2022 theme is “Black Health and Wellness,” which acknowledges both the legacy of Black scholars and medical practitioners in Western medicine and other ways of knowing (e.g., midwives, naturopaths, herbalists, etc.) throughout the African diaspora.

And as Black Lives Matter at School declares, 2022 is a year of purpose. BLM at School is a national movement that calls on all of us to have honest conversations about racist policies and practices that affect our students and schools — and to take action. Find ways you can get involved, and curriculum and resources for your classroom and community, at [cta.org/blm](https://cta.org/blm), [blacklivesmatteratschool.com](https://blacklivesmatteratschool.com) and [neaedjustice.org/black-lives-matter-at-school](https://neaedjustice.org/black-lives-matter-at-school).

Read about a Black Lives Matter at School training offered by CTA leaders on page 42.



**MARCH IS** Music in Our Schools Month®. This year, the National Association for Music Education focuses on lessons for kindergarten and third grade using classic children’s songs. Lessons (along with previous years’ lessons for multiple grade levels) are free to teachers to use and share at [nafme.org/programs/miosm](https://nafme.org/programs/miosm).



NACCD

**IT’S ESTIMATED THAT** 1 in 6 U.S. children age 3-17 has one or more developmental disabilities, such as ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, hearing loss, intellectual disability, learning disability, or vision impairment. With the right supports, these students can and should be included in all areas of school and community life, and can contribute to building strong, diverse communities. Read CTA’s stance on education for those with developmental disabilities at [cta.org/our-advocacy/special-education](https://cta.org/our-advocacy/special-education).



Show appreciation for counselors' unique contributions to student success during **National School Counseling Week**, Feb. 7-11. The 2022 theme is "School Counseling: Better Together." Visit [schoolcounselor.org/nscw](http://schoolcounselor.org/nscw) for ideas.

### NEA Foundation Grants

**FEB. 25** APPLICATION DEADLINE

The NEA Foundation gives Student Success, Learning & Leadership, and Envision Equity grants up to \$5,000.

► [neafoundation.org](http://neafoundation.org)

### New Educator Weekend North

**FEB. 25-27** CONFERENCE

Santa Clara Marriott. For educators in their first three years, NEW has everything you need, including sessions on lesson plans, assessments and special education. Booking deadline: Feb. 10.

► [cta.org/conferences](http://cta.org/conferences)

### NEA Foundation Awards

**FEB. 28** NOMINATION DEADLINE

One CTA member will be chosen to compete for NEA Foundation's Awards for Teaching Excellence, presented at a gala in Washington, D.C., in February 2023. Five awardees receive \$10,000 plus expenses-paid travel for themselves and one guest; one selected from the five receives \$25,000 and a commemorative gift. CTA members and staff may nominate themselves.

► [cta.org/nea-foundation-awards](http://cta.org/nea-foundation-awards)

### Read Across America

**MARCH 2** EVENT

Celebrate this annual event by reading with your students! CTA's California Reads program offers teacher-recommended book selections year-round for students of all ages.

► [cta.org/californiareads](http://cta.org/californiareads)

### CTA/NEA-Retired Issues Conference

**MARCH 3-4** CONFERENCE

Virtual. Learn how CTA/NEA-Retired is protecting your future and watching legislation that affects your benefits.

► [cta.org/conferences](http://cta.org/conferences)

### Chavez/Huerta Awards

**MARCH 4** ENTRY DEADLINE

Cesar E. Chavez and Dolores Huerta Education Awards honor students who show they understand Chavez's guiding principles with a visual art project or written essay. Awards up to \$550 go to both the sponsoring CTA member and the student.

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

### Equity and Human Rights Conference

**MARCH 4-6** CONFERENCE

Westin Bonaventure, Los Angeles. "Spring Into Action: Declutter, Decolonize, Organize." Affirms CTA's mission to protect the civil rights of all people and secure a more equitable, democratic society. Speakers and workshops give members a greater understanding of diversity, equity and social justice. Booking deadline: Feb. 16.

► [cta.org/conferences](http://cta.org/conferences)

### NEA National Leadership Summit

**MARCH 11-13** CONFERENCE

Caesars Forum, Las Vegas, Nevada. "Uniting for a Better Future for Our Students, Our Educators, and Our Communities." Develops activist leaders and prepares them with the knowledge and skills necessary to lead thriving associations. Aligned with the NEA Higher Ed Conference (March 18-20).

► [nea.org/leadershipsummit](http://nea.org/leadershipsummit)

### Spring CUE

**MARCH 17-19** CONFERENCE

Palm Springs/virtual. This educational technology conference by CUE (Computer-Using Educators) offers hundreds of sessions with keynotes from world-renowned educators.

► [cue.org/spring](http://cue.org/spring)

### Good Teaching Conference South

**MARCH 18-20** CONFERENCE

Hyatt Regency Orange County, Garden Grove. Supports excellent teaching practices with a variety of diverse workshops focused on curriculum content areas for K-12 teachers. Booking deadline: Feb. 24.

► [cta.org/conferences](http://cta.org/conferences)

### NEA ESP Conference

**MARCH 25-27** CONFERENCE

New Orleans Marriott, Louisiana. The nation's premier professional development opportunity for education support professionals enhances ESPs' skills and knowledge.

► [nea.org/esconference](http://nea.org/esconference)

### CTA Institute for Teaching Grants

**MARCH 31** APPLICATION DEADLINE

IFT's Grant Program demonstrates what CTA members can do when they have the freedom to create and invent. Apply for Educator Grants up to \$5,000 and Impact Grants up to \$20,000.

► [cta.org/ift](http://cta.org/ift)

### John Swett Awards

**APRIL 8** NOMINATION DEADLINE

CTA's John Swett Awards for Media Excellence honor media professionals for outstanding coverage of education during 2021, and student journalism. CTA local chapters and Service Center Councils may nominate.

► [cta.org/awards](http://cta.org/awards)

### EMEID Leadership Program

**APRIL 8** APPLICATION DEADLINE

Members of color interested in CTA leadership roles may apply online to the Ethnic Minority Early Identification and Development program starting Feb. 15. Applicants will be notified by May 13. Participants will attend Summer Institute and State Council (January 2023).

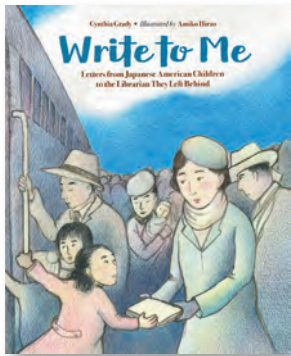
► [cta.org/emeid](http://cta.org/emeid)



# THE STORIES THEY TELL



**CULTIVATE A LOVE** of reading in your students! Here are a few of the teacher-recommended books from CTA's California Reads program. See the full list at [cta.org/careads](http://cta.org/careads). (Members get a 20 percent discount when you buy through the CTA website or Ink Spell Books, [inkspellbooks.com](http://inkspellbooks.com).)



*I Promise* (pre-K, kindergarten), by NBA superstar LeBron James and illustrated by Nina Mata, tells the story of a kid from Akron, Ohio, who is dedicated to uplifting youth everywhere. Young LeBron knows the key to a better future is to excel in school, do your best, and keep your family close. With rhyming text, the picture book reminds us that tomorrow's success starts with the promises we make to ourselves and our community today.

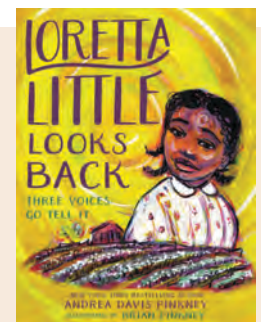
*Write to Me: Letters From Japanese American Children to the Librarian They Left Behind* (grades 1-2), by Cynthia Grady and illustrated by Amiko Hirao, is a true story about Japanese American children who corresponded with their school librarian Clara Breed while imprisoned in World War II internment camps. Before her students are sent away from San Diego, Breed gives them books and asks them to write her letters. Through three years of internment, the children share their stories, provide feedback on books, and create a record of their experiences. Breed sends more books, seeds, soap and craft supplies. She also writes magazine articles about the treatment of Japanese American families and letters requesting a library and school for the children. When the war ends, she welcomes her students home. A good book to tie in to the **Day of Remembrance** on Feb. 19, commemorating the 1942 signing of Executive Order 9066, which required all Americans of Japanese ancestry to be interned.



*Firekeeper's Daughter* (grades 9-12), by Angeline Boulley, is a young adult thriller about Native teen Daunis Fontaine. She has never quite fit in, both in her hometown and on the nearby Ojibwe reservation. When she witnesses a shocking murder that thrusts her into an FBI investigation of a lethal new drug, she must draw on her knowledge of chemistry and Ojibwe traditional medicine to track down the source. Complications ensue, and Daunis must learn what it means to be a strong *Anishinaabe kwe* (Ojibwe woman).

## Read Across America — Every Day

**NEA celebrates reading** with an annual calendar of books, authors and teaching resources that promote diversity and inclusion. In February, for example, middle school students will enjoy *Loretta Little Looks Back: Three Voices Go Tell It*, by Andrea Davis Pinkney and illustrated by Brian Pinkney. First-person narrators chronicle a Black family's challenges and triumphs from 1927 to 1968 while struggling as sharecroppers, living under Jim Crow, and fighting for civil rights. Find the calendar at [nea.org/readacrossamerica](http://nea.org/readacrossamerica).





## ¡Sí Se Puede!

Yes we can! Celebrate the lives of labor and civil rights icons Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. **Cesar Chavez Day** is March 31 (his birthday), a state holiday in California. It's followed by **Dolores Huerta Day** on April 10 (her 92nd birthday this year).

The State Board of Education offers a model curriculum on Chavez's life and work for multiple grade levels at [chavez.cde.ca.gov/modelcurriculum](http://chavez.cde.ca.gov/modelcurriculum). United Farm Workers ([ufw.org](http://ufw.org)) created a supplemental curriculum kit that offers a coloring book, song book, poster and video. A teacher's guide includes a detailed biography, discussion questions and handouts.

Last year, a team of educators including CTA members worked with the Dolores Huerta Foundation to develop K-12 curriculum based on her life and legacy. Students can learn about the rich history of struggle in the Central Valley and the state as they examine the essential question: "How do people work together to solve problems and implement the solution?"

"I want students to get a sense of their own empowerment and the things they can do to make the world a better place," Huerta said about the curriculum. Find it at [doloreshuerta.org](http://doloreshuerta.org). (Read our story at [cta.org/doloreshuerta](http://cta.org/doloreshuerta).)

### Enter CTA's Cesar E. Chavez and Dolores Huerta Education Awards Program

Students from pre-K through higher education can demonstrate an understanding of the vision and guiding principles embraced by Chavez and Huerta by submitting a visual arts project or a written essay. Students must be sponsored by a CTA member. Awards up to \$550 will be given to both the student and the sponsoring CTA member. Deadline is March 4; for details, go to [cta.org/chavez-huerta-award](http://cta.org/chavez-huerta-award).



## #BREAKTHEBIAS

**International Women's Day** on March 8 celebrates women's achievement. It is also an opportunity to raise awareness against bias and take action for equality. Are you in? Will you actively call out gender bias, discrimination and stereotyping each time you see it?

Cross your arms to show solidarity. Strike the IWD 2022 pose and share your **#BreakTheBias #IWD2022** image, video, resources, presentation or articles on social media to encourage all to commit to helping forge an inclusive world. Find resources at [internationalwomensday.com](http://internationalwomensday.com).

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For our full social media directory, see [cta.org/social](http://cta.org/social). **#OurVoiceOurUnion #WeAreCTA**

EMEID Class of 2021-22 (not pictured: Kenda Pot and Benjamin Vazquez).



## GROW YOUR LEADERSHIP SKILLS



Naqiba Gregory

**FOR NAQIBA GREGORY**, being part of CTA’s EMEID (Ethnic Minority Early Identification and Development) program in 2018-19 “was an important journey in my life. EMEID provides wonderful opportunities to find how our strengths and interests fit within CTA’s structure so we can best serve the association and our members.”

Gregory is now the new board advisory chair for EMEID, a yearlong program for CTA members of color who are interested in expanding their roles in CTA. EMEID’s goal is to increase the number of CTA leaders of color. It builds on existing CTA and NEA programs, trainings, conferences and events, and includes ongoing interaction with your chapter, CTA and NEA leadership, and CTA staff.

*Continued on page 55*

### Dates for EMEID Class of 2022-23

Apply at [cta.org/emeid](https://cta.org/emeid) starting Feb. 15; deadline: April 8. Applicants notified by May 13. Participants are expected to attend CTA Summer Institute, Emerging Leaders Track, July 24–28, and CTA State Council, Jan. 27–29, 2023. Contact [emeid@cta.org](mailto:emeid@cta.org) for details.



## SOLUTIONS TO THE TEACHER SHORTAGE

**A NEW REPORT** from the Learning Policy Institute looks into the acute teacher shortages in many districts and the strategies some are using to mitigate them — such as increasing compensation, developing high-retention pathways such as teacher residencies, and hiring more support staff. The report includes these initiatives in its recommendations to address the shortages.

“Teacher Shortages During the Pandemic: How California Districts are Responding” surveyed officials from eight small and large districts in California and investigated the impact COVID-19 has had on teacher supply and demand, including teacher retirements and resignations. The study, conducted in August and September 2021, found that shortages have been exacerbated during the pandemic, leading some districts to hire under-prepared teachers as they also cope with a lack of substitute teachers.

Recommendations in addition to the above include:

- Initiatives to support school staff to become credentialed teachers, and bonuses or stipends for particularly hard-to-fill positions.
- Debt-free college, income tax credits, and housing subsidies for educators.
- Improved state support for teacher candidates.
- Investment in programs allowing students to begin teacher preparation at community colleges and finish at four-year institutions.

Read the full report at [learningpolicyinstitute.org](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org).

# QUOTES & NUMBERS

Compiled by **Julian Peeples**



*"We all have a role to play in preserving our democracy and creating a better future. It starts with an honest education that sets all our students, regardless of their backgrounds, on a path to success."*

—CTA President **E. Toby Boyd** in a statement marking the anniversary of the Jan. 6 insurrection.

