State Council Report, October 26-27

Hello, and welcome to our report as your delegates to CTA’s State Council of Education. My name is Dwight Young, and traveling with me from Lancaster is Gina Whipple. As delegates, we carry your voice and your concerns to the 1,000-member strong State Council, CTA’s legislative and deliberative body, and return to you with the news of what CTA is doing for the teachers and students in California’s public schools.

Each delegate is not only part of the whole State Council, but is also a member of a committee dedicated to issues of CTA’s advocacy. I am part of the Negotiations committee. As a member of this committee, I am learning about issues that affect our bargaining rights and the trends to watch. On this committee, I have already found my way onto the Legislative subcommittee, the group that closely watches bills moving through the state senate and assembly, as well as possible initiatives and referendums to be placed before voters that would affect Negotiations, for good or for ill. Similarly, Gina is on the Personal Rights and Responsibilities committee, and is also on the Legislative subcommittee for that group. We will be watching developments in our respective areas very closely this year.

There is a lot of work that is done, as well, in the General Sessions where all State Council members come together. Similar to the work done locally in Representative Councils at the local association level, or at the Representative Assembly at the national, NEA level, the delegates report out from various committees, offer proposals for action or recommendations to either support, oppose, or watch pending legislation. This is a summary of the action at the October meeting:

# President Vogel: Common Core, LCFF Let Us Engage Our Communities

## "This is our time!"

Repeating this refrain in his optimistic speech to Council delegates, President Dean E. Vogel set the tone for the Oct. 26-27 weekend's celebration of CTA's 150 years of advocacy and for seizing the right time to help transform student learning and California's future.

"As we are celebrating 150 years together, I think it's important to acknowledge our own accomplishments and to think of the opportunities we have right now to set the education agenda in this state and in this country," Vogel said.

He stressed the "tremendous opportunity" for educators to engage their local communities offered by the state's new Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), designed to help our students of greatest need succeed, and by the Common Core State Standards rolling out in our classrooms. Local school district conversations and collective bargaining sessions are deciding how to spend additional LCFF money.

"The LCFF gives us an opportunity to be right in the middle of that conversation to engage parents and to serve our communities," Vogel said. "The Common Core State Standards are refocusing what is happening in schools."

The new standards are a challenge to implement, but they "allow critical thinking skills to once again be part of our students' educational foundation, and we decide how to best teach that, not some district-level administrator who hasn't been in a classroom for 15 years, and certainly not some bureaucrat from Washington, D.C."

Vogel reminded delegates that the governor recently signed CTA-backed AB 484 to overhaul the state's student assessment system and suspend most standardized testing while the new standards are being put in place. He said this law "means educators and school districts have time to concentrate on implementing the standards without a hammer coming down on their heads" in the form of meaningless test scores.

# New Strategic Plan Offers Blueprint for CTA's Future

More than a year in the making, involving a committee of more than 75 educators, leaders and staff and input from thousands of members, the CTA Strategic Plan to guide us into the future and engage members in the work of the union was presented to Council. It was greeted with enthusiasm and hope for change. Council will vote on the plan in January.

This long-term plan will make CTA stronger in the ongoing fight against corporate reformers "attempting to undermine educators and public education by blaming and demonizing us, individually and collectively," said Council delegate Shannan Brown, president of the San Juan Teachers Association in Sacramento County. "With this Strategic Plan as our guide, the California Teachers Association will once again lead the way."

The plan, titled "Our Union, Our Future," is available to all members on the CTA website at www.cta.org/ourfuture.

After months of talking with, listening to, and getting input from CTA members and staff, committees were formed correlating to eight key focus areas identified as crucial to forging a strategic plan to lead CTA for the next three to five years. These committees developed goals and tasks in each focus area. Out of those goals and tasks, a final Strategic Plan was developed. Council will vote on adoption of the plan in January after additional presentations and discussions with members at Service Center Council meetings, CTA trainings and conferences, and local chapter meetings.

"The plan centers around building an organizing culture in CTA — so that members are continually engaged and so that we are continually talking with and, more importantly, listening to each other," President Vogel said. It fosters community engagement, and more chances to "reconnect on the issues of social justice, equity and diversity."

