



A CSO PUBLICATION

CSO ORGANIZER

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Black. Lives. Matter.

CSO affirms commitment to fighting racism and white supremacy

Horrified by the police murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and countless other Black people across the nation, Americans took to the streets last summer to demand justice and proclaim unequivocally that **Black Lives Matter**.

The continued struggle against racism and white supremacy in America requires direct and deliberate action to protect, value and affirm Black lives everywhere. As part of this fight, CSO Representative Council last summer unanimously adopted the following resolution:

Black Lives Matter!



Photo by Nathan Dumlao on Unsplash

The California Staff Organization (CSO) plays a significant role in upholding the CTA Mission Statement.

*"The California Teachers Association exists to protect and promote the well-being of its members." CSO can only do this if we recognize that students, CTA members and CSO members are being injured daily by racism at work and in their personal lives. **CSO affirms that Black Lives Matter!***

CSO can only "improve the conditions of teaching and learning" if we first recognize the ways in which racism, white supremacy and police brutality impact every aspect of students' and educators' experience at school.

CSO can only "advance the cause of free, universal, and quality public education for all students" by advocating for changes to the current system of public education which is not designed for students of color. Public education was originally designed by and for White people first. That legacy continues.

CSO can only "ensure that the human dignity and civil rights of all children and youth are protected" if we do the work to remedy the trauma of racism, white supremacy and police brutality within public education, CTA, CSO and society.

CSO can only "secure a more just, equitable and democratic society" by holding ourselves accountable (individually and collectively) for our role in upholding a system of racism and white supremacy.

CSO can only protect and promote the well-being of CTA and CSO members if we also protect, value and affirm Black lives everywhere.

Look in future editions of CSO Organizer for coverage of equity, racial and social justice issues.

In this spirit, we rise in solidarity with all communities threatened by white supremacy, racism and police brutality. We encourage all to take action in their work and personal spaces to address and dismantle structural racism, white privilege and white supremacy, and please share your actions with us!

Who We Are:

CSO Organizer is produced by the California Staff Organization (CSO), the union for professional, departmental and Regional UniServ staff who work for the 310,000 members of California Teachers Association. CSO affirms that Black Lives Matter and is committed to working to remedy the trauma of racism, white supremacy and police brutality within public education, CTA, CSO and society.

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Don't Underestimate the Importance of Self-Care

Working during a pandemic is trying for even the most resilient among us. CTA and CSO members have found a myriad of ways to work collaboratively in the virtual world on countless issues facing educators across the state: organizing for safe school reopening MOUs, leading workshops and professional development for distance learning, and resolving “site” issues, just to name a few!

Often overlooked is the importance of prioritizing self-care. Taking time for your physical, emotional and mental health can help alleviate the anxiety, stress and negative feelings that many people have been experiencing during the pandemic. According to *Healthline.com*, self-care is not self-improvement, but instead involves “healthy diet, exercise, sleep and maintaining work-life balance.”

“You spend countless hours working on behalf of others. You deserve time to take care of yourself,” says Karen Taylor, a CSO member and CTA staff in the Instruction and Professional Development Department.

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If you aren't sure where to start, check out Taylor's suggestions that take just five minutes (see below). Taylor also recommends the “Mindful Mondays” workshops from the IPD Distance Learning Support Series. These brief 30-minute workshops, several of which have been conducted by CTA members, include the science, practice and integration of mindfulness into the classroom. Past sessions have included topics such as breathwork, meditation, gratitude and coping with anxiety. The Mindful Monday workshop on March 8 will be Finding Joy.

Wendy Lockhart, CSO member and CTA primary contact staff in Region 4, has been using her interest and background in the mind-body connection to help educators through her self-care workshops. Her virtual session “Educator Self-Care During COVID: Explorations in Wellness and Strengthening Immunity” was one of the most well-attended elective sessions at the Issues Conference in January. Lockhart's suggestion for anyone feeling drained by the pandemic: Prioritize sleep.