CDC/Unsplash



Katie Rainbow/Unsplash



# 7,569,687

Confirmed COVID-19 cases in California, as of Jan. 25.

States that passed legislation banning teachers from including discussions of systemic racism in their curriculum (Arizona, Idaho, Iowa, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, New Hampshire, North Dakota and South Carolina).

## 81.6%

Percentage of California population age 5 and older that has received at least one COVID-19 vaccination dose.

## 5.33%

Cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) in the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) in the governor's proposed 2022-23 state budget.

## 2/3

Proportion of LGBTQ+ teens and young adults who say that recent high-profile debates and state legislation on restricting transgender youth participation in school sports have been hard on their mental health, according to a poll conducted by Morning Consult for The Trevor Project.

**"We're the folks that are seeing the faces of everybody or not, and we really need to have some weigh-in as to what that threshold looks like, and what we can do that's sustainable and meaningful for our communities."**

—Hayward Education Association President **Mercedes Faraj** on deliberations of how to transition back to in-person instruction after Hayward Unified School District returned to distance learning for a week in January.



*"It is only by having educators of every type at the table with parents, administrators and the district that communities can set the policies, procedures and plans that make sense. ... If they won't let us in the room to be at the table, we'll bang on the door until they listen. And we'll hold them accountable for their words and actions."*

—NEA President **Becky Pringle** on the Omicron variant and the classroom.



**"Mental health challenges in children, adolescents and young adults are real, and they are widespread. But most importantly, they are treatable and often preventable. ... Our obligation to act is not just medical, it's moral."**

—U.S. Surgeon General **Vivek Murthy** in a December warning about the mental health of young people.

▼ Nolan, shown in a video on his YouTube channel, says handling a snake was the “day my heart stopped.”



# GOT GRIT?

Terron Nolan conquers his fears so students can, too

By Sherry Posnick-Goodwin

**LAST SUMMER** Terron Nolan conquered his No. 1 fear — jumping out of an airplane — and went skydiving. He made a video of it and added it to *The Fearlist*, a series on his YouTube channel *Grit&Integrity*, which showcases Nolan facing his worst fears. There are videos of him holding a snake, riding a horse, jumping off a 45-foot pole, and doing standup comedy.

“Skydiving was so awesome,” says Nolan, a sixth grade teacher at Robinson Elementary School in Fresno. “And it was really scary.”

Nolan was inspired to create *The Fearlist* in 2018, based on conversations with his students.

“I noticed many of my students struggle with fear,” says the Fresno Teachers Association (FTA) member. “They fear their environment, because when they leave their homes, they have to walk through scary situations to come to school. They are fearful of the future and of change.”

Many of them live in a nearby apartment complex and deal with the challenges of poverty, broken families and neighborhood violence.

“I told my students, ‘I will share all of my fears if you face one of yours.’ And they took me up on the challenge.”

A student was terrified of spiders and touched one. Another was scared of public speaking and entered a

student body election and made a speech. A student dared to admit his dream of becoming a doctor — and his fear of not being able to go to college — and scheduled more challenging classes.

As students faced their fears and shared the results with classmates, Nolan noticed their behavior improved. They became more confident. They stopped worrying about speaking up in class and started participating in discussions. Angry outbursts diminished.

“The fact that they could lean on their teacher — who was going through the same process of facing his fears — helped us to bond,” he says. “Students absolutely loved the videos and seeing me freak out. To see an adult scared but facing his fears over and over had an impact. It gave them the courage to face their own fears, sometimes in small steps.”

“Mr. Nolan’s skydiving made me want to face my fear of heights,” says student Tristan Shouman Rangel. “Having him as a teacher has had a great impact on my education.”

Says classmate Alondra Torres Diaz, “Mr. Nolan made me want to face my fears. Being in Mr. Nolan’s class made me open up to more people.”

When school shut down in 2020 due to COVID-19, fears that were unimaginable suddenly became a reality.





The *Fearlist* videos took on a new relevance. Students watched them over and over, and found them motivational. Nolan watched them repeatedly, too.

“My philosophy is that it’s OK to be afraid, that everyone is afraid, and it’s what you do with that fear that defines who you are.”

Nolan admits that he has spent a great deal of his life living in fear. He was afraid he couldn’t become a teacher, because he’s a terrible speller. He was afraid of failure. He was afraid of heights. Fear held him back in some ways, and he doesn’t want that for his students.

He grew up in Northridge near Los Angeles, and then attended Fresno State, where he planned to become a graphic designer. But once he began working for an agency to help Fresno youth with behavior issues, he found his calling.

“I was working with kids who had got out of juvie or were in foster care, which sent me to some very tough places,” he

***“To see an adult scared but facing his fears over and over had an impact. It gave students the courage to face their own fears, sometimes in small steps.”***

recalls. One place was Slater Elementary School, where he was assigned to mentor a child who had a teacher named Michael Robinson, also an FTA member.

“I was mesmerized by Mr. Robinson and the way he connected with his students in the classroom. Because of him, I became a teacher.”

Nolan ended up teaching at Slater Elementary right next door to his mentor, who is still a great friend. Nolan then transferred to a school closer to home, coincidentally named Robinson Elementary School, where his wife also works and his children attend classes.

The videos helped him conquer his fear of performing, and he is working up the courage to audition for an acting role. His students, naturally, are cheering him on. ■

Check out Nolan’s YouTube channel at [tinyurl.com/gritandintegrity](https://tinyurl.com/gritandintegrity).



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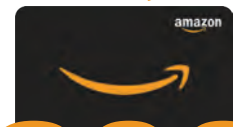
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# The Value of Educators With Disabilities

By Toby Tomlinson Baker



**PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES** represent the largest minority group in the United States (1 in 4 adults, or 61 million people, live with a disability). However, educators with disabilities are rarely a topic of discussion.

With the constant emphasis in today's public discussion on diversity, equity and inclusion, it makes sense to recognize that one of the categories within this group is teachers with disabilities, who are entering the education field and doing their job as highly effective educators. Even though many people know someone with a disability, it may not occur to them that a teacher could have a disability.

The social assumption is that all teachers are intelligent and nondisabled. Yet that is not the case. All state-licensed teachers are required to pass exams to qualify for their state-issued credentials. It is not well-known that there are "test takers with disabilities" who qualify for and receive testing accommodations, including extra time, double-time, and a separate room to minimize distractions during their Praxis or other state-required exams. Contrary to the belief that they couldn't possibly pass these grueling exams, they do pass and become highly qualified certificated teachers alongside their nondisabled peers.

Educators with disabilities, in fact, often bring additional expertise to the job: empathy. They understand all too well what students with disabilities, and students who struggle in school socially and with their studies are going through. They

are powerful role models, and can offer counsel and assistance through a personal lens. And these educators can offer other talents such as being particularly adept with technology, having used various programs or devices for years, and are able to more easily incorporate tech into their teaching.

But what school district would hire a teacher with a disability? Due to privacy laws such as HIPAA, no employer may examine or gain access to the health records of their employees, including teacher applicants. It is against the law for any human resources department in any school district to probe, request or disclose the disability knowledge or status of a candidate.

When a teacher with a disability applies for a job, they do not put their disability label on their résumé. They list their qualifications and their credentials. Furthermore, research shows that invisible disabilities, such as learning disabilities, ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder), Asperger's syndrome, and other disorders recognized on the autism spectrum, may be concealed during interviews. This does not necessarily include those with intellectual disabilities. Consequently, in recent years, certificated teacher candidates with disabilities have been hired for positions in the competitive areas of early childhood education and primary, secondary and higher education. To the surprise of many nondisabled educators, sometimes a disabled teacher candidate is more qualified and hired for the job instead of them.

Although there have been policy initiatives to increase the

***“Educators with disabilities often bring additional expertise to the job: empathy. They understand all too well what students with disabilities and students who struggle in school are going through.”***

employment of people with disabilities, advocacy organizations such as the National Organization on Disability continue their work to ensure equality for all workers with disabilities. This is evident particularly with the effort to eliminate sub-minimum wage 14(c). Thousands of Californians work in the federal 14(c) program, which lets employers pay employees less than minimum wage. Eliminating it is critical to help qualified educators with physical disabilities overcome obstacles to gain employment. Even if educators with disabilities become gainfully employed, however, often they are restricted in their placement and have limited advancement opportunities within their careers.

This issue not only impacts employers of educators with disabilities, but also impacts the communities of parents and students. Would a school district's value decrease if it employed educators with disabilities? If students learn that their teacher has a disability, how these children learn to respond influences their attitude toward and treatment of all people they meet who are "different." These are just a few factors to consider in having educators with disabilities in our schools.

Such challenges must be recognized by all school districts, as there is still a widespread belief that educators could not have disabilities. There is still a great need to combat the social stigma associated with disabilities, namely, that an educator with a disability has a lesser intellect. Certainly, there is a need to increase the awareness of excellent educators with disabilities in the workforce. By including educators with disabilities as role models for students, it increases their empathy, encourages them to face challenges, and enhances their belief that all educators with disabilities are valued. ■

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*United Teachers Los Angeles member Toby Tomlinson Baker, Ph.D., teaches special education in Los Angeles Unified School District and is an adjunct lecturer at CSU Los Angeles. She received the Harrison Sylvester Award for her research from the Learning Disabilities Association of America and was CHADD's (Children and Adults With ADHD) 2018 Educator of the Year.*

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# Tales From the Trenches

*Surviving a COVID surge, staffing shortages and trauma at the start of the year*

By Sherry Posnick-Goodwin

**SCHOOL STAFF** typically return from winter break feeling refreshed. But this January, educators found themselves amid the biggest COVID-19 surge yet. At some sites, the virus was rampant and staff shortages were widespread.

In our continuing series, we conducted interviews in mid-January to capture various experiences of teachers around the state — snapshots of educators surviving the chaos with help from their colleagues, friends, families and unions.



## Mara Harvey

**SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER**, Discovery High School  
Natomas Teachers Association president

**I am at home with COVID. I caught it at school.** My husband and our two children — a ninth and fourth grader — also have COVID. We are all fully vaccinated. We have been terribly lucky; our family has handled it well.

The best way to describe the return from winter break is *surreal*. The speed at which the spike hit was frightening. We were way over the numbers that closed down the schools at the start of the pandemic. In some classes, half of my students were missing. Some were home due to COVID, others because they

may have been exposed or their parents may have just been keeping them home. Some of my students were really sick and were still expected to keep up.

I used Google Classroom and the Go Guardian program, which allowed us to have direct contact with students quarantining. I made myself available to students on Zoom independently if students needed it.

I kept watching the news and seeing COVID numbers go up. I kept thinking, “When is anybody going to step in and do something?” And

then it hits you that nobody is coming and we are just going to ride this wave till the end. As president of the association, in addition to teaching, I had to be in constant contact with teachers to make sure they had the safest environment possible and that our safety agreements were being maintained.

Then I got COVID. I'm still communicating with my substitute and posting things on Google Classroom. Part of being a teacher is that you never stop — even when you're sick

***“I kept thinking, ‘When is anybody going to step in and do something?’ Then it hit me that nobody is coming and we are just going to ride this wave till the end.”***

— because you don't want your students to fall behind. My colleagues have brought work to my doorstep so that I don't get too far behind.

I'm incredibly proud of all the front-line people who have been keeping our schools running despite these

challenges. We have all come together — teachers, nurses, counselors, social workers, speech therapists and others. It's been exhausting, but it's also been amazing to see how people have supported each other.

## Shannon Barnes

### KINDERGARTEN TEACHER

Douglas K. Fletcher Elementary School  
Bakersfield Elementary Teachers Association vice president



**It's been really chaotic since vacation, with 25 to 35 percent of the staff out this week.** We're talking about cafeteria staff, janitors and ESPs. Before COVID you might have three or four teachers out on a given day. On Friday, we had 15 teachers out. Some have compromised immune systems; some have COVID; others are taking care of family members with COVID.

There are not enough subs. Our district office is sending people to cover classrooms, but it's not enough. Our principal has to plead for subs. They are sending anyone with a certificated position to schools including curriculum instructors, technology trainers, and anyone they can grab from the departments.

I'm taking extra students into my classroom. I have to keep track of where students are sitting in case we need to contact-trace them. I'm also doing an independent study option for kids who are quarantining at home. Per an MOU with the district, I'm doing live interaction for 30 minutes and providing students with asynchronous work on Google Classroom after my in-person students leave for the day.

At some of our schools, entire classrooms are home

quarantining. Some kids haven't gotten their return dates scheduled yet by the district's care team because things are so backlogged. We had 37 cases before winter break, and this last week we had 416 cases. I get potential COVID exposure letters two to three times a week. But the district is pretending that things are normal and telling us literacy assessments are due. At what point can we not worry about collecting data and focus on doing the best we can?

We don't have enough prep time anymore, so it means extra work on weekends and after school. We used to just drop students off in the lunch line and leave, but now we help them get their food, get them seated, and make sure they sit on their assigned "number spot" for social distancing, in case we have to do contact tracing from the cafeteria.

Every time I hear a cough or a snuffle I'm wondering, "What do I do now?" I'm trying to keep things as normal as possible for students. But I think I'm going to be white-knuckling it until June.

***“I think I'm going to be white-knuckling it until June.”***





## Rori Abernethy

**MATH TEACHER**, James Denman Middle School  
United Educators of San Francisco

**Things were challenging before winter break.** Kids were dealing with a lot of grief, anxiety and stress. On top of that, staff were leaving. On the Wednesday before the winter break, three math

teachers — half the math department — left. Another math teacher had left in October. Some retired. Some needed medical accommodations. Others wanted to get out of the classroom because they didn't feel safe.

Our principal and vice principal sub every day in the classroom, or they're sending kids to the library because there are not enough teachers to teach them. Sometimes half the kids are at home quarantining. I try to help them keep up and reconfigure lessons for them on Google Classroom. Nobody is calling it hybrid instruction, but that's what it is.

The district told all the teachers to get tested before school started in January, but there were no rapid tests available, and the lines to get tested were out of control. Meanwhile, our COVID sick days expired on Dec. 31.

