

Partners in Advocacy

Eccles: 'I learned early to get involved'

Working hand-in-hand, CSO staff and inspired leaders make a powerful team to advance the cause of public education.

One of those leaders we'd like to highlight in this issue is State Council delegate Wendy Eccles. She began teaching at Mira Loma Middle School in Jurupa Valley in 2004 and remains there today, having taught English, Social Studies, and PE.

Her path into union activism started the very next year when she became a site rep while still probationary.

"I had a bad administrator, and I learned early to get involved," Eccles said. And she never stopped. First elected to represent NEA-Jurupa on State Council in 2011, her current roles include ABC Chair, San Geronimo Service Center Council Chair, local vice president, organizing and PAC chair, and UniServ treasurer.

She spent years at the bargaining table fighting for her colleagues. She is now the President-elect of NEA-Jurupa and takes the reins this summer. Wendy is truly one of the people who make CTA the force that it is—and a strong single mother of son JJ on top of it all.

Eccles credits CSO as much as leadership for the success of CTA and has worked closely with an array of staff throughout the state.

"The relationship is essential," she explained "Leadership provides the face and the direction. Staff provides the support and expertise we



CSO Staff Ken Johnson and NEA-Jurupa President-elect Wendy Eccles.

**"Staff provides the support and expertise we would be lost without."**

would be lost without."

Her work with GR brought her to admire Seth Bramble and Pat Rucker. Ken Johnson in the San Bernardino

RRC is "absolutely essential to San G." She greatly enjoyed working on Tax Fairness issues with Angela Su.

Wendy dropped a lot more CSO names, and emphasized throughout her many years of deep involvement.

"I have never had a bad interaction with staff — nothing but excellent experiences," she said. "I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to have worked with and learned from a lot of great staff people over the years."

Wendy has always believed collaboration beats confrontation and has worked tirelessly to build rather than block, and embodies the phrase: Partner in Advocacy. Thanks for all you do Wendy!

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INSIDE

- Accountability now...2
Oakland wins.....3
Powerful partners....4



A CSO publication

Members, CSO work on Special Education issues

On a recent professional development day, secondary education members from the Albany Teachers Association attended an ATA-sponsored session about special education issues which was conducted by local primary contact staff/CSO members using resources from the CTA IPD department.

"This workshop was important to our members because they saw that they are not dealing with these concerns alone," ATA Co-President Patty Fugiwara said.

ATA, like many local chapters, is experiencing an increase in the challenges members are facing around special education. Lack of adequate funding, a move to more inclusion, mainstreaming, and co-teaching without proper training, more IEP meetings with adversarial advocates, challenging student behavior, and increased caseloads seem to be common experiences for local CTA chapters right now.

IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) is the landmark federal legislation that guarantees students with disabilities get a free and appropriate public education, an individualized education program (IEP), and adequate support to make educational progress. Additionally, there are many California education code provisions that protect teachers and their students and ensure that the districts are accountable for providing quality special education services.

One major issue ATA and other chapters are facing seems to be around an increase in mainstreaming or inclusion of students with disabilities. There are two distinct schools of thought around this issue. One asserts that all students, regardless of their disability or level of functioning, should be in general

education with their non-disabled peers. The other asserts that for some students, an alternative setting, like small group classes or learning center, provides more educational opportunity.

The IDEA mainstreaming provision requires that students with disabilities should be educated with their non-disabled peers to the "maximum extent appropriate." What is appropriate should be determined by the IEP team and should be based on student need, not the district's convenience. It is best practice, and IDEA requires, that local education agencies have a continuum of services available to meet students' unique needs (§3051).

At a similar workshop, Fairfield Suisun Unified Teachers Association members were eager to discuss key provisions in the law that would assist them in supporting parents and students. Ed code section 56046 protects educators from retaliation by the district when they assist parents in obtaining services or accommodations for students with exceptional needs. Section 56347 ensures you have the right to be knowledgeable about IEP contents. Additional provisions in federal law guarantee teachers and parents the right to receive training if it will help support the implementation of a child's IEP.

What about addressing challenging behaviors?

Both ATA and FSUTA members described students who had frequent tantrums, outbursts, and whose acting-out behavior made it impossible to teach the rest of the class. The IDEA requires that IEP teams address student behavior when

(See SpEd training, Page 2)



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www.calstaff.org.

## Charter laws bring common sense reforms

As part of the “Kids, Not Profits” campaign, CTA and CSO members have been advocating to bring more transparency and accountability to California’s Charter schools.

After months of work at the Capital, in the field, and in the legal department our CSO brothers and sisters Seth Bramble, Muni Citrin, Ann Swinburn, Cheryl Coney, Ona Keller, Mandy Hu, and Jean Shin partnered in advocacy with multiple CTA leaders and members to fast-track this bill.