“People's sleep is disrupted. We're stressed out, we're inside more and not getting cues from the sun,” she says. “Go to sleep and get up at the same time every day. Honor your sleep cycle.”

In Region 3, Brian Guerrero, CSO member and CTA staff in the Instruction and Professional Development Department, has hosted watch parties with chapters to view another “excellent self-care webinar” presented this fall.

“Teachers are under tremendous stress right now and some are nearing their breaking points,” he says. “The presenter, Dr. Will Hensen, offered a lot of suggestions to help teachers pause, re-regulate and better manage the stress they're experiencing.”

Guerrero recommends hosting a watch party in local chapters. The recorded sessions are located at cta.org/distancelearning.



Photo by Jared Rice

Self-Care Tips for Busy Lives

Five minute healthy habits from Karen Taylor

- **Get some vitamin D.** Switch your Zoom meeting to your phone and take a walk outside for at least five minutes. Walking can also help bring blood to the brain and encourage more creative thinking.
- **Enjoy the horizon.** Try to look at objects more than 20 feet away for 20 seconds. This can help reduce eye strain. Do this intermittently, even if it means just walking away from your desk for a few minutes.
- **Take a deep breath.** Breathe in through your nose for four to six seconds, hold your breath at the top, and then exhale for six to eight seconds. Doing this for one or two minutes on a regular basis can help your nervous system switch back to “rest and digest” mode.
- **Start a gratitude journal.** Especially after a difficult meeting, take one minute to write down as many things as you can that you are grateful for. Regular gratitude practice has been found to even boost your immune system!
- **Quiet time.** Before you pick up your phone or turn on the news, take five minutes of quiet time in the morning for self-reflection and set your intention for the day.



Building Collective Power to Protect Health and Safety

More than 1,000 educators in Marin County organized late last year with the shared belief that “All Students Need Safe and Healthy Schools!” At the tail end of 2020, the Marin County Superintendent decided that all districts in Marin County would return to in-person teaching and learning without the necessary safety precautions in place, even though COVID-19 cases were skyrocketing. There was a huge push to get educators into their classrooms, no matter what.

This directive made educators extremely nervous about their safety and that of their students. The local unions in Marin County knew that they would need to come together to make sure the county understood that educators would return to in-person instruction only when it was safe to do so. Working closely with CSO member and CTA primary contact staff Chris Brunette, the educators formed the Marin Educators for Safe Schools Coalition.

The coalition, comprised of all 14 Marin County CTA chapters and three CFT chapters, held four listening sessions to hear the concerns of their members regarding the pandemic and safe schools. Using member and leader concerns, the Marin Educators for Safe Schools Coalition’s student-centered frame was created: All Students Need Safe and Healthy Schools. This frame was accompanied by their three message points, 1) Community Support: All students need community support in providing a safe and healthy school as we work together to re-open and grow the economy. 2) Safe Schools: All students need a school district that will provide safe and healthy schools with equity that meet their academic, socio-emotional and physical needs. 3) Effective Classrooms: All students need a classroom learning environment that is planned by professional educators and has all necessary resources for student success.

The coalition launched parent forums. Leaders were trained on how to facilitate parent sessions and invited community members to participate as well. Parents were given an opportunity to ask questions and give feedback, with more than 1,000 community members attending the forums. The coalition had an activist base of 1,500 leaders, members, education support professionals and community supporters.

The coalition decided that to make sure that teachers and students had safe and healthy schools they needed to apply pressure to the county superintendent. Working with CSO member Brunette, the coalition planned a large action that would bring educators, families and the community together for safe and healthy schools. Brunette said that he was amazed at how all the locals in the county came together to support students and each other, building something truly special. He said that his leaders felt supported, heard and that they were not fighting alone.

After additional events, including a car caravan and press conference, the county superintendent and the county public health officer changed their narrative. Marin Educators for Safe and Healthy Schools were able to change the way the entire county viewed returning to school during the pandemic.