Teachers in SF classrooms have daily "close contacts" with their students and must be tested if one of their students is positive. The district contracted with Color COVID Testing to test teachers who were considered a close

contact. We had to go to different testing sites all over town, and most SFUSD testing locations closed before our contractual day ended. The district said we had to wear KN95 masks but didn't give us any. Lots of teachers were getting COVID.

On Jan. 9, the testing company ran out of tests. On Jan. 10, the system crashed, and tests couldn't be processed. So, people who had been tested for being close contacts were just sitting at home waiting for results for days, using their own sick leave.

Teachers and staff organized a sickout on Jan. 6. That's because on Jan. 3 we had 400 educators out. On Jan. 4 it was 600 educators, and on Jan. 5, 700.

The sickout received national attention. UESF bargained with the district and got an MOU for all teachers to get weekly rapid tests, KN95 masks, and 10 days of sick leave retroactive to Dec. 21. I don't believe that this would have happened without the sickout. We felt like no one was listening and all hell was breaking loose. We had to do something.

***"We felt like no one was listening and all hell was breaking loose. We had to do something."***



## Amy Eytchison

**FOURTH GRADE TEACHER**, Temecula Elementary School  
Temecula Valley Educators Association secretary

**It's unsettling.** We've done so much work to try to avoid COVID for so long, and now it's everywhere. When I came back from winter break, half my class was out. For me, it's a balancing act between teaching in-person students and making sure those who are quarantining at home are getting their online independent work done so they don't fall behind. You feel like you're never doing

enough. The burnout is real for everyone, the parents and kids included.

The rules for what counts as exposure are ever-changing. I can't even keep up with all the changes. Who knew I was going to become a contact tracer? In the beginning, to qualify as being exposed, the student had to be closer than 6 feet for 15 minutes to the infected student — which, really, who can



## David A. Sanchez

**SUBSTITUTE INTERVENTION TEACHER**

*Abraham Lincoln Elementary School in Palm Desert  
Retired CTA president*

**Students ask, “What will we do if we get sick – or Mom and Dad get sick?”** I reassure them that there are doctors and medicine that will help.

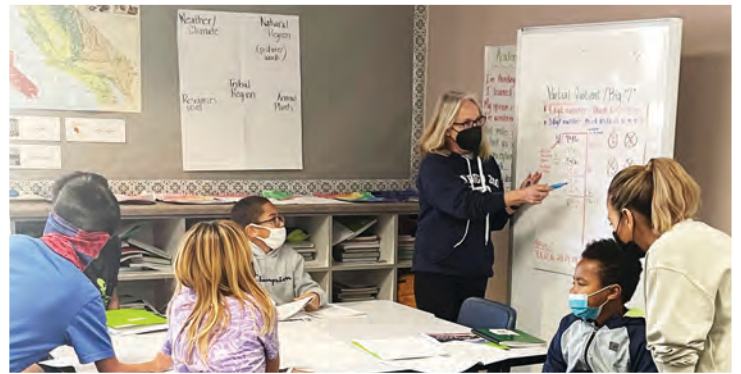
Last week, there were only eight kids in the classroom, and there are normally 24. This week, some of the kids are coming back. Everybody’s doing everything they can to keep their hands washed and their masks on. Teachers are wearing KN95 masks.

I was motivated to sub because I missed being in the classroom and being around elementary school children.

There is such a shortage of subs that it’s unbelievable, and I’m glad to be helping. Schools are grateful for subs willing to take on the challenge right now and fill in during this state of emergency. Everybody is worried that there might be a new variant. Teachers are worried, but they are doing everything they can. Despite COVID, they are making sure students are getting a top-notch education. It’s not easy, but they are doing a great job.

***“Despite COVID, teachers are making sure students are getting a top-notch education.”***

Eytchison in class. ▶



***“Who knew I was going to become a contact tracer?”***

remember? Now, if a student shows up with a runny nose, I have to send them to the office, and then they are sent home.

Our district has been trying to help. They pay for testing. We put our rapid tests in a bucket, and they pick it up twice a week. They have also taken away some of our professional learning communities and staff meetings. Unfortunately, it doesn’t feel like it’s enough. The continued loss of prep really affects your planning, which in turn affects your teaching.

We have people who come to our school board meetings

who are not from the area. They say that our school board members are “possessed by the devil” because they are requiring that students wear masks. At meetings they pray for the board members to lift the mask mandate. It’s surreal.

We have many new members at our site. As an executive board member, I feel I should be reaching out and helping them more. But it’s hard to help others when you feel so overwhelmed yourself.





## Mary Walsh

**MATH TEACHER**

Hayward High School  
Hayward Education  
Association vice president

**Normally, the first day back after winter break, we have nearly 100 percent attendance, but on Monday, Jan. 3, 30 percent of students were out.** By Friday, there were less than 50 percent of students in attendance. It was a shocking progression — and not just at Hayward High, but throughout the district.

There has been voluntary testing in the student parking lot twice a week since the start of the school year. Before winter break, you might have two or three people in line, but since our return on Monday, the line went from the parking lot to the street and down the block. It felt like we'd entered the Twilight Zone.

I had a student ask to use the bathroom, and when he came back, he handed me something. I realized it was his rapid response COVID test. The student asked, "Am I positive?" and indeed he was. I must have washed my hands for 20 minutes.

Imagine having a special education class with paraeducators absent. Some of our students with special needs require bathroom assistance. We were in dire straits without enough substitutes. We had six classes in the cafeteria with administrators watching students because of the lack of substitutes.

In mid-January our school board held an emergency online meeting attended by more than 2,200 parents, and made the decision to return to virtual learning and independent study for one week. This provided 10 days (including the Martin Luther King holiday) for students and staff to go through quarantine period and to get more control of the situation.

***"It felt like we'd entered the Twilight Zone."***



▲ In January, Hayward High's line for voluntary COVID testing, which had been two or three people a day before winter break, stretched from the parking lot to the street and down the block.

Parents wanted this. Parents who wanted their children back in school were now saying, "Close it down and give us a chance to slow down the spread of the virus." During the week of online learning, my student attendance was back up to nearly 100 percent. Learning was taking place.

State leaders are threatening our district with a huge financial loss because we went virtual, but the situation was so dire, we had no choice. We feared for the safety of our children and staff. I don't think the state Legislature has a pulse on what the public wants and what is happening during this surge. Legislators aren't in the trenches with us.

I am getting through this with the support of my union. HEA has been there for members who call to ask questions or need support. We publish a *Friday Follow-up* weekly for members to stay informed. We are there for one another, and we will get through this together.

### TALES FROM THE TRENCHES

See other educators' stories in our series at [cta.org/tales](https://cta.org/tales). Got your own tale as an educator during the pandemic? Let us know at [editor@cta.org](mailto:editor@cta.org) with "Tales" in the subject line.



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▼ After 63 years at Clovis Unified without a union, a brave group of educators are organizing the Association of Clovis Educators (ACE) for a real voice in decision-making and equitable opportunities for all students.



# ACE Is the Answer

Credentialed educators organize a union in Clovis for the first time ever By Julian Peeples

“**SMALLER CLASS SIZES**, academic supports, social-emotional learning — this is what we’re fighting for. Things we can improve to continue serving mind, body and spirit,” says Silvia Berst, a teacher at Boris Elementary School in Clovis and member of the Association of Clovis Educators (ACE).

Last spring, teachers, school psychologists, itinerant specialists, school counselors and other education professionals formed ACE, seeking a real voice in decision-making, more transparency, better communication, and equitable opportunities for all 43,000 Clovis Unified School District (CUSD) students. It’s a mission that unites the educators working hard to organize and build ACE, centered around providing the education all Clovis students deserve.

On Feb. 4, ACE was officially recognized by the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) as the exclusive representative of CUSD’s 81 school psychologists and mental health support providers (MHSP) after they chose the union in an election.

“We have a great district. We want to make it better,” says

Tamara Soemali, a CUSD school psychologist and ACE member. “We want to make sure all our students have access to all the wonderful things in our district.”

The organizing effort is a heavy lift in normal conditions, even heavier amid the second year of a pandemic that has challenged educators like never before. But many hands make light work, with a core group of educators creating seven democratic committees to delegate the tasks needed to grow the union and build a movement.

“In our community in Clovis, education is so highly valued. It affects our whole city,” says Nancy Welch, eight-year special educator with the adult transition program and former CUSD student. “There is a huge disconnect between people making the decisions at CUSD and the people on the ground. That was difficult to see, and it’s a big reason why I’m here [building ACE].”



Silvia Berst

## The Clovis way

Located just northeast of Fresno, Clovis is a city of about 120,000, and the school district is by far its biggest employer.

CUSD is well-known statewide and beyond for its quality schools, strong athletic program, and one notable fact: In Clovis Unified's 63-year history, teachers have never had a recognized union.

"When you sign a contract, they say, 'You know Clovis is not a union district,'" says Dan Dritz, 27-year teacher at Mountain View Elementary and ACE member.

The lack of a teachers union in Clovis was celebrated by the district in a document called "Doc's Charge," written by CUSD founding Superintendent Floyd "Doc" Buchanan upon his retirement in 1991, which includes numerous themes and slogans that embody the district's culture and are embraced by school district leadership. One sticks out: "The professionals who work in our district are proud that we do not have collective bargaining."

"Clovis is adept at misattributing their success to not having a union," says Kristin Heimerdinger, 29-year Buchanan High School educator and ACE member. "Maybe it's not the lack of a union; maybe it's the hard work of educators who deserve a louder voice."

Despite Doc's wishes, there has been a union in CUSD for quite some time — education support professionals in the district are represented by the California School Employees Association. Teachers, however, utilize a "faculty senate," which provides a forum for teachers to discuss and make nonbinding recommendations to district administration. School psychologists, counselors and other credentialed staff do not have representation in the senate. Clovis educators say it has very little power, especially compared to the strength of a union contract. Berst served as a member of the faculty senate for many years before the COVID-19 pandemic showed her how little the group could do to protect the safety of students and educators.

"I saw how much was put on educators, and I realized my role as a faculty senator was very limited," Berst says. "I was motivated to learn more about ACE."

While educators were growing tired of ever-increasing responsibilities and an administration that didn't seem to care about them, a July 2020 CUSD school board meeting was the tipping point. When the board approved returning to full-time



*"There is a huge disconnect between people making the decisions at CUSD and the people on the ground. It's a big reason why I'm [building ACE]."*

—Nancy Welch, special educator with the adult transition program



Tamara Soemali

in-person instruction, against public health regulations and without consulting educators, it moved them to organize.

"The district showed no sympathy or empathy for us," Berst says. "There was no recourse for educators."

Clovis East High School teacher and ACE member Jason Roche says the decision was the last straw. He reached out to Heimerdinger, and she replied, "I've had enough."

"The pandemic has just amplified the deep rot that was in the system to begin with, and we need something to fix it," says Roche. "ACE is the answer."

When Clovis school psychologists were required to return to in-person assessments of students, Soemali says, there was no plan from management about how to do so safely and no effective personal protective equipment. School psychologists asked for guidance, and the Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) director

told them: "You're smart people, you'll figure it out."

"The district said, 'You will return to work and assess these students,' even though the assessments weren't normal," Soemali says. "That really moved the psychologists."

Heimerdinger says the pandemic spotlighted the decision-making process in CUSD and how educators were not involved. She says it's a problem that has been festering for some time in Clovis Unified.

"It's never been about decisions, but about a lack of voice," she says. "I don't want to work in a district that does not value my voice."

After serving in the faculty senate for numerous years, Clovis East High School teacher Amy Kilburn says educators need a union to balance the unchecked power held by district leadership and move forward together for all Clovis students.

"There needs to be checks and balances in our district. That would create a structure where there would be collaboration," says Kilburn. "This is the opportunity to see where we can fix things and where we can grow — so

let's go and let's grow!"

**"We Are ACE"**

After the fateful July 2020 school board meeting, a group





◀ While the anti-union legacy of CUSD founding superintendent “Doc” Buchanan looms large in the district, Kristin Heimerdinger and other ACE educators are creating a new culture in Clovis.

*“Educators need a meaningful seat at the table. A union is the best way to ensure a strong future for our students and schools for years to come.”*

—Kristin Heimerdinger, Buchanan High School teacher

of Clovis educators began meeting regularly to discuss the growing challenges in CUSD and share their experiences. The group quickly grew to include new and seasoned educators across Clovis from all grade levels. They discovered that they shared common values and goals, and cared deeply about their students, the district and the Clovis community.

“This movement has built a family among educators,” Heimerdinger says.

The team contacted CTA for support in the union-building effort and continued to reach out to colleagues in the organizing effort. Only nine months later, the educators went public, announcing the establishment of the Association of Clovis Educators in an April 2021 letter to the community. “We are proud to be Clovis educators, and we have created ACE because we want to see our schools, students, teachers, staff and administrators thrive,” reads the letter, signed by 75 Clovis educators and ACE members.

“Clovis educators and schools are known for their excellence, and we believe that to stay true to our district’s core values, forming a union is our next important step,” Heimerdinger said in April. “Educators need a meaningful seat at the table, and we believe a union is the best way to ensure a strong future for our students and schools for years to come.”

The effort to collect the signatures of more than half of Clovis Unified’s 2,100 educators on petitions to form a union is a tall order under normal conditions — even more so during a pandemic and in a district so openly hostile to unions. (See sidebar on the process of forming a union.) Educators say they’re battling 60-plus years of anti-union rhetoric and challenging a system that is

historically closed and isolated, fueling fears of retaliation.

Soemali’s mother and aunt were part of an unsuccessful unionizing effort by Clovis educators in the 1980s. She says every educator who was a part of the attempt was retaliated against by district management.

“It’s not just something people are afraid of; it’s something that actually happened,” says Soemali.

The movement to build ACE is changing what has been a long-standing culture of fear. Welch says building relationships across the district and working together toward what students need helps dispel that fear.

“We’re beginning to build a new culture where educators feel they have agency in the system,” says Roche.

Maple Creek Elementary School teacher and ACE member Elizabeth Henderson can feel it. Exhausted from being asked to do more and more for her students and tired of having nowhere to go, she says ACE is making a huge difference in her life.