On Tuesday, March 5th they achieved a significant win when Governor Newsom signed Senate Bill 126 into law. The bill, co-authored by Senator Connie Leyva (D- Chino) and Assemblyman Patrick O’Donnell (D- Long Beach), makes clear that publicly funded charter schools must adhere to the same laws as traditional schools.

In a news release issued by her office Senator Leyva said, “For far too long, charter schools in California have

been held to lower accountability and transparency standards than traditional public schools. SB 126 will ensure that all publicly funded schools — including charter schools — guarantee fair and open access to information. This measure also empowers parents to keep school leaders responsive and accountable.”

SB126 requires that charter schools follow California’s open meeting laws, either the Ralph M. Brown Act for schools governed locally or for schools that report to a state agency, the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act. Also clarified in this bill is the requirement of charter schools to comply with the California Public Records Act. Charter schools do retain the right to have employees serve on the school’s governing board but the law requires them to abstain from voting on any matters affecting their employment or attempting to influence the voting of others in such matters.

“On behalf of California’s students,

we thank governor Newsom and the legislature for ensuring there is transparency and accountability in all California charter schools. Fixing these laws will put us on the right path to making sure all schools are held to the same standards for the sake of our students,” stated CTA President Eric Heins.

While SB126 was a good start, there is still more that needs to be done. Assembly Bills 1505, 1506, 1507, and 1508 have been introduced to address other issues such as ensuring the schools are governed locally, placing a cap on the growth of charters, ensuring charters are being operated within the authorizing district and allowing authorizers to take into account facilities, fiscal and academic impact when considering charter petitions.

More information on these bills and ways you can work with CSO can be found at CTA.org. Working together we can urge a yes vote for our legislators to prioritize kids over profits.

## SpEd training leads to action plan

(Continued from Page 1)

it impedes their learning or the learning of others. The law does not specify how behavior must be supported, but typically districts provide functional behavior assessments, behavior support plans, and behavior goals. Positive behavior intervention and support (PBIS) is another approach where educators teach behavior explicitly, just like academics are taught, but districts frequently implement it improperly. Members have the right to request additional support, resources, training,

and/or call for a meeting to review student progress and placement if they believe the district is not adequately addressing a student’s behavior.

ATA and FSUTA members were eager to discuss how they can best enforce their rights. While grievances can be filed when contract language is violated, many chapters are just starting to tackle negotiating special education language. Education code and board policy can be enforced through the Uniform Complaint Process, with appeals up to the California Department

of Education. Members will often find more expedient resolution when collective action is used to pressure the district decision-makers. A petition, march on the boss, presentation to the board, or another action that involves a large number of members is likely to get results more quickly than a grievance or complaint alone.

“We’re going to prioritize our issues and make an action plan to involve members and try to improve special education for students in our district,” Fugiwara said.

## Oakland on strike

# Partnership brings results for OEA members

The lesson from the Oakland strike can be summed up in two words. Strikes work.

“Our settlement was so much better that it would have been had we not gone on strike,” according to CSO staff John Green. “We moved mountains.”

The OEA settlement included:

- An 11% increase on the salary schedule, plus a 3% bonus
- The first class size reduction for grades 4-12 since 1981.
- The first ever class size reduction for targeted, high needs schools.
- Many more student supports, including counselors, resource specialists, psychologists, newcomer support staff and speech-language pathologists.

“They are going to have to hire three more speech language pathologists, and that will mean more attention to the kids,” Green said.

A OEA leadership team that was ready to do the needed work with members was key to the strike’s success, Green said, as was a variety of CSO staff



OEA members and CSO staff forged strong community connections to win

including C4OB staff, the Legal Department, Communications and others.

“We stole all kinds of things from UTLA, even their staff,” he said. The success in Los Angeles fed the energy in Oakland, and the success of both should be helping chapters across California to understand the power in their locals, when they work to build solidarity and engage their members to participate fully in the union.

There is still much work to do. Despite their gains, starting salary in Oakland will not reach \$50,000 – very low for the Bay Area -- until 2021. There were some in Oakland who would have wanted the strike to continue, and leadership and staff made a series of site visits after

the settlement to check back in with membership.

“If we can shut down the second largest school district in the country, and the second largest school district in the Bay Area, there is literally nowhere we can’t go,” Green said.

Other area districts have been encouraged to take some tougher bargaining stances, and many unrepresented charter educators showed their support for the striking OEA members – and showed some interest in representation.

“I do think the Oakland experience is putting other Bay Area school districts on notice,” he said.

And now, chapters and their staff members need to have conversations about what it takes to apply the kind of power we have seen this year in Oakland, Los Angeles, and across America.

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