June 1, 2013

Good morning Council!

It’s only been about two months since we last met, but a lot has happened and there will be a lot happening at this State Council, including honoring our Executive Director, Carolyn Doggett.

We have a few things planned for you my friend.

But before I get into CTA turning 150, moving forward with building our long-term strategic plan and the biggest change in school funding since the passage of Prop 13 – a topic that I know will be discussed in several committees today…I want to start with taking a moment to acknowledge our colleagues in Moore, Oklahoma, who just two weeks ago, showed the world, once again, the stuff educators are made of.

Teachers in the Plaza Towers and Briarwood Elementary Schools in Oklahoma used their bodies as human shields to protect their students. In one case, rescuers in a school hallway pulled a car off a teacher who had shielded three kids from harm. Another teacher was found in a bathroom stall covering several children.

The devastation this tornado caused is hard to comprehend. I know America was watching in awe as the events unfolded. I bet they saw what I did: Teachers are made of tough stuff.

We love our students and when they are in harm’s way, we will do everything in our power to protect them. It’s who we are. It’s what we do.

Let’s take a moment of silence for the victims of those devastating storms and in honor of the courage that saved so many lives.

CTA has donated to the Oklahoma Education Association Relief Fund. If you would like to donate, just visit the CTA website.

Month of celebrations

Here in CTA, I’m so proud to say we’ve been putting students first and fighting for public education for 150 years. I hope all of you had a chance to take part in Day of the Teacher festivities and in honoring our Education Support Professionals. I know some of you were lucky enough to do the Chicken Dance with our own Mikki Cichocki in Yokuts Park in Bakersfield. There were so many amazing stories shared on Facebook.

The other celebration that took place last month was CTA’s official 150th anniversary on May 9. We received a signed proclamation from the state legislature, commending CTA for the vital role we’ve played in improving the quality of education in California.

And when you look back at what we’ve accomplished and what we fought for, you know that’s true. I hope you’ve seen our ads on TV and heard them on the radio over the past few weeks. These ads, featuring several CTA members, including a few of you in this room, really do tell our story.

Yes, it was CTA that fought to establish free public schools for all children by getting funds for schools teaching non-white students.
It was CTA that secured free textbooks for kids, helped establish community colleges, and led efforts to outlaw child labor.

It was CTA that helped establish schools for the children of migrant workers, protected women educators from getting fired because they got married, and opposed the internment of Japanese Americans.

It was CTA that helped pass the collective bargaining law for public employees, that passed more than $35 billion in statewide school construction bonds…and it was CTA that established an internationally recognized program – QEIA – to help lower-performing schools.

For 150 years, CTA has been a mix of advocacy for public education and social justice...because really one cannot thrive without the other.

We've made the tough decisions and done the right thing, even when it wasn't popular. We've had many, many successes over the years. Most recently, of course, was the passage of Proposition 30.

Now, I know some of your chapters are continuing to do battle at the bargaining tables. Some districts are ignoring the fruits of our coalition efforts and continue to sit on those huge reserves.

But we are already seeing the impact of Prop. 30. It prevented $6 billion in additional budget cuts, which resulted in a massive reduction in pink slips this year.

Last year, more than 20,000 pink slips were issued. By this year’s final deadline last month, it was down to 17-hundred. We did that!

And over the next seven years, Prop. 30 raises $47 billion for our schools and colleges. That’s a giant step in the right direction.

May Revise

Governor Jerry Brown continues to keep public education a priority in the state budget. His revised budget includes an additional $1 billion that is earmarked to help implement the Common Core State Standards and another $1.6 billion to repay those funding deferrals to local school districts. That’s good news on both fronts.

In Sacramento, CTA has been demanding that all the money owed to schools be restored. That’s the song we’ve been singing day in and day out. We’ve also been making sure lawmakers know that schools must have additional resources for the enormous amount of work that must take place to implement the new standards.

New textbooks must be written, curriculum designed and teachers must get the quality professional development they need. The transition to Common Core Standards will greatly impact the way we teach and we must have support and resources to make this successful.

But when I talk about the Common Core Standards, I’m not talking about the tests and assessments that come with them. That implementation is a whole other ballgame.

And based on what we’ve seen so far, I’m with NEA President Dennis Van Roekel, it’s time for a moratorium on testing.

For higher education, the May Revision also includes another $30 million for community colleges and maintains the $500 million increase proposed in January for the UC and CSU. It also freezes student fees through 2016–17.
There is still much to be done to adequately fund our schools, but our hard work is paying off and there is hope for the future. You know, it was 45 years ago this week that Sen. Robert F. Kennedy was shot down just three miles from here, at the Ambassador Hotel.

Like Martin Luther King Jr., who was assassinated two months earlier, Bobby Kennedy believed in the power of education.

In a speech at the University of Alabama in 1966, he said this:

“Education is the key to jobs, to income, to human dignity itself...In the last analysis the quality of education is a question of commitment–of whether people like us are willing to go into the classrooms as teachers or parents, as volunteers or just as concerned citizens, to ensure that every child learns to the full limit of his capabilities.”