“I’m having conversations with people I’ve never had before. I feel like I’m finally part of a group who sees me and that I matter,” Henderson says. “Speaking up is no longer rocking the boat. We realize that we’re not alone anymore. I think Clovis is starting to change.”



Dan Dritz



Jason Roche

### ***Building and growing the union***

Only a few months after announcing the formation of ACE, the young union recorded a major victory when CUSD’s school psychologists filed for recognition with the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) in June. Due to the critical needs of their students and ongoing impacts of the pandemic, 76 percent of CUSD’s

school psychologists and MHSPs signed union support petitions. In a letter to the Clovis community, they said that educators in CUSD should have a real voice in the decisions that impact students and educators.

“It is our desire to create an inclusive culture that honors our diverse backgrounds and experiences,” the letter reads. “A culture that is based on collaboration and respect, a culture that fosters open dialogue, transparency and advocacy to best serve the academic, social and emotional needs of all our students.”

ACE member Cy Hiyane says the last two years have been eye-opening for his fellow school psychologists to see how decisions are made in Clovis Unified. Hiyane says school psychologists have been active in Clovis over the past decade, advocating for the implementation of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and appropriate compensation, and are eager to accomplish so much more now with a loud, unified union voice.

“It’s about serving our students and continuing to create a diverse workforce,” says Hiyane, a 10-year veteran of CUSD. “Our students will feel our success because they



Amy Kilburn

*“We’re going to preserve what we love about the district, and we’re going to improve the things that need to be improved.”*

—Amy Kilburn,  
Clovis East High  
School teacher

will know they have a voice. We are going to advocate for them and be a voice for them.”

As a former student, Soemali says Clovis Unified supported her as a learner, but as a school psychologist, she says there is a lack of equity in the types of special and general ed services provided to students of color. It’s a common refrain among ACE educators, who say that the educational experience isn’t the same for every Clovis student.

“I think we do a great job, but I think we don’t always do a great job for everyone,” says Heimerdinger.

▼ Clovis Unified teachers, school psychologists, itinerant specialists, school counselors and other education professionals announced the establishment of ACE in an April 2021 letter to the community.



## A Union Is Born

**TO FORM THE** Association of Clovis Educators, members followed these steps:

- **Notify the employer of intent to form an independent employee organization**, as ACE did in an April 2021 letter. Per the Educational Employment Relations Act (EERA), ACE has rights and protections as an independent employee organization. ACE filed unfair labor practice charges and requested an injunction against Clovis Unified School District during this time.
- **Collect enough signatures from potential bargaining unit members on petitions to form a union** to show there is substantial interest. If more than half sign, the organization can file with the California Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) for recognition. While teachers, counselors and other education professionals are still gathering signatures, school psychologists and mental health support providers (MHSP) filed for PERB recognition in June 2021 with a supermajority signing petitions.
- **Upon filing, a 15-day period begins, during which other employee organizations can file for recognition with 30 percent of the proposed unit’s signatures.** If no other organization files, the union is officially recognized. If another organization files, PERB holds an election to determine who will represent the workers.

During the 15-day period following the school psychologists and MHSP’s filing, another organization (Clovis Psychologists for Clovis) filed for recognition, spurring a majority-vote election. (Bargaining unit members are allowed to sign more than one petition.) This election was held in January and February, and a majority of members voted for ACE, which was officially recognized as their union.





Nichole Klein

## Support of the CTA Family

AS MEMBERS OF the Association of Clovis Educators continue the work of building their new union, CTA is providing resources and guidance. In addition to staff technical assistance and expertise, CTA is providing release time to several members from Central Valley local associations to lend their support (like Nichole Klein from Selma Unified Teachers Association, above).

"We're proud to be working with CTA," says ACE member Kristin Heimerdinger. "The help, support and mentorship are invaluable."

ACE's unionization effort is attracting attention among CTA's 310,000 members as well as the 3.1 million educators of NEA.

"This is historic for the Central Valley!" CTA President E. Toby Boyd says. "Join me in supporting these courageous educators as they build a movement in Clovis. We are all ACE!"

## Clovis Born and Bred

MANY OF Clovis Unified's 2,100-plus educators were students in the district before returning to teach in Clovis. For three ACE organizing committee members, teaching and learning in Clovis is a multigenerational family affair. Read about it at [cta.org/clovisfamily](http://cta.org/clovisfamily).

Teresa D'addato says her students at Tarpey Elementary School, a Title I school, have been treated differently by the district for all 33 of her years there. Long a proponent of unionizing in Clovis, D'addato says a victory for ACE means binding equity, guaranteed for all students.

"My students need more, and the district doesn't like to acknowledge that," she says.

Kilburn says the district's leadership and board don't reflect the student population, which is 60 percent students of color. ACE members are proud that the district's rich diversity is reflected in their organizing team.

"We need a redefinition of what Clovis means," Roche says. "The Clovis of old doesn't exist anymore."

## The power of us

Building a movement takes time, and the organizing team is putting in work, with ACE committee meetings scheduled nearly every night to win the voice that Clovis students need. In just a short period, educators have built a functioning, member-led, democratic union — all while CUSD has engaged in an aggressive union-busting campaign.

ACE hit the ground running, filing a series of unfair labor practice charges and requesting an injunction with PERB against CUSD over the district's improperly cozy relationship with the faculty senate, interfering with ACE's

organizing efforts, and intimidating and retaliating against unionizing educators (including monitoring educators' emails and suddenly changing a long-standing assignment for an ACE organizer). PERB investigated the claims and found reasonable cause that CUSD had violated the law in multiple ways, taking the extraordinary step of seeking an injunction from Fresno County Superior Court to cease the district's unlawful conduct until the complaints are resolved.

"Even through all that, we are maintaining our integrity," says Kilburn.

"We're going to do big things for our community and our kids."

The positive impacts of the ACE movement are already being felt by educators and students alike. CUSD has acted on numerous items proposed by ACE, including placing instructional aides in special education classes, directly benefiting students. ACE also began its Fall Forward campaign in October, outlining six priority issues in CUSD identified by educators. By November, the district had agreed to move forward on several, including extending educator's COVID leave and improving substitute coverage.

"We're fighting to make sure all our students get the resources and support they need," Heimerdinger says. "This continues to be the focus of all our work."



*"I'm having conversations with people I've never had before. I feel like I'm finally part of a group who sees me and that I matter."*

—Elizabeth Henderson,  
Maple Creek Elementary  
School teacher

▼ School psychologists Cy Hiyane and Tamara Soemali are eager to advocate for all students with a unified union voice.



Teresa D'addato

Support in the Clovis community is solid and growing, as ACE spreads the word about the union and how it will benefit students and families. Local unions, faith leaders and district parents agree that ACE is the answer.

“I wholeheartedly support the formation of ACE. It is imperative that educators truly have a voice when decisions are being made that will impact the children in their classrooms. The development of a union is the only means to ensure this,” says Clovis parent Sarah Martin. “I am so excited for the Clovis educators who are spearheading this endeavor. Please know there are many of us who are cheering you on from the sidelines!”

Each victory is a boost for the educators building ACE and working hard to make a difference for Clovis kids and families. Where before many of them felt alone, educators now have a supportive family — in ACE, CTA and NEA. It’s an exciting realization for some.

“I haven’t felt this much love for what I’m doing for Clovis in a long time,” says Henderson. “I felt like I wanted to retire, and now I want to fight!”

The organizing continues as the effort approaches the one-year mark. Heimerdinger says that educators are in the fight for the long haul.

“We’re not going away,” she says. “There’s a better way for us to do things for all educators and all students.” ■



## ACE on Social Media

**CLOVIS EDUCATORS** have been utilizing social media to tell their story, build support and provide updates.

Campaigns have included educators sharing stories about why they’re building ACE and what it will mean for Clovis students, as well as an inside look and detailed breakdown of unfair labor practice charges and PERB rulings. Their podcast *The ACEPod* includes in-depth discussions with ACE members about the union-organizing effort and how it will benefit the CUSD community.

ACE is also on TikTok, posting news and interviews to share the sights and sounds of their struggle.

“Our mission in social media is two-fold: To make the case for unionization in Clovis, but to do it in a way that demonstrates that these arguments are being made by people,” says ACE member Jason Roche. “ACE is your neighbor, your colleague and your child’s teacher. We aren’t outsiders imposing on a culture, but insiders with deep roots and a commitment to the district and the students we serve.”

Follow ACE on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok at [@cloviseducators](https://www.facebook.com/cloviseducators), and visit ACE online at [cloviseducators.org](http://cloviseducators.org).

# Remaking the Grade

*Educators, districts consider a more equitable way to assess student learning*

By **Sherry Posnick-Goodwin**

**SAM PEREIRA** is helping his district transition to what he believes is a more equitable form of grading, so that students in the Monterey Peninsula Unified School District are graded based on what they *know*, rather than on their behavior and ability to meet deadlines.

This approach, called “standards-based grading,” was piloted at Central Coast High School, a continuation school where Pereira teaches English. The district’s four high schools have committed to implementing it in the future.

In Monterey’s version of standards-based grading, low grades or missing assignments aren’t held against students if they can prove they have mastered the material at the semester’s end. Instead of the traditional 100-point grading scale, there’s a 4-point grading scale, and students have chances to make up missed assignments or even redo a test. This puts the emphasis where it belongs, on learning rather than on rule-following, says the Monterey Bay Teachers Association member.

“Under the old system, a student has a zero from not turning in an assignment, then turns in the next one and gets 100,” says Pereira. “Even though he understands the material, he has only

earned 50 points, which is an F in the class. Our new system motivates kids to not give up and keep trying, instead of putting their heads on the desk and not caring. For me, it boils down to how students can show me what they know — even if they need multiple opportunities.”



Sam Pereira

## Rethinking how to grade

While a number of educators have been vocal in support of a traditional grading system, many districts have opted to change it. Some, like Monterey, began this journey before COVID-19. Others found the pandemic to be a perfect opportunity to reform grading, with students facing increased academic struggles, stress, depression and challenges at home.

Los Angeles Unified has directed educators to grade students on what they have learned and not penalize them for behavior or missed deadlines. Teachers have been encouraged to give students the opportunities to retake tests, update essays, and demonstrate they understand the material. Santa Ana Unified, Oakland Unified and other districts have considered whether to limit the use of D’s and replace F’s with “incompletes,” according to news reports. And



Standards-based Grading Scale	
Points	Notes
4	Demonstrates <b>extensive</b> mastery of concepts and skills within taught standards at this time
3	Demonstrates <b>sufficient</b> mastery of concepts and skills within taught standards at this time
2	Demonstrates <b>partial</b> mastery of concepts and skills within taught standards at this time
1	Demonstrates <b>minimal</b> mastery of concepts and skills within taught standards at this time

## Understanding your child's grade

All assignments are based on a 4-point scale

- 4 = exceed expectations
- 3 = on-track
- 2 = developing
- 1 = emerging

Your child's final grade for each course will be an average of the individual grades throughout the quarter.



▲ Monterey Peninsula Unified School District's 4-point grading scale, left, and an explainer for parents, right.

Lindsay Unified School District in the Central Valley assigns students to classes and projects based on what they know and not their grade level — with a 1-4 grading scale designed to foster a “growth mindset.”

The reasoning behind grade reform is that students living in poverty, who are more likely to be students of color, have more challenges. They may be working to support their family, caring for siblings, or even homeless. Penalizing them for turning in late assignments or their behavior creates bias against students and may even unwittingly promote racism, say proponents.

“Our traditional grading practices have always harmed our traditionally underserved students,” said former teacher Joe Feldman, author of *Grading for Equity* and a consultant with districts nationwide on grading reform, in a *Los Angeles Times* interview. “Now, because the number of students being harmed is so much greater, people are ready to tackle this issue.”

### ALHAMBRA: Points go by the wayside

Joshua Moreno, an English teacher at Alhambra High School, did away with points entirely because some students fell so far behind, they stopped trying. Others had so many points they stopped working, knowing they would still receive an A.

“I went into teaching so students could learn and not chase points,” says the Alhambra Teachers Association member. “It’s nobody’s fault. It’s been part of the system since the turn of the century. But now it’s outdated. The 100-point system is really 50 ways to fail. What we call ‘equitable grading’ is part of a larger

district initiative led by our new Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Task Force.”

For examples of how traditional grading can go wrong, he created a profile of Student A, who has turned in every assignment on time, is never tardy and writes in a mediocre manner. Then there’s Student B who writes in an exemplary style but is frequently tardy and doesn’t turn in every assignment, which may be due to work, family obligations or other challenges.

“Under the old system, student B would have a C or be failing, and student A might have an A in the class. But it’s time to look at the skills and not penalize Student B for other factors, some of which may be beyond his control. For student A, the point system is masking skills he’s deficient in.”

Moreno gives students second chances to submit work and retake tests. He considers homework “practice” without grading it painstakingly.

“Some may say this doesn’t prepare students for the real world, but it does. In the real world you get second chances. You can retake your driver’s license, the SATs and the bar exam.”

He will even retroactively change a first-semester grade if a student does well by the end of the second semester. “What matters is that they get there — not how long it took.”



*“Some may say this doesn’t prepare students for the real world, but it does. In the real world you get second chances. You can retake your driver’s license, the SATs and the bar exam.”*

—Joshua Moreno,  
Alhambra Teachers  
Association

### SAN DIEGO: Reform is controversial

When San Diego Unified updated its grading policy in 2020, allowing students to turn in late work and resubmit assignments, not everyone was happy. Some educators



were upset that it happened during a pandemic, when things were most challenging.

Teachers worried that grading policies would be dictated by the school board or administrators. They filed a grievance and eventually reached a settlement giving teachers the right to determine:

- The length of the grace period for each late assignment.
- Which assignments may be submitted within the grace period for late work.
- How many times an assignment can be resubmitted.

Meanwhile, the district is implementing standards-based grading at the secondary level, with San Diego Education Association (SDEA) and district talks continuing, to ensure teachers retain their right to grade as they see fit, as granted in the state Education Code. Because behavior is not supposed to affect a student’s academic grade, it is now reflected in a separate citizenship grade.

Under the settlement, teachers don’t have to give students more than one retake or redo per semester, and late work can be submitted without demerits only up to a point.