Vogel said CTA cast a very wide net for the data collected for this plan. "The extensive amount of data that was gathered came from all corners of CTA, from our members, from our chapter leaders, from staff, from other labor unions and community groups, and even from the media. The goal of the process from the very beginning was to listen to what members were saying and build a plan around their vision."

# Executive Director Joe Nuñez Outlines Vital CTA Goals

In his first State Council speech as CTA's new executive director, Joe Nuñez introduced himself as the union's "organizer in chief" and talked about wanting to be the kind of organizer that Fred Ross Sr. — a mentor to César Chávez — aspired to be.

He quoted Ross: "A good organizer is a social arsonist who goes around setting people on fire."

In his detailed speech to Council, Nuñez, a native Californian, shared some of his impressive biography and humble roots, growing up in a small coastal farm town near Santa Maria, the son of farmworkers, working in the fields until he was 18. The first in his family to graduate from college, he taught high school for 20 years, became a CTA chapter president in the 1980s, joined CTA staff as the executive director of the Stockton Teachers Association, and kept excelling in union work, eventually serving the past eight years as the CTA Associate Executive Director of Governmental Relations.

As executive director, Nuñez outlined for delegates several goals that will better help CTA serve its members. They include creating a CTA working culture of collaboration among departments, building an organizing culture, implementing LCFF and Common Core, supporting charter school organizing, and putting into place the union's new Strategic Plan once State Council adopts it. It's to be considered in January.

He noted that, while other states are still in the dark about Common Core, CTA has held numerous trainings and developed "Common Core Spirals" to help teachers better understand how the standards are related across grade levels — and that other toolkits and trainings are already online for easy access. Browse the library of training videos here. Nuñez also announced that CTA has just received a $250,000 grant from the National Education Association to "expand our Common Core support to all of you."

"It's going to be a busy year, and we have a lot of work to do, but I want you to know CTA staff will be right by your side," Nuñez said. "I look forward to working with you to achieve our goals, our hopes and our dreams for our students, schools, colleges, local chapters and communities."

# Governor Brown Keynotes CTA's 150th Anniversary Gala Dinner

A major highlight of the State Council weekend was the CTA 150th anniversary gala dinner with Governor Jerry Brown as keynote speaker and a multimedia presentation about the union's long history and accomplishments. Five past CTA presidents — Marilyn Russell Bittle, Ed Foglia, Wayne Johnson, Barbara E. Kerr and David A. Sanchez — joined President Dean Vogel to narrate the journey through the decades. Also narrating on stage were CTA Secretary-Treasurer Mikki Cichocki-Semo, current and former CTA Executive Directors Joe Nuñez and Carolyn Doggett, and National Education Association Secretary-Treasurer Becky Pringle.

Council delegates enjoyed the special museum archive created at their Los Angeles hotel, where they saw rare CTA newspapers, photographs, paintings, and other artifacts. History-related resources also unveiled during the weekend were an extraordinary interactive collage about CTA's victories, and a new and growing oral history archive featuring interviews with key CTA leaders about the association's rich labor heritage of strikes, political and human rights victories, and improvements for students and the teaching profession. Read a digital version of the 150th anniversary commemorative history magazine as well.

At one point at the gala dinner, Council delegate George Sheridan, former president of the Black Oak Mine Teachers Association in El Dorado County, appeared onstage as a time traveler, dressed as John Swett, California's fourth superintendent of public instruction. In 1863, Swett founded an association of teachers that later became CTA. Sheridan/Swett drew a laugh when he noted his first teaching job was in San Francisco after a stint in the gold fields. "I was taken aback by how little respect there was for teachers, and how much power the local school boards had. I'm sure it's not the same now."

After the CTA history presentation, Governor Brown took the stage and quipped, "I feel right at home with all those historical artifacts."

Brown dropped by to honor CTA's contributions to both the teaching profession and the labor movement. "We stand on the shoulders of a lot of people, that's the whole message today," he said. "I think it's very important that we get that sense of solidarity for those who were there before, those who are there now," and those who will be there in the future. "It's the collective imagination and effort that makes things go forward."

Loud applause greeted his recognition of educators' hard work in helping students. It's the "teachers in the frontlines, not people up in headquarters," who are making a difference, he said. "There's no magic set of tests in Washington, D.C., and there's no formula that some new think tank is going to invent, that will replace the inspiration and the love and the attention that a teacher" brings to a classroom, Brown declared.