Local Control Funding Formula


That brings me to the Local Control Funding Formula. I know you, like me, believe that every student should have the opportunity to reach his or her full potential. How many times have you had to keep moving further in your lesson, when you could tell by the lost looks on a few faces that they weren’t quite getting it?

Maybe they needed more one-on-one attention that your class size made impossible. Maybe they needed to go to the reading lab but it’s gone, or maybe they needed the librarian, but your school let go of the librarian two years ago. Or maybe their home life has been stressful lately and they just need someone to listen and tell them it’s going to be okay, but there’s only one counselor in your school and she is swamped with standardized testing responsibilities.

These are the realities we face every day. These are the realities our students face every day. It’s sad, but true, that every student in California doesn’t have the same opportunities for success. Some are going to take more resources to get them to where they need to be.

It’s a fact State Council recognized when you adopted the State Budget Guiding principles in April. And it’s why it is so important for us to support the GOALS of the Governor’s Local Control Funding Formula.

CTA has been fighting for equal and equitable funding for all kids since we established free public schools in 1866. But there's still a lot of work to be done.

As Governor Brown so eloquently said in his State of the State address, “Equal treatment for children in unequal situations is not justice.”

Do we have some concerns and some unanswered questions about the L-C-F-F? Absolutely! There are changes that must be made. But remember, it is still a proposal, and it is still making its way through the legislature.

I will say this. As your president, I guarantee you, we will never support anything – including a district accountability plan – that undermines our collective bargaining rights or gives over-reaching authority to County Superintendents. It’s not going to happen.

This funding formula is different. It provides more funding to every school district. Let me say that again. It provides more funding to every school district.
But by then targeting additional resources to low-income students, English learners and foster kids…it gives us the opportunity to put our money where our mouths are...or where our principles are.

The idea that one-size funding fits all just doesn’t make sense...and we cannot ignore or deny that. CTA hasn’t and we won’t.

Providing more help and resources to students who need it is part of our proud history and is surely part of a proud future. It’s our core value for equality that led CTA to the Quality Education Investment Act to bring more resources to our students and schools of greatest need. For too long, too many at-risk kids have received too little attention from this state.

We have an historic opportunity to help change that for our students, for their families and for generations to come. The Local Control Funding Formula is bold and it is different. And yes, the change is even a little scary. But I remember collective bargaining being a little scary when it first became law.

There were new challenges, and we had to learn how to do things in a new way. This proposal is no different. There’s no denying that this is a redistribution of wealth. The fact is some districts need more because of the disadvantaged students and the disadvantaged communities they serve.

It’s time for all kids regardless of what side of the tracks they live on to have the same opportunities. And it’s time for us to take the risk...it’s time to for us take the lead...and it’s time do what’s right for the future of public education.

Are we willing to move this? I believe we are. We have to be the leaders who our members expect us to be. We have to be willing to look them in the eye and tell them what we're doing and why. Because it's the right thing to do.

The school funding system has needed to be changed for years and it’s up to us to make it happen. I know there will argument and debate in several committees today. And that’s essential and what we need to do.

It’s important that we discuss these issues and truly listen to each other so we can make the right decision for ALL the children of California and for their future. Just as a group of educators led the way in 1863, you are setting the direction and leading the way this weekend. We have an opportunity to be pioneers once again.

Leading isn’t always comfortable and it's never easy. But doing the right things always feels good in the long run. Yes, it's all about leading and it’s about our willingness to lead.

**Strategic Long-term Planning**

Speaking of leading, we continue to make strides in our strategic long-term planning process entitled: Your Voice. Our Union. Our Future.

Our goal is to best position CTA to reclaim and transform our profession and our union. This is a powerful and important process, and is occurring at a crucial time. It’s a bit daunting but it’s also exciting to be reviewing and renewing our mission.

We know that a strong CTA is built on the foundation of members who are active and engaged in strong local chapters. After considerable input from CTA members and staff, the Strategic Planning Group has identified eight areas upon which to focus and build a plan to lead CTA for the next 3 to 5 years.
You will hear more about these areas of focus during the Board Report. And if anyone wants more information or wants to share their ideas, we're going to have a special opportunity for that at 3 this afternoon. You can also read the latest at cta.org/ourfuture.

Conclusion

We have a lot to think about and to vote on this weekend. I want to leave you with something our founder, John Swett wrote in 1865 that I’m sure will resonate today.

He said, “California has taken her place in the front rank with those States whose material prosperity has been the result of public schools; and it is the duty of every legislator and every statesman to strengthen and perfect a system of schools which shall educate a free race of men and women for the next generation that shall inherit, with the boundless resources of the Golden State, something of the energy, enterprise, talent, character, and intelligence which have settled and civilized it."

That enterprising spirit still runs through California. Through the boys and girls we teach. It is our job to help them see it, to nurture it, to invest in it and give them every opportunity to succeed. I guarantee you, the next Sonia Sotomayor, the next Beyonce, the next Steve Jobs is in one of our classrooms.

Maybe they need a little more help. And maybe…with our leadership and our willingness to do what’s right, we can give it to them.

Thank you so much for what you do every day. And thank you so much for your work this weekend.