“We had to set boundaries,” says Julia Knoff, an economics and U.S. government teacher at Scripps Ranch High School, who was on the SDEA team that negotiated the settlement. “I understood lenient grading when kids were doing distance or hybrid learning. But now we are back at school. I don’t allow retakes on tests. I don’t think it prepares students for the real world or college. And I still use the 100-point system. To me, points demonstrate mastery.”

Knoff, a teacher for 30 years, fears assignment retakes cause an increased workload for educators, who must regrade assignments. And while some school districts are considering eliminating D’s, she believes that is a mistake. A D is passing and still allows students who are not bound for a four-year college to graduate.

**SACRAMENTO:**  
**A unique approach**

This year, Sacramento City Unified School District adopted a policy that students are not supposed to score lower than 50 percent — even if they don’t do the work — in a move toward



*“I don’t allow retakes on tests. I don’t think it prepares students for the real world or college. I still use the 100-point system. To me, points demonstrate mastery.”*

—Julia Knoff, San Diego Education Association



Kara Synhorst

eventually phasing out D’s and F’s. The goal is for students to keep trying and redo work so they won’t be derailed from a four-year college.

At Luther Burbank High School in Sacramento, some members of the Sacramento City Teachers Association are also changing how they grade students.

Kara Synhorst, an English teacher for high-achieving International Baccalaureate students, has implemented what she calls “labor-based grading” so that strong effort is reflected in students’ grades.

“Grading students for how hard they work is a way to accurately determine what they know,” she says. “I give students weekly assignments, and if they put time and effort into it, they get 100 percent. But I also tell students to put a cap on it, because some high-achieving kids will work all night, and I want them to achieve a work-life balance.”

Since the pandemic, Synhorst allows students to demonstrate knowledge creatively. “They can write an essay, perform an interpretive dance, create a TikTok video, perform a skit or create podcasts. One student demonstrated what she knew through embroidery in the Hmong tradition. I have guidelines: Others must view what they are doing and understand what they are saying.”

She allows a week’s grace period on assignments, during which they can earn full credit. If they don’t turn in assignments until the end of the semester, they receive 80 percent instead of a zero.

“I disagree with those who say it doesn’t work like that in the real world,” she says. “I spent time working in the real world, and if I had a report due Thursday and needed to turn it in on Friday, the boss was OK with that. The real world isn’t robotic. The real world has empathetic human beings.”

Shana Just, who teaches biology at Burbank High, also allows late work without penalty. She has implemented a 5-point rubric for grading. Other science teachers have joined her.

Years ago, after attending a Linked Learning conference in Berkeley, Just began questioning whether the 100-point grading scale was valid. For example, there is a 10-point difference

*“If you have a kid who never does homework and aces every test and knows the material but fails, the system isn’t working. Now my thinking is: If you learned it, you learned it.”*

—Shana Just,  
Sacramento City Teachers  
Association



▲ Biology teacher Shana Just tells her students, “It’s never too late to pass if you can show you understand the concepts.”

between an A, B and C, and 50 points between a D and an F.

“If you have a kid who never does homework and aces every test and knows the material but fails, the system isn’t working. Now my thinking is: If you learned it, you learned it.”

She puts less emphasis on homework or “busywork” with multiple-choice questions, and instead asks students to explain scientific concepts.

“I tell students, ‘It’s never too late to pass if you can show you understand the concepts — even without the scientific vocabulary. You’re never so far behind you can’t catch up.’”

She is pleased students are now more willing to take risks, rather than find the “right” answer. She believes this is the best way to approach science and make new discoveries.

### **RANCHO CUCAMONGA:** **Professor shows flexibility**

Jackie Boboye, a counselor and professor at Chaffey College, has changed how she grades students in her Essential Student Success class and her Career and Life Planning course. Since she is preparing students for the future, she wants them to be inspired and excited about learning, instead of devastated by setbacks.

The pandemic brought it all home: Her students are caring for loved ones and are sometimes sick themselves. They have housing and internet problems and are super stressed.



Jackie Boboye

“In the past, students had to provide documentation for late work if there was sickness or a death in the family,” says the Chaffey College Faculty Association member. “With the pandemic, that has changed. I’m more flexible about late work, as long as students communicate with me.”

She doesn’t assign many tests or quizzes anymore. Instead, she’ll ask students to read a chapter and create their own quiz and answer their own questions — or create a summary.

“I want students to be more engaged and be able to express what they have learned. They can’t redo assignments. But I offer them extra credit by taking workshops online, and participating in conferences, which allows them to demonstrate research and learning tying into their career goals.”

Grades are important, but learning is even more important, she believes.

“I love to see them succeed, and then come back and share their success stories with other students. It’s why I love what I do.”

### **ALAMO:** **Change takes time and reflection**

Courtney Konopacky, a teacher on special assignment and an English and history teacher at Stone Valley Middle School in Alamo, began rethinking the grading process →



*“This kind of change is touchy for teachers. We have a lot of autonomy for grading, but very little training in how to do it. We fall back on the practices of when we were in school.”*

—Courtney Konopacky, San Ramon Valley Education Association

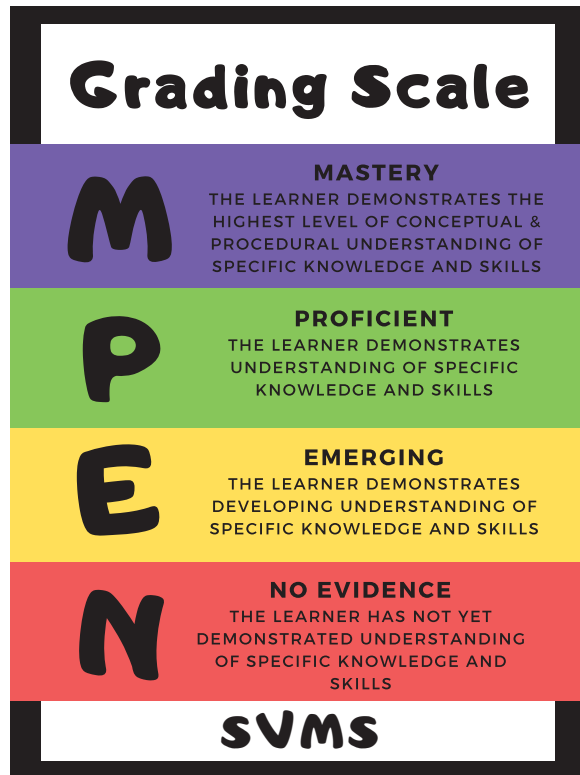
when she and four colleagues heard education expert Rick Wormeli speak on standards-based grading. It sparked a grassroots teacher-led movement at her site.

“There was also a lot of resistance,” admits the San Ramon Valley Education Association member. “This kind of change is touchy for teachers. We have a lot of autonomy for grading, but very little training in how to do it. We fall back on the practices of when we were in school.”

She describes the transition as a work in progress with plenty of trial and error and teacher reflection. Her school calls it “evidence-based learning” with a four-point scale of M for mastery, P for proficient, E for emerging, and N for no evidence.

“I understand that at the middle school level, you want to teach functional skills like turning things in on time, good handwriting and following directions. But that can cloud how students are graded — especially boys.”

Some students whose grades were inflated by good behavior received lower grades under the new system, and some parents at the high-performing school were not happy. Teachers had to explain



▲ Konopacky says the transition at her school site from traditional grading to “evidence-based learning,” above, is a work in progress.

compliance and nice handwriting don’t merit an A.

Last year, a majority of teachers including Konopacky eliminated D’s, but it wasn’t a schoolwide policy. Students can now turn in assignments late and redo work. Konopacky is doing her best to make sure nobody fails, helping students at lunchtime. If a student asks to redo a test or assignment, she asks them to reflect on why they did poorly before and why they think they can do better now.

“It’s a slow process that requires collaboration, vulnerability, and talking about what works and what doesn’t, so we can get kids back on track. Some of us felt guilty about the way we used to do things. But it’s important to look forward — not backward. And teachers definitely need more professional development to help us with this.” ■

### Does your grading system make the grade?

Feel strongly about your grading system and what works best for your students? Tell us why at [editor@cta.org](mailto:editor@cta.org). Put “Grades” in the subject line.



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# GOVERNOR PROPOSES RECORD EDUCATION FUNDING

*Budget proposal includes \$102 billion in Prop. 98 funding*

By **Julian Peeples**

**GOV. GAVIN NEWSOM** continues to live up to his commitment to neighborhood public schools and colleges with a record \$102 billion in Proposition 98 guaranteed funding — \$8.2 billion more than last year’s historic level — in his proposed 2022-23 state budget, released in January.

The budget includes an additional \$3.3 billion in Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) discretionary funds to provide a 5.33 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), and increases Prop. 98 per-pupil funding to \$15,261.

“The unprecedented investments prioritized in today’s budget proposal will be instrumental in the learning resiliency and recovery of our 8 million students,” says CTA President E. Toby Boyd. “The pandemic has made clear that living in the state with the fifth-largest economy in the world doesn’t mean all students in our schools and communities have the resources and services they need to succeed.”



The budget proposal provides resources for learners from cradle to college, with \$639 million to expand transitional kindergarten, as well as \$12.7 billion for California Community Colleges, an increase of \$560 million from last year.

“Access to early childhood education and transitional kindergarten for all students is essential to giving our youngest learners the strong start they need,” says Boyd. “We appreciate the governor’s commitment to ensure learning readiness, and the significant funding for higher education will help ensure more students can afford college.”

Other highlights of the budget proposal:

**Special Education:** Provides an additional \$500 million in ongoing funding for special education.

**College and Career Pathways:** Proposes \$1.5 billion in one-time funding over four years to support the development of pathway programs focused on technology, health care, education and climate-related fields.

**School Nutrition:** Provides \$596 million to fund universal access to subsidized school meals. Beginning in the 2022-23 school year, all public schools will be required to provide two free meals per day to any student who requests a meal, regardless of income eligibility.

**Educator Workforce:** Proposes \$54.4 million to enhance schools’ ability to hire qualified teachers and substitutes.

**Early Literacy:** Proposes \$500 million in one-time funding to train and hire literacy coaches and reading specialists to guide productive classroom instruction, and to offer one-on-one and small-group intervention for struggling readers. Includes \$200 million in one-time



Gavin Newsom

**“The unprecedented investments prioritized in today’s budget proposal will be instrumental in the learning resiliency and recovery of our 8 million students.”**

—CTA President **E. Toby Boyd**

funding for the creation and expansion of multilingual school or classroom libraries offering culturally relevant texts to support reading instruction.

**Expanded Learning Opportunities Program:** Proposes an additional \$3.4 billion in ongoing Prop. 98 funding for the program, which provides students in low-income communities with no-cost access to developmentally appropriate academics and enrichment activities.

**State Preschool Program:** Includes \$308 million in total funding to increase the State Preschool Program adjustment factors for students with disabilities and dual-language learners. The budget also proposes \$500 million in one-time funding to support the Inclusive Early Education Expansion Program.

**Community Colleges:** Includes an increase of \$200 million in ongoing funding to expand health care coverage provided to part-time faculty. Proposes an increase of \$130 million in one-time funding to support health care-focused vocational pathways for English learners through the Adult Education Program. Proposes \$325 million to align with community colleges’ multiyear roadmap, including investments in expanded Cal Grants, the implementation of a common course numbering system, and transfer reform provisions.

**Independent Study:** Proposes changes and flexibility to the current independent study program and timeline.

**COVID-19 Supplemental Paid Sick Leave:** Proposes new legislation to extend additional COVID sick leave.

Public education accounts for approximately 40 percent of all state general fund spending. Funding received by school districts fluctuates annually based on revenues, per capita personal income, and school attendance.

The state Legislature is reviewing the proposed budget prior to Gov. Newsom’s May revision. The budget must be passed before midnight on June 15. ■

## **COVID-19 Sick Leave Bill Passed**

**OUR COLLECTIVE ACTION**, including calls from educators and other union members across the state, proved successful on Feb. 9, when Gov. Gavin Newsom signed SB 114, which ensures workers have access to COVID-19 supplemental paid sick leave (SPSL) through Sept. 30, 2022.

The measure provides up to 80 hours of SPSL, with a guarantee of 40 hours to all employees. It is retroactive to Jan. 1 and covers workers and care for family members. SPSL may be used by employees who have been advised to quarantine and those caring for COVID-impacted family members or attending a COVID vaccination appointment.

In recent weeks, thousands of students and educators tested positive or fell ill with COVID-19. This put undue pressure on teachers and school employees faced with having to choose between going without pay and spreading the virus to their school communities.

“This leave will allow school employees to quarantine, recover and return to their students and classrooms,” said CTA President E. Toby Boyd. He praised educators’ efforts to convince legislators to pass the bill: “We did this together!” He added the legislation was “the fruits of our collective labor as educators, labor partners and state leaders committed to the health and well-being of California workers.”

## **CTA Candidate Recommendations**

**CTA candidate recommendations** for the June 2022 primary election were approved at the January State Council meeting and can be found at [cta.org/our-advocacy/election-2022](https://cta.org/our-advocacy/election-2022).

CTA’s recommendation process involves teams of 30 local educators and CTA members from throughout the state, who interview candidates and evaluate them on a variety of criteria, including:

- Their positions on and vision for K-12, community college and higher education issues.
- Their historical support for public education, students and educators, in such areas as education funding, budget stability, safe schools and campuses for all students, collective bargaining, educator professional rights, charter school accountability, and equal access to higher education.
- Their viability for success in the office that they are seeking.

Teams then make their recommendations to the CTA Board of Directors. Those approved are brought to CTA State Council (800 delegates), which debates and makes final recommendations.

# EDUCATORS MOBILIZE TO SUPPORT DISTRICT SCHOOLS

## *Victory in Vallejo*

### Educators rally community to protect students against charter

By Dawn Cova

**Vallejo Education Association (VEA)** secured a victory for their students and neighborhood public schools.

When Caliber, an independent charter school operator, submitted a petition in late November to expand their charter to siphon off another 600 students from the Vallejo City Unified School District (VCUSD), members of VEA mobilized to defend and support students in district schools.

Within a few days, working with the local California School Employees Association chapter and allies at the Central Labor Council, VEA got hundreds of signatures on a petition calling on the VCUSD Governing Board to support Vallejo students and reject the charter expansion.