Sponsors and advertisers helped make the evening possible and special.

# Council Votes to Seek Bill Making Kindergarten Mandatory

After decades and decades of California failing to make kindergarten mandatory, State Council voted unanimously to sponsor legislation to make it so. A legislator will now be sought to carry the bill.

As proposed by the Council's Early Childhood Education Committee, all students who turn 5 years old by Sept. 2, 2014, and every year after, would have to attend kindergarten. Currently, students "who do not attend kindergarten are at a distinct disadvantage when they come to first grade in terms of achievement levels, oral language development," and other areas, a report to Council stated. Also, many parents of kids in kindergarten now pull them out of class routinely because there are no truancy consequences.

Research shows Hispanic and African American children, English learners, and students from low-income families are hurt the most if they enter first grade without experiencing kindergarten. First-grade teacher Kimberly Chevlin told the Council State Legislation Committee about students struggling if they have not had any kindergarten learning. This puts these children "at a huge disadvantage with their peers" at Murrieta Valley Unified School District, Chevlin said.

Because attendance is not mandatory, kindergarten attendance rates are the lowest of all grades in the Oakland Unified School District, and this law would change that, said Kei Swensen, a kindergarten teacher there and a Council delegate. She fought for this bill as a member of the Early Childhood Education Committee. "It's exciting," she said after the Council's vote. "The problem is that academic standards include kindergarten and are not in alignment with California law because attendance is not mandatory."

## In other actions, CTA State Council:

Approved a CTA Board of Directors Redistricting Plan that dissolves, in June 2014, one of two District J Board member seats and moves the Association of Colton Educators from District O to District K. The plan also moves the San Jose Teachers Association from District B to District G.

Received a report from the Special Education Committee that members are being asked to fill out the CTA Education Survey on Special Education Services. It concerns questions about instruction changes statewide for students with disabilities.

Recommended Lily Eskelsen for NEA president and Becky Pringle for NEA vice president.

Opposed agreements involving waiving of NCLB rules reached between state or federal government agencies and local school districts "without an opportunity for public comment and a direct vote of approval by the elected governing board." Such an agreement was recently reached for NCLB rule waivers for eight California school districts working with the so-called California Office to Reform Education (CORE) group, which also did not involve local CTA chapters. President Dean Vogel will send a letter to the school boards of these CORE districts stating the reasons for CTA opposition to the waivers.

Approved a new business item directing President Dean Vogel to notify all parties involved that CTA supports current legal action to challenge efforts to remove the accreditation of City College of San Francisco by next summer. The unfair crusade to close the vital college, attended by 85,000 students, is being waged by the controversial Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges.

Received a report from Student Support Services Committee reminding CTA members that although some school districts are offering training to teachers and Education Support Professionals in administering insulin to students with diabetes in emergency situations, such training is voluntary. This concerns the recent California Supreme Court decision allowing nonmedical school personnel, instead of only school nurses, to administer insulin to students.

Endorsed these candidates for upcoming Assembly District elections: Matt Dababneh, AD 45, for the Nov. 19 special election; Tim Sbranti, AD 16, and Patrick O'Donnell, AD 70, for the June 3, 2014, primary election.

Heard a reminder from the Teacher Evaluation and Academic Freedom Committee that CTA members are asked to fill out the Teacher Preparation and Support Survey offered by the CTA Teacher Evaluation Workgroup. The workgroup is involved right now in examining what is the best preparation for the next generation of California's teachers.

Accepted instructive handouts from a recent CTA forum on alternatives to suspension and expulsion hosted by three State Council committees. Read the material attached to the Civil Rights in Education Committee report. Five CTA members presented at the forum: Emily Geiges, San Francisco Unified; Michael Richards and Patty Taylor, San Bernardino City Unified; Karen Junker, San Rafael City Schools; and Whitnee Garrett, Oakland Unified.

Watched a short video titled "We Are Indian" featuring California students. It was presented by the CTA American Indian/Alaska Native Caucus in honor of November being national American Indian/Alaska Native Heritage Month.

Listened to a heartfelt presentation about breast cancer prevention in honor of cancer survivors. October was national Breast Cancer Awareness Month.