The coalition continues to work together for the schools Marin students deserve. They used the principles of coordinated bargaining and created a common Memorandum of Understanding that all 14 CTA locals presented to their respective school districts. One member said “This is coordinated bargaining at its best!” The coalition has been hard at work expanding its members, recently adding Marin firefighters and the Marin Labor Council.

Who’s got the power? We’ve got the power!
What kind of power? Union Power!



**All
Students
Need
Safe and
Healthy
Schools**



Charter Organizing Efforts Growing During COVID

Organizing unrepresented educators is one of CTA's core missions. The proliferation of charter schools in California over the past couple decades creates a generational opportunity for CSO and CTA to partner in recruiting new members and helping to strengthen the profession and raise the bar for sometimes slipshod charter operators. While it is pretty much in everyone's job description somewhere, three CSO members are tasked specifically with this pursuit: CTA staff Muni Citrin and Ona Keller organize charters in Northern California while Cheryl Coney works in the south.

In a normal year, organizing new chapters with new members and leadership structures from scratch is a heavy lift. The employer is generally uncooperative if not overtly hostile. Usually, it begins with a spark of discontent in a handful of employees. Nurturing and fanning that spark into a self-sustaining fire is a complex and time-consuming task; sometimes it does not work out and the spark fades into a wisp of smoke.

Obviously, this is not a normal year and the sparks of discontent have been ignited in an all-new way as employers, unencumbered by collective bargaining agreements, play fast and loose with employee and student safety in the COVID-19 era. Previously, trying to organize a group of employees into union members was a retail game: Meetings, meals, strategy sessions, visits and finally hearings. Like the rest of our work world, it has gone virtual--and our organizers have adapted and are still getting it done. In some cases they have never actually met the people they are building into leaders and advocates.

Coney has been busy in the Inland Empire: "We are working with Sycamore Academy in Wildomar and Chino, as well as Santa Rosa Academy in Menifee--together about 140 full-time employees, all being done virtually. The efforts started after the pandemic closed things down." Keller and Citrin are also busy two-dimensionally organizing the staff at Downtown College Preparatory in San Jose (see adjacent story). Building on an effort started a few years ago, online trainings are also being sponsored for school board members, in particular newly elected ones, to educate them about charter operations and their role in approving, rejecting and overseeing the operations of charter schools in their districts.

Examples of financial, employment and educational malpractice abound in the less-regulated charter sphere. Arming board members with knowledge while empowering unrepresented workers to balance the scales are two especially important but not well-known efforts happening every day. CSO celebrates the work of our charter organizers in strengthening CTA and improving the working conditions and lives of many hundreds of charter educators throughout California.

Making History During the Pandemic

The power of unity was no more evident than last year when a small group of San Jose charter school educators organized a union amid the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic, making history with their solidarity. The group of Downtown College Prep educators began meeting regularly with CTA Organizer and CSO member Ona Keller—via Zoom, due to shelter-in-place orders that prevented the face-to-face interaction that usually fuels such endeavors.

The team met virtually for two months, even coming up with a way to collect wet-signed union cards while maintaining their social distance, before filing for recognition as South Bay Educators United (SBEU) on May 11, 2020, becoming the first educators union to organize during the pandemic nationwide. Keller said that solid organizing fundamentals work whether in person or through a screen: one-on-one conversations, identifying leaders and building a strong organizing committee.



"What struck me is how little changed," Keller said. "We just weren't face to face."

The educators noted that meeting virtually provided flexibility and privacy that may have even aided their organizing effort, which was driven by a desire to bring sustainability to their schools and have a real seat at the table when it comes to supporting their students' needs.

"Our students already have so much instability in their lives; they deserve stability at school," said Sal Williams, SBEU member. "Our union can help create systems to aid with teacher retention that will support our students."

SBEU is currently in bargaining and has negotiated multiple MOUs regarding return and safety. Since the union's founding, five more charter school locals have formed—check a future issue of the Organizer to learn more!

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