Had the proposed charter school been approved, the total loss to VCUSD students, programs and services would have been \$1.3 million to \$1.6 million in the first year and up to \$17 million to \$22 million cumulatively in five years.

VEA members educated parents and the community about what the loss of funding for neighborhood schools means: Kids lose teachers, services and valuable programs. Loss of funding can also mean eventual school closures that are harmful and disruptive to students.

VEA member Leanne Duden told the board, "My current TK and kindergarten students depend on safe and

supportive schools. I am concerned that by the time my kiddos get to high school, our district schools will have been decimated because the proliferation of charters has taken so much from them."

Thanks to AB 1505, legislation authored by Assembly Member Patrick O'Donnell (D-Long Beach) in 2019 and supported by CTA, VCUSD had the authority to deny the charter. The law ensures school districts that are experiencing fiscal distress because they have a negative interim certification or are under state receivership (having a state loan) can deny the charter petition because they are not positioned to absorb the fiscal impact of the proposed charter school.

The VCUSD Governing Board voted 5-0 on Dec. 15 to deny the charter expansion.

Kevin Steele, an elementary teacher and VEA president, celebrated the victory. "Approving another charter that would have taken more resources away from our students would have been unconscionable. We are thrilled the VCUSD board acknowledged we need to invest in

our local schools, not drain them of resources." Now VEA members are gearing up to take the fight for their students and neighborhood schools to the Solano County level, where the charter operator has sought to appeal the district's denial.



*"Approving another charter that would have taken more resources away from our students would have been unconscionable. We are thrilled the VCUSD board acknowledged we need to invest in our local schools, not drain them of resources."*

—Kevin Steele, Vallejo Education Association president





# *Nipped in Napa*

## Educators help block charter school that would drain district

By **Gabriella Landeros**

When members of the **Napa Valley Educators Association** (NVEA) got word in September about a petition for a new 336-student charter school in Napa County, they quickly organized with parents and education support professionals to fight for their students against the unsound education plan the petitioners were proposing.

In large part because of their efforts, which included a community petition, meetings with the local school board members, letters to the editor, and an op-ed in the local newspaper, the school board unanimously voted to deny Mayacamas Charter Middle School in December. However, the petitioners have appealed to the Napa County Office of Education, which is expected to make a decision by this spring.

If the plan were to move forward, it would reduce the enrollment of the Napa Valley Unified School District (NVUSD) by over 300 pupils. The charter school would receive public dollars, which would have a negative impact on the district's 17,000 students, including cuts to staffing, services and programs at the middle school level and beyond. The charter's proposed student population represents a 2 percent enrollment decrease for NVUSD, and an

8 percent enrollment decrease for NVUSD's middle school programs. The district is already down 300 students, and if it lost another 300 students, it would experience at least 14 educator layoffs beyond the current layoff expectations.

***“Our students need more resources in our public schools, not fewer. The approval of this charter would have only exacerbated already existing issues within NVUSD.”***

—**Gayle Young**, Napa Valley Educators Association president

NVEA member Michael Alger, in a *Napa Valley Register* opinion piece, pointed out the charter's “complete lack of meaningful support for English language learners or special education students.”

The charter might be a dream come true for the privileged students who could attend, wrote Alger, but “for everyone else, including the 17,000 NVUSD students who will not attend their school, it will be a nightmare.”



# BARGAINING ROUNDUP

Compiled by Julian Peeples



◀ El Dorado educators boycott the taco truck brought in by their district to improve morale, focusing instead on bigger issues.



**EL DORADO:**

## Using creative tactics to win

Last fall, **El Dorado Union High School District Faculty Association (FA)** worked hard to educate members about the need for binding arbitration and won at the bargaining table, securing binding arbitration and a compounded 11.17 percent pay increase over two years.

During the bargaining campaign, members engaged in creative actions like a “grade-in” protest when the administration brought a taco truck to the district to improve morale. Educators were frustrated the district chose not to address their concerns and decided to boycott the taco truck. They raised a banner reading “Let’s Taco ‘Bout” and listing their issues, including more prep time and a copy room helper. In an amazing show of unity, the classified staff joined the FA, and not one member crossed the taco truck line. Educators took up a tip for the taco truck operators.

**TRACY:**

## Agreement on coverage pay

**Tracy Educators Association** and the school district reached an agreement for this school year on teachers’ coverage hourly pay for lack of substitute teachers. Middle and high school teachers will receive \$75 an hour while elementary school teachers will receive \$2.50 per student taken per hour when elementary classes are split into another grade level’s classrooms.



**SAN MARINO:**

**Show of solidarity leads to payments**

The educators of **San Marino Teachers Association** took to the sidewalks before and after school to show they were unified in their demand for appropriate compensation. Their solidarity powered the bargaining team to win two one-time payments: \$3,000 for all members currently working in the district and an additional \$2,000 for those who have been employed since January 2021.



**LOS GATOS-SARATOGA:**

**Highest increases in a decade**

**Los Gatos-Saratoga District Teachers Association (DTA)** launched an organizing campaign focused on building worker power — and it worked. In December, they ratified an agreement that will increase the salary schedule by 5 percent each year for three years, the largest increases in more than a decade.

Educators attended morning walk-in rallies and a board action, and circulated a community petition to organize support for the resources needed to attract and retain quality educators. Their robust efforts won the pay increase as well as health benefits enhancements.

DTA teachers are keeping up the pressure on noneconomic issues, organizing around their school communities' needs for improved teaching and learning conditions for all.



**ALUM ROCK:**

**Organizing for smaller class sizes**

**Alum Rock Education Association (AREA)** members held a candlelight vigil and sang holiday carols with a union twist outside the Alum Rock Union School District office to show the district they are united and urge ARUSD to settle contract negotiations. AREA has held three events along with leafleting parents and informational picketing.

AREA has been negotiating for smaller class sizes and more resources to stop educator turnover and improve education for a year. At press time, educators were headed to a fact-finding hearing.



**WASHINGTON COLONY:**

**Pay increases, teacher-driven PD**

The small but mighty **Washington Colony Teachers Association** in Fresno won a new contract late last year that provides more than 8 percent in pay increases for 2021 and 2022, as well as a \$3,000 one-time retention payment. WCTA also won an increase in the district's

health care contribution and contract language regarding teacher-driven professional development.

The contract is a big victory for WCTA, which has grown from two members eight years ago to 18 members today.

# MAKING BLACK LIVES MATTER AT SCHOOL

## Training for educators focuses on racial justice, centering work in love and empathy

By Julian Peeples

**WITH EDUCATORS AND COMMUNITIES** coming together nationwide to ensure that Black students can live, grow and thrive with support and love, two CTA members have developed a training to help educators show that Black lives matter at school.

CTA Board member Erika Jones and United Teachers Los Angeles President Cecily Myart-Cruz developed the training for the NEA Leadership Summit in 2016, highlighting the work done by UTLA's Racial Justice Taskforce to facilitate tough conversations around race and racism in education. The task force was formed following the 2014 killing of Michael Brown by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, which spurred the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement.

"We developed the UTLA Racial Justice Taskforce and noticed that spaces for educators to talk through racial justice issues and begin unpacking what it means to be an anti-racist educator were nonexistent," says Jones, a UTLA member. "Students and community members were far ahead in their understanding of the Black Lives Matter movement and the impact it could and would have on classrooms."

Jones and Myart-Cruz have trained thousands of educators nationwide, tailoring each session to the needs of their audience, focusing on breaking down misconceptions of Black Lives Matter and racial



▲ CTA leaders developed a training for all members.

justice, and centering the work of educators in love and empathy. The training asks educators to analyze what it means to be a member of a marginalized community and identify ways to bring racial justice to their schools.

"Showing that Black lives matter at school is really about centering our most marginalized students. When you center the most marginalized and create an educational environment where they can succeed, you have created an environment where all can succeed," Jones says. "We push educators to examine their own practices and existing school policies from curricular choices to discipline policies. These reflective conversations are geared to plant seeds where educators then take agency to continue the work."

The goal of the broader Black Lives Matter at School movement ([blacklivesmatteratschool.com](http://blacklivesmatteratschool.com)) is to spark ongoing critical reflection, honest conversation, and impactful actions in school communities for people of all ages to engage with issues of racial justice. Black Lives Matter at School organizers have designated 2022 as a Year of Purpose. Educators, students and parents are



## OBJECTIVE

1. **RESISTANCE:** Understand the Black Lives Matter Movement
2. **RESILIENCE:** Analyze what it means to be a member of a marginalized community
3. **ACTIVISM:** Identify ways to bring racial justice work to your school



▲ From the training in answer to the question: What does it look like in your classroom to center the most marginalized?

▲ A slide from the training, which asks educators what it means to be a member of a marginalized community and how they can bring racial justice to their schools.

encouraged to participate in ongoing work and reflection throughout the school year.

Jones and Myart-Cruz’s workshop dovetails with this goal. “We must make Black lives matter at school every day,” Myart-Cruz says. “When we talk about Black Lives Matter at School, it’s beyond wearing a shirt. It’s beyond having a Zoom background. It’s beyond having a poster. Educators, what are you embodying?”

The training has evolved and expanded over time. It now embraces the community schools model and provides more support for members to continue the work after the training. Jones and Myart-Cruz have continued to facilitate during the pandemic, leading Black Lives Matter at School trainings with educators at El Cerrito High School, with health and human services professionals who work in multiple school districts, as part of CTA’s Tuesday Takeovers for Racial and Social Justice, and in numerous CTA service centers. The duo was recently joined as facilitators by CTA Board member Taunya Jaco.

Jones hopes educators take away from this training:

- A better understanding of racial justice movements and the role educators can play in these movements.
- A historical understanding of how Black students are marginalized within the public school system and

the connection with all marginalized groups.

- Actions they can do at the classroom, school site and local levels to ensure that Black lives do in fact matter.

“The training starts an important discussion and breaks down racial narratives that deep down we all have to face. With the awareness, members can be more thoughtful and intentional about creating change on their campus,” Jones says. “Though we give examples of where to begin, undoing decades of disinvestment in Black youth will not be answered in one training. Coming into the space, educators need to understand that this is a first step, but they have to continue walking if sustainable change is going to happen.”

The Black Lives Matter at School Year of Purpose asks educators to reflect on their own work in relation to anti-racist pedagogy and abolitionist practice, persistently challenging themselves to center Black lives in their classrooms. Jones says educators need to create spaces to listen to students and provide and support opportunities for students to lead.

“What that looks like can vary. For UTLA, it meant hosting student forums where parents, educators

and community members actually had to stop and listen to the lived experience of our Black students,” says Jones. “It also meant supporting student groups and providing opportunities for student groups to lead.”

Jones and Myart-Cruz are offering the training at the Equity and Human Rights Conference and the Good Teaching Conference in March; for more information, visit [cta.org/conferences](https://cta.org/conferences). Members can also reach out directly to set up trainings by emailing [ejones@cta.org](mailto:ejones@cta.org). ■

**“When you center the most marginalized and create an educational environment where they can succeed, you have created an environment where all can succeed.”**

—Erika Jones, CTA Board member

# Growing Into the Role

## Camille Butts steps up to lead

**IN SUMMER 2020**, following the atrocities committed against African Americans and others, high school history teacher Camille Butts emailed her superintendent to propose the district recognize and participate in the annual Black Lives Matter at School Week of Action. Butts, a member of the Association of Colton Educators in the Inland Empire, borrowed language from other CTA efforts to present a resolution to the school board, which approved it.

“That February I utilized the BLM at School guiding principles as introductory lessons and put them into my activities for the week, highlighting African American contributions,” says Butts, who recently became co-chair of CTA’s Racial Equity Affairs Committee (REAC) and also serves as chair of CTA’s African American Caucus. Her lessons, of course, extend well beyond the week and Black History Month, and continue in 2022. As she explains, her growth as an activist and educator led her to speak up and take action.

### *On why she became an educator*

I made the decision when I was in second grade. I enjoy explaining things and making connections, helping people achieve their goals and dreams.

### *On why she’s an activist*

Wrongs happen, and people need to take their experience to the right people so reparations can take place and the wrong is corrected. It’s challenging, because you become the person whom everyone tells, “You’ve got to get this fixed.” Advocating for people and finding solutions have positive aspects, but it’s also limiting when people think you have all the decision-making power.

### *On getting past challenges*

Working with people of different backgrounds, experience levels and life experiences and finding commonalities takes many more skills than I ever thought. For example, I’m involved with the Democratic Central Committee, and building bridges between radical factions and skeptics is hard. You have to keep your perspective and work on what’s attainable.

### *On involvement with the union*

My union helped while I was coaching at my school in a traditionally female sport, with differences in expectations and pay between

male and female coaches across all school sports. I became much more involved in the union after that.

### *On gaining confidence as an activist*

In my 10-year career I’ve undergone a progression to where I can confidently address BLM at School principles and the value of diversity. Three years ago, for example, I was not confident talking about Black LGBTQ+ and trans people because I was scared people in my community would not understand and I would get into trouble. Now I feel supported by my district, as well as by my CTA family and their actions.

### *On leading REAC*

As co-chair of REAC, I work with the other ethnic caucuses to monitor ethnic minority representation and advise the CTA Board in addressing the needs of California’s ethnically diverse student and educator populations. I’m hoping that California will soon meet its NEA bylaw goal [3-1(g)] of having our Representative Assembly delegation reflect the ethnic minority population of the state.

### *On how to attract and retain more Black educators*

There are financial aspects that need to be figured out. Barriers to higher education, which seems to be the only route to becoming an educator, limit access.

Having role models in administration and classrooms can show Black students that this career is an option.

### *On finding support and motivation*

Seeing all the ways my CTA friends and family are walking the walk motivates me. So does my work with the American Legion Auxiliary, which supports military families and encourages civic engagement especially among rising high school senior females. ALA volunteers — heads of companies, local elected officials, educators — put them-

selves out there to make change. Parents, friends, church, faith all help.



Camille Butts

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CTA’s Human Rights department works with the Racial Equity Affairs Committee and local Equity Teams to host Tuesday Takeovers for Racial and Social Justice, webinars on multiple topics that welcome all. Webinars are recorded. Watch “Unapologetically Black,” a conversation with CTA Black, female educators and leaders moderated by Camille Butts, at [cta.org/reac](https://cta.org/reac).



# Read-Alouds

## to Boost Students' Creativity

*Reading aloud to middle and high school students encourages them to think critically, fosters a sense of community, and makes learning fun*

By **Carly Van Der Wende**

**“DID I HAVE YOU** in seventh grade language arts?”

As the spark of recognition intensifies, the first question is followed by, “Do you still read *The Glass Castle* to your students?”

Read-alouds leave an impression on students long after they leave the classroom.

There are different ways you can include read-alouds within your classroom routines. You can use them as a warm-up for the day’s lesson or integrate them as part of a larger unit of study about reading or writing effectively. Students can even use read-alouds themselves to go on self-guided reading and writing journeys.

The following is a lesson where I used a read-aloud to teach writing and then examples of independent interdisciplinary projects that students can do.

### A read-aloud lesson

**Vocabulary building** (5–10 minutes):

When students enter the room, a new vocabulary word from the day’s read-aloud is on display. This immediately engages kids, and they quickly settle in. For one thing, they know they’ll soon hear the read-aloud.

We study and understand the word in a variety of ways. Through vocabulary immersion games, students learn how to apply the unfamiliar word by writing original sentences, researching synonyms and antonyms, and creating a pictorial representation of it. The culmination of this portion of class is that students share their work with their peers.

As an extension of the lesson, when students come across unfamiliar words, they use these same vocabulary techniques. It’s inspiring to hear one student say to another, “I also learned that word


from a book I was reading!” When students read their own books, I encourage them to make their own word discoveries as part of our vocabulary practice.

**The read-aloud** (5 minutes): After we discuss as a class the key story developments from the previous day, I begin the read-aloud. Looking around the room, I can tell the students are completely immersed. At this point, the text for them comes to life. To sustain the buzz in the classroom and encourage discussion, I make sure the read-aloud ends on a cliffhanger.

**Discussion** (5–10 minutes): We transition from the read-aloud to students talking in small groups and then into a whole-class discussion. Instead of my asking a single question, which may limit responses, students use discussion starters like the ones below, which allow for a more creative flow of ideas and increased participation:

- I’m thinking...
- What stood out to me was...
- A question I have is...
- I’m wondering...
- A connection I made was...
- I feel...
- I disagree with...
- I can relate to...
- I would change...

This is a student-led segment of class where students call on one another. It frequently results in passionate, animated debates, with everyone eager to express their viewpoints. “If I were the dad, I would never have done that!” one student might argue. “What he should’ve done instead was...” Then another student will add to the discussion. It’s impossible to overstate the importance of selecting an evocative read-aloud text for stimulating productive discussion.

**Reading and writing mini-lesson and workshop** (30 minutes): I use the read-aloud text as a model to 

demonstrate a reading or writing strategy during the mini-lesson. Take, for example, the goal of encouraging students to include setting details in their writing. I'll begin by handing out copies of the read-aloud text. Next, students collaborate in small groups to highlight, analyze, and discuss the passage's setting details.

Students then go through their own independent reading book looking for examples of setting details. Finally, they write and highlight vivid setting details in their own pieces, then present their favorites to the rest of the class.

## Further creative connections

The read-aloud also provides a platform for other creative explorations. Here are a couple to consider.

**Projects:** After reading aloud Jeannette Walls' memoir *The Glass Castle*, my students are inspired to create real or digital models and floor plans of their own glass castles. Everything from cardboard dioramas and meticulous doodles to Minecraft and Tinkercad mansions demonstrates my students' ingenuity and excitement. During a gallery walk showcase, they describe their models using the vocabulary they've learned. They share feedback and celebrate each other's creativity.

**Playwriting and performances:** Students reenact or create new situations based on the day's read-aloud. Groups use the

## Interdisciplinary Connections

**READ-ALOUDS CAN BE expanded outside of language arts. Here are just a handful of the areas that my students explored based on their own interests in subjects related to *The Glass Castle*.**

### Social studies:

- Create tourist brochures with information about the cities where the characters lived.
- Read articles about underlying issues in the United States, such as poverty and food insecurity.

### Math and science:

- Collect and compare statistical data about the various cities where the author lived.
- Investigate things that interested the father character, such as binary numerals and the solar system.

### Music:

- Write and perform songs based on characters' experiences.

guiding questions below to plan out their ideas before drafting their skits.

- Describe the characters in the scene. How do they look? How do they act? Decide which group members will perform each role.
- Will your scene have a narrator or be told from a first-person perspective?
- What problem does a character or characters face?
- What's the theme or lesson? What message should your audience take away from your performance that will leave an impression?
- What props and/or creative elements will you include?

For example, I've had students write a scene from Quixote the cat's perspective from *The Glass Castle*, depicting his new life after getting tossed out of a car window.

When students act out characters' experiences, it also cultivates empathy and helps them to relate to the story on a deeper level. Often my students choose to reenact scenes of homelessness, filming themselves outdoors in winter, lacking essentials.

Read-alouds encourage enthusiasm and creativity in the classroom, transforming isolated lessons into ones that stick. They encourage students to think critically, foster a sense of community in the classroom, and make learning fun and enjoyable. I've never looked back since I started reading aloud to my classes years ago. ■



*The Glass Castle: A Memoir*, by Jeannette Walls, is the story of the author and her siblings growing up in extreme poverty as they weathered their parents' dysfunctional behavior. *School Library Journal* notes the book is appropriate for ninth graders and up, and says Walls "presents an objective portrait of her circumstances that is both poignant and forgiving."

This article originally appeared on [edutopia.org](http://edutopia.org).



## 7

# CLEVER, TEACHER-TESTED TECH HACKS

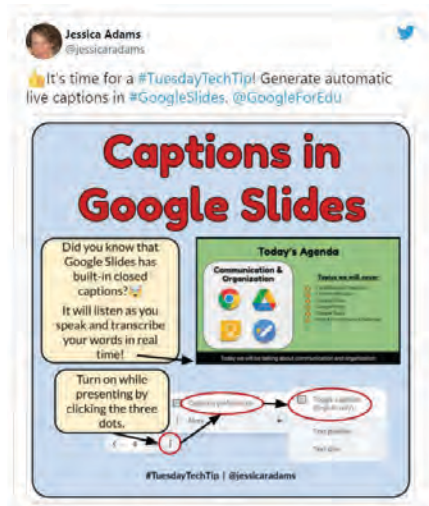
From dropping a pin into online texts to teaching students the art of checklists, you can up your edtech game

By **Paige Tutt**

**AFTER MONTHS OF** remote and hybrid instruction, many teachers have become accomplished technology users, leveraging sophisticated tech tools to facilitate learning both in and out of the classroom. But like any area of expertise, there are always smart ways to sharpen skills, streamline workloads and increase accessibility.

While social media can tend to feel like an **#edtech** firehose, it can also be a rich resource — especially once you home in on teachers curating useful advice they've learned on the job.

Here are seven standout teacher-sourced tech tips.



1

## PRESENT GOOGLE SLIDES WITH LIVE CAPTIONS

To boost accessibility in Google Slides, try switching on automatic captioning, which displays the speaker's words alongside each slide. After entering presentation mode, hover your cursor in the bottom left corner of your screen to bring up the menu. Click the three dots, then select Captions preferences, and Toggle captions (English only). Google will listen as you present and transcribe your words as you speak. (Tip courtesy of Jessica Adams.)

2

## MAGNIFY YOUR CAPTION SIZE IN YOUTUBE

When playing a YouTube video in class, it might be difficult for all students to see and read the captions clearly, but this simple trick eliminates the problem: After selecting closed captions, simply press the + (plus) key on your keyboard to increase the text size. Pressing the - (minus) key decreases the text size. (Tip courtesy of Tony Vincent.)



## 3 TEACH ORGANIZATION WITH INTERACTIVE CHECKLISTS

Checklists can help build students' organizational skills, allowing them to monitor multistep tasks or track progress on complex projects. Click on the Checklist icon in the toolbar or use the keyboard shortcut Ctrl+Shift+9 (Command+Shift+9 on a Mac). Be sure to show students how to check off completed items or tasks by clicking the displayed box on the left, which updates the line with a strikethrough. (Tip courtesy of Jessica Adams.)



## 6 LIVEN UP GOOGLE FORMS WITH AUDIO

Have a hunch your Google Forms could be a bit more engaging? The application Mote allows users to add audio to questions or answers. While you can use the app for free on a limited basis — there's a 20-motes-per-month cap and 30-second recording time limit for each entry when used for free — the ability to access additional features requires paying a fee. Once the app is installed, the Mote icon will appear when creating a new question. Tapping the icon once will begin recording audio instantly, and when you've completed the message, click the Done button. You can then click anywhere else on the page and Mote will create a clickable voice note card that can be listened to immediately. (Tip courtesy of Lisa Nydick.)

## 4 QUIT ENDLESS SCROLLING

No more scrolling down to page 158. A new feature in Google Chrome makes it possible to send readers directly to a specific section in a text. On a PC, highlight the section you want students to read within a text, right-click and select "copy link to highlight." On a Mac, click your trackpad and the Ctrl button on your keyboard at the same time, then select "copy link to highlight!" This generates a URL ending in a # symbol, which you can then share with others. Upon visiting the new URL, readers are taken directly to the highlighted portion. (Tip courtesy of Dan Stitzel.)

## 5 KEEP YOUR DOCUMENTS PRISTINE

Eliminate the possibility of students or colleagues inadvertently typing directly in your document by granting users access only after they make their own copy to work in. First, make sure you've shared your document as either "anyone with the link" or "public." Next, click the URL in the search bar and replace the word edit at the end of the URL with the word copy. Then click enter (or return on a Mac) and you're all set! Share this new URL and it will force users to make a copy of the document prior to opening it. (Tip courtesy of Tony Vincent.)

## 7 ELIMINATE DISTRACTIONS FROM YOUTUBE

YouTube can be a powerful tool for teaching and learning, but using it in the classroom can be a bit of a gamble, with ads popping up and distracting video suggestions lining the page. Adding a simple hyphen to the YouTube link, so that YouTube appears as yout-ube, solves this problem, allowing students to view content on the site without interruptions. (Tip courtesy of Tony Vincent.)

This story originally appeared on [edutopia.org](https://www.edutopia.org).

It's been two years since the first COVID-19 case was identified in the U.S and changed our lives. And since then, safety, guided by the science, has been our top priority — the safety of all educators, our students, and families.



**E. Toby Boyd**

CTA President and kindergarten educator

#CTAStateCouncil

#WeAreCTA

# READYING FOR CHALLENGES AHEAD

## Meeting remotely again, State Council sets a vision for the coming year

By **Julian Peoples**

**IN WHAT WAS** planned to be a return to meeting in person for the first time since January 2020, CTA State Council of Education met virtually Jan. 13-16 after the uncontrolled spread of the COVID-19 Omicron variant forced a quick shift to a remote format.

It was the kind of flexibility in the face of uncertainty that educators have exhibited for almost two years. CTA President E. Toby Boyd thanked State Council members for their understanding, noting that while much has changed since the beginning of the pandemic, CTA's focus has remained the same.


“It's been two years since the first

COVID-19 case was identified in the U.S. and changed our lives. And since then, safety, guided by the science, has been our top priority — the safety of all educators, our students, and families,” Boyd said.

In his report to State Council, Boyd addressed the impacts of Omicron on schools across the state and outlined what is being done to keep educators and students safe. Boyd said CTA continues to support in-person instruction *as long as it is safe to do so*.

“Educators and students must have the safety precautions they need. There must be regular testing. And there must be enough staff to run a school,” said

Boyd, who outlined steps to be taken immediately in a January letter to Gov. Gavin Newsom, including providing high-quality masks for educators and restoring COVID supplemental sick leave. “No educator should have to choose between going without pay and spreading the virus to their students and their families.”

In addition to the ongoing pandemic, there are numerous challenges facing educators and public schools, including upcoming elections and a fringe minority that wants to prevent students from learning the truth about our nation's history. Several dangerous ballot initiatives, including a voucher 



◀ CTA President E. Toby Boyd and Secretary-Treasurer Leslie Littman at State Council.



◀ A panel on community schools, clockwise from top left: CTA Vice President David B. Goldberg, Kampala Taiz-Rancifer (Oakland EA), Grant Schuster (Anaheim Secondary TA), and Ingrid Villeda (United Teachers Los Angeles).

measure, were proposed by those seeking to privatize public education and profit off neighborhood schools. Fortunately, most of these initiatives have been withdrawn, but their proponents promise to bring them back in 2024. Boyd said we will be ready to take them on.

“While we face a multitude of challenges, it’s not as if we don’t have the tools, the skills and the knowledge to address them. We just need to make sure we use them, and the first step is to organize,” Boyd said. “We have the means to address the challenges we face, and organizing will be key.”

A panel of educators led by CTA Vice President David Goldberg discussed the

transformative power of community schools and the more than \$3 billion investment from the state that could see a third of public schools become community schools in the coming years. A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources with an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, leadership, and community engagement, leading to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities.

“Our students deserve more than just to survive. Another world is possible,” said Goldberg, noting that more information is available at [cta.org/communityschools](https://cta.org/communityschools).

“Community schools are the antidote to a system that puts our students’ needs last.”

(Read “Building the Heart and Hub,” our October/November 2021 story on community schools in California, at [cta.org/educator/communityschools](https://cta.org/educator/communityschools).)

State Council elected members to the following offices: Kisha Borden, CTA Board of Directors District P; Angela Der Ramos, NEA Board of Directors District 4; Maritza Avila, NEA Board of Directors District 5; Wil Page, NEA Board of Directors District 6; and Ruth Luevand, NEA Board of Directors District 13.

State Council’s next meeting is scheduled for March 25-27, in person in Los Angeles. ■

**PURR-FECT!**

**SHOUTOUT TO** Los Gatos Elementary Teachers Association, whose creative logo incorporates *gatos* (Spanish for cats) and makes us smile. Is your chapter logo something we should note? Send it to [editor@cta.org](mailto:editor@cta.org), with “logo” in the subject line, or let us know at [#logoCTA](https://twitter.com/logoCTA).





▲ El Dorado High School student, elementary school children admire the toy cars.



# A Community “Driver”

## Student-made toys bring joy, thanks in part to CTA grant

**FOR 18 YEARS**, Lance Gunnensen has offered students an opportunity to learn *and* bring joy to others. Every fall, the career technical education (CTE) teacher has his woodworking and engineering students at El Dorado High School design and produce toys — cars, train cars and other items. The toys are painted by the school’s art students. Students also turn the woodshop into a holiday wonderland for the elementary school kids who come to visit and receive their gifts. The young visitors are entertained with games, food, and music by the high school band.

Because of the pandemic, the much-loved project was put on hold in 2020, which “devastated Lance,” says Stephanie Davis, president of El Dorado Union High School District Faculty Association. But in fall 2021 it was back on and expanded — thanks to educators’

enthusiasm and energy, and supported in large part by a CTA Community Engagement Project Grant.



Lance Gunnensen

The El Dorado chapter joined several other CTA chapters in El Dorado County — Gold Oak Teachers Association, Mother Lode Teachers Association, and Placerville Elementary Educators Association — to apply for the \$1,000 grant. The money was primarily used for materials and supplies to make the toys, and transportation from the high school to participating elementary schools to deliver them. The grant covered about two-thirds of what was needed, with the chapters chipping in the rest.

Gunnensen and his students ramped up production from previous years’ 100 to 300 toys. “We make it like industry and figure out patterns of production,” says Gunnensen, who serves on CTA State Council’s





Stephanie Davis

Adult Alternative CTE Committee and is the CTE subcommittee chair. “We have a production line. Students rotate into positions at different stations.”

Other students and educators took part. “At nights, high school AVID students, middle school leadership students and teachers, parents, school board members, and superintendents helped wrap the gifts,” says Davis.

Gunnerson’s students dressed as elves to give the toys to delighted elementary school kids.

“What I teach leads to lucrative careers,” says Gunnerson, explaining his thinking behind the project. “Students enjoyed what they learn

*“This project lets students give a gift and recognize they’re making a difference in someone’s life, that they have talents and services they can provide to the community.”*

—Lance Gunnerson, El Dorado UHSD Faculty Association

but didn’t understand their newly gained skills could have positive effects in the world around them. This project lets them give a gift and recognize they’re making a difference in someone’s life, that they have talents and services they can provide to the community.”

He says he often gets calls from businesses and industry requesting talented students who are interested in working in manufacturing and construction, as it’s become increasingly harder to fill jobs for lack of a trained talent pool.

He notes that local businesses contribute to the project, making a positive influence that extends well beyond students. “Businesses, parents and the community at large get involved, from offering food and funding to helping in the woodshop.”



▲ El Dorado High School students dress as elves to deliver gifts and engage children in creative activities.

### CTA Community Engagement Project Grants

Many CTA chapters work with individual stakeholders and community organizations on behalf of their students. If your chapter is interested in starting a new project to explore building community connections and needs seed funding, consider applying for a CTA Community Engagement Project Grant. Contact your Regional UniServ staff or send email to [communityeventsandgrants@cta.org](mailto:communityeventsandgrants@cta.org).

Davis and the presidents of the other chapters who won the community grant will likely reapply this year. Chapters representing other elementary district feeder schools may also join in for an even bigger impact on the community.

Gunnerson is ready. “I have some kids who say the event has encouraged them to sign up for my class again,” he laughs. ■



# AUTO SAFETY

**Does your car, or your teen's car, have a hidden deadly safety recall defect? Here's how to find out and fix it.** By **Rosemary Shahan**

**YOU'RE DOING ALL** you can to make your classroom safe. But what about your own safety? For most teachers, the riskiest part of your day is driving to and from work. Adding to the risk: You and your family may be riding in a car with dangerous unrepaired safety recall defects.

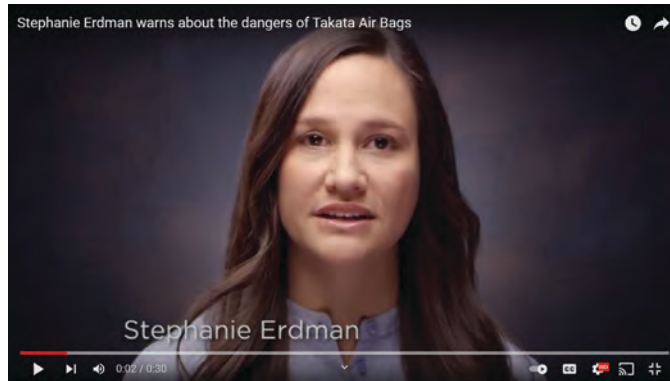
Air Force officer Stephanie Erdman nearly lost an eye when the Takata airbag in her 2003 Honda Civic exploded in a 2013 collision. Corona resident Delia Robles, a 50-year-old grandmother, was not as lucky: In 2017, on her way to get a flu shot, the 2001 Civic she was driving collided with a pickup truck. According to her son, she was driving only 25 mph and always wore a seat belt. Ordinarily, she would have survived. But the Takata airbag exploded upon impact and caused her death. Honda had recalled the car years before the crash, but the defective airbag was never repaired.

Most airbags protect drivers and passengers from serious injuries and death. But Takata used a cheaper, more volatile chemical to inflate its airbags, causing metal shrapnel to slice into drivers' and passengers' faces, necks and torsos. Over 100 million airbags in vehicles produced by GM, Ford, Fiat Chrysler/Jeep, Honda/Acura, Toyota/Lexus, Nissan/Infiniti, Subaru, BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Kia, Hyundai and other major auto manufacturers were built with recalled Takata airbags. They have caused hundreds of devastating injuries, including blindness, and dozens of fatalities.

**6.3 million vehicles currently registered in California have at least one potentially deadly unrepaired safety recall defect. Is your car one of them?**

*Rosemary Shahan is president of the Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety Foundation, which works with CTA as part of the Consumer Federation of California. For more information, visit [carsfoundation.org](https://carsfoundation.org), where you'll also find tips for buying a used car.*





When Stephanie Erdman's Takata airbag deployed after a car crash, metal shrapnel shot through the airbag and into Erdman's right eye and neck. As she later explained to the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, she took her Honda Civic to the dealership for service three times after the dealership received the recall notice for her car; they never replaced the airbags. Eventually Honda notified her by phone message about the defect — three days after her accident. In an NHTSA safety spot, she urges viewers to check if their car is under recall.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

### How can I find out if my car, or a car I might buy, has an unrepaired safety recall?

It's easy, and the information is free. All it takes is the car's Vehicle Identification Number, or VIN, and access to the NHTSA website, [nhtsa.gov/recalls](https://www.nhtsa.gov/recalls).

### Where can I find my car's VIN?

The VIN is a unique 17-character identifier that's like a fingerprint for a specific car. It's located on the left side of the dashboard near the windshield, plus on the vehicle registration, auto repair orders, and auto insurance documents.

### Where should I check the safety recall status for my car, or a car I'm thinking of buying?

Simply enter the VIN at the NHTSA website at [nhtsa.gov/recalls](https://www.nhtsa.gov/recalls). The information is free. All auto manufacturers (except very small specialty companies) that sell vehicles in the U.S. are required to frequently update the safety recall data they provide to NHTSA. You can also check the manufacturer's website or call the manufacturer's toll-free number.

### What about private databases like Carfax or Autocheck?

Carfax has some safety recall data, but it may not be current or complete. Autocheck often fails to include safety recall information. Bottom line: Don't rely on them.

### Does the National Motor Vehicle Title Information System (NMVTIS) include safety recall information?

*No.* The U.S. Department of Justice established NMVTIS to provide information about severely wrecked or flooded vehicles that are declared a total loss. But NMVTIS does not include safety recall information. If a car dealer tells you an NMVTIS report shows a car doesn't have an unrepaired safety recall, he is trying to trick you.

### Who pays for safety recall repairs?

Federal law requires auto manufacturers to pay for safety recall repairs for at least 15 years. Many manufacturers pay for recall repairs longer than that.

### Where can I get free safety recall repairs?

Auto manufacturers authorize their franchised dealers to perform safety recalls, assist with training technicians, and reimburse them for the work. For example, if you have a recalled Ford, any Ford dealer should perform the recall repairs at no cost to you.

### I bought a car from CarMax. They advertise that all their vehicles must pass a 125-point inspection. Does that mean it's recall-free?

*No!* Unfortunately, CarMax, Vroom, Carvana, AutoNation, and other car dealers routinely fail to get the free safety recall repairs done before they sell cars to the public. Never trust a car dealer to tell you whether a car has an unrepaired safety recall defect. Always check yourself.

## MANY KINDS OF DEFECTS

The Takata airbag defect is the most common reason for recalls, but other recall defects in various cars and trucks also pose a serious threat.

According to the nation's top auto safety agency, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), "All safety recalls are serious." Other typical safety recall defects:

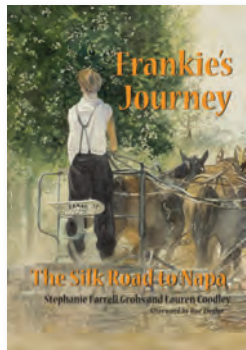
- Faulty brakes.
- Loss of steering, including steering wheels that come off in the driver's hands.
- Catching on fire.
- Sticking accelerator pedals.
- Seat belts that fail.
- Hoods that fly open, obscuring your vision while you're driving.
- Axles that break while you're driving, causing a loss of control.

An alarming 6.3 million vehicles currently registered in California have at least one potentially deadly unrepaired safety recall defect. Is your car one of them?



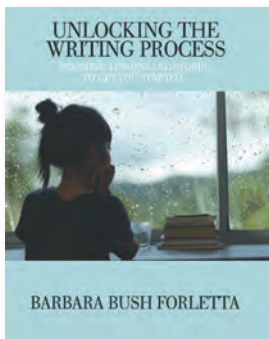


Continued from page 56



## ◀ **Another Silk Road**

From 1902 until its closure in 1928, the St. Joseph's Agriculture Institute in the heart of Napa Valley taught boys how to work with their hands, raise crops and learn a trade. *Frankie's Journey: The Silk Road to Napa* is a fictional first-person account of one of those boys, who were ages 9-18 and mostly poor kids from San Francisco. Written by Stephanie Farrell Grohs, Napa Valley College Faculty Association, and Napa historian Lauren Coodley, the book is appropriate for young readers and provides a unique view and history of boys coming of age through agriculture, including silk-farming. On Amazon.



## ◀ **Teaching Kids to Write**

Barbara Forletta, CTA/NEA-Retired, spent 30 years in the classroom, teaching grades 1-12; 18 of those years were focused on students with special needs at the secondary level. Her new book *Unlocking the Writing Process: Inspiring Lessons and Stories to Get You Started* addresses the difficulties in getting students — especially those with learning disabilities — to write, and using visual arts and other techniques to help. The 12 lessons, in the form of a teacher's guide, include such topics as journal writing, vocabulary development, the study of famous artists, African American art and history, and Greek and Roman mythology. Lessons are primarily for grades 6-12, but they can be adjusted for younger students. On Amazon.

## EMEID: Growing Leadership Skills

Continued from page 12

Participants are paired with a coach who assists in identifying steps to achieve individual goals. "Being mentored on my goals helped me define them and know my direction," recalls Gregory. As a result, she has become very involved in equity issues.

A member of West Sacramento Teachers Association, Gregory is active in multiple CTA leadership areas, including the American Indian/Alaska Native Caucus, the State Council Civil Rights in Education Committee, and the Racial Equity Affairs Committee. In 2021, Gregory received CTA's American Indian/Alaska Native Human Rights Award in Honor of Jim Clark for her advocacy of Native equity.

As chair, she expects EMEID to continue expanding and recruiting more BIPOC members who can help CTA's work. "The more diverse voices that reverberate through CTA and our locals, the sooner we will have a more equitable educational system."

Got something for these pages — a book, blog, album, video, podcast or other creation? Tell us at [editor@cta.org](mailto:editor@cta.org) with "Lit From Within" in the subject line. We lean toward new(ish) work that can be used in the classroom.

# Lit From Within

Often educators' creativity spills over into a book, blog, app or other work. We're happy to showcase members' talents.

## St. Patrick's Day Prankster

Each year during the month of March up until the Irish holiday, Lucky the Leprechaun comes to visit children at school and at home. Lucky creates magic by hiding toys, leaving messages and surprises, and even making messes while no one is looking. *Lucky the Leprechaun on the Loose*, by first grade teacher Maria Thompson, Walnut Creek Teachers Association, started as a tradition in her classroom. A little leprechaun figurine would intermittently move around the classroom, then on March 17 students would arrive to a "mess" (chairs tilted, confetti on the floor, etc.), with personalized messages and treats on their desks from Lucky. A fun read for children everywhere. On Amazon.



## School, Love, and Intergalactic War

Lance Novak, Las Virgenes Educators Association, teaches English at Agoura High School in Los Angeles County, often to at-risk students.

Through his teaching and mentoring experiences, he writes fiction revolving around troubled outlier teens who struggle with the societal pressures of a seemingly apathetic, conformist world.

Novak's third young adult novel publishes in April, the first in a science fiction/space opera series for middle and high schoolers. *Miss Sophia Sanchez: Intergalactic Starfighter Pilot Extraordinaire* is about a feisty sophomore who wants to fly an Excalibur starfighter in a famed squadron. But she has yet to finish high school or pass her spaceflight exams, and is suspended from the spaceflight program for punching a rival. Then a mysterious starship shows up with rumors of an invasion by lizard-like aliens, and soon she's starting to fall for dauntless crewman Tristan Crawford. Can Sophia save her people? On Amazon.



## Zombies vs. Vampires

Solomon Petchers, a 25-year educator and Murrieta Educators Association member, is an award-winning young adult author who specializes in suspense and horror. His books *Feasters: An Apocalyptic Tale* and *Feasters: The Circle*, published in 2020 and 2021, tell the tale of three teenage vampires who are trying to survive in a postapocalyptic zombie world where the flesh-eating Feasters rule the streets. On Amazon.

Continued on page 55

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