

# DIRECT LINE

A PUBLICATION OF THE SACRAMENTO CITY TEACHERS ASSOCIATION.

Volume 33  
Issue 3  
November 2009  
Sacteachers.org

## The Race to the Top...of What?

### Education Coalition Warns Against Premature 'Race to the Top' State Policy Changes

Education Leaders Urge Lawmakers to Wait for Federal Guidelines Before Considering SB 1 5X

The state Education Coalition is urging lawmakers to involve all stakeholders and wait for final guidelines as they consider potential education reforms related to the federal Race to the Top competitive grant program. Education leaders called on Senate President Pro Tempore Darrell Steinberg and Senate Education Committee Chair Gloria Romero to slow down efforts to push through Senate Bill 1 5X, a new measure which did eventually make it through the Senate. You have to love Assembly Speaker Karen Bass though. She adjourned the Assembly until January! This means that Romero's bill won't get heard in the Assembly before then. Among other things, the proposed law would seek significant changes in how the state addresses its lower-performing schools, the current cap on charter schools, student transfer rules, and how data is used to measure teacher and administrator effectiveness.

"Education reform shouldn't be a race; it deserves serious attention that will actually help kids and improve student achievement," said CTA President David A. Sanchez. "Proposed reforms need thoughtful discussion with all stakeholders, including parents, teachers and community members. They should not be sprung on the public just hours before last-minute hearings if any meaningful input is really going to take place."

"By rushing to enact legislation before the release of final federal regulations," said CSBA President Paula S. Campbell, "the California State Senate is jumping to conclusions about what is required by the federal government as well as what makes good sense. For example, while districts should have a wide range of options to improve low performing schools, SB 1 5X instead limits reform options by forcing districts to choose from options that research has consistently shown to have a limited chance of success. It makes no sense to act quickly if the result is a step backward for school reform."

"At this time we should be focusing on working together to develop a thoughtful Race to the Top plan, rather than adding new laws that may be unnecessary or that may conflict with the final guidelines," said ACSA president and Santa Clara County Superintendent of Schools Charles Weis. "Our analysis shows there is no need for changes to state law to apply for Race to the Top, and premature reforms may have long term and potentially unnecessary consequences for students and schools."

"We fully support efforts to turn around persistently low performing schools, improve student achievement and close the achievement gap, but such efforts need to be done in a thoughtful manner with input from all stakeholders including parents and community members," said Debbie Look, director of legislation for the California State PTA. "We acknowledge the sense of urgency created by the short timeline of the application process for Race to the Top funds, but our sense of urgency is based on providing all students, especially the historically underserved, opportunities for a high quality education."

"In this time of unprecedented budget cuts to schools, we should focus on thoughtful proposals to help our schools, not further hinder them. Students are not best served through premature and rushed decisions made in emergency legislative sessions. None of the proposals in SB 1 5X is of an urgent nature that needs to be passed right now," said Allan Clark, president of the California School Employees Association.

California Federation of Teachers President Marty Hittelman said, "The Legislature should wait to respond to the published regulations that will come out as a result of formal review at the federal level - there is no reason to rush the process and move in directions that are both educationally disruptive and are not responsive to the final federal regulations."

## Collaborate! Collaboration! Collaboratively!

By Linda Tuttle, SCTA President

If you are fortunate to be working at a school with a principal that understands and incorporates these principles you are lucky! You need to give a principal like this "high marks" when SCTA does its administrator evaluations. This year there will be two opportunities for administrator evaluations. There will be a packet going out to all SCTA site reps in Nov. You will do an administrator evaluation and then share the results to commend and/or help your administrator improve. They will have the school year to improve before the spring. In April/May SCTA will be sending out the same administrator evaluations for the Final Evaluation. The final evaluation will be shared by ranking all principals from best to worst! This will be published in the final Direct Line for all to see.

Everyone needs to know this information as the district is in the lay-

off cycle that has been going on for several years for our bargaining unit. During the surplus and lay-off process teachers always ask, "What is the principal like?" This year we can give them the list. We can also make the comments available and they can make their choices based on your data rather than what SCTA has heard.

The SCTA Political Involvement Committee (PIC) is also looking at a School Board Evaluation. Everyone is obsessed with test scores so lets see how well the school board fares on the PIC's form. It is important to develop a year by year report to help when re-election time rolls around to determine if the board member will receive the SCTA endorsement. Often it is left up to a short interview with no reflection on the candidate's performance over the previous years served.

SCTA is collaborating with other local CTA chapter presidents to keep up with cuts being proposed. We learn from each other. SCUSD has been making cuts over the last few years

so should not be hit with the massive cuts hitting districts around us. There will still be cuts and most likely lay-offs again. SCTA is making plans and meeting to try to ward off a worst case scenario.

There have been many meetings with entire staffs this year. This sends a real message that there is a lack of collaboration and teacher support at many sites. But, SCTA does take every opportunity to talk about those principals that are supportive of teachers and involve you in site-based decisions.

SCTA collaborates with SCUSD in doing School/Site Council training. If you have not attended any of these trainings look for them and plan to come with a team. This is a big step toward working collaboratively at your site. Look at the money your site generates and how you want to allocate it. Is class size reduction still important? SCTA thinks it is a top priority!

### Economic News

The Governor recently stated that it looks as though California faces another 7 billion shortage this year and 7 billion next year.

### Middle School's Zero-Tolerance Policy Results In Improved Discipline, Test Scores.

The Sacramento Bee (9/30, B1, Lambert, Reese) reports on the front of its regional section that "Samuel Jackman Middle School in south Sacramento had 507 suspensions last year for drugs and violence -- more than any other school in Northern California." The school, however, is not "a typically troubled school." Its "high suspension rate is due to a zero-tolerance policy designed to put an early lid on trouble, according to school officials." The majority "of the school's violent offenses last year" were "pre-fighting" incidents such as a student "taking a fighting stance or threatening to fight." The zero-tolerance policy was enacted after Principal William Del Bonta "counted 35 fights in his first 10 days on the job in 2004." Each year since the policy began, discipline at Jackman Middle has improved, Del Bonta said. "There were 64 percent fewer fights last year than in 2004" and "the school also has increased its API score 64 points and its graduation rate by 34 percent."



### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

#### NOVEMBER 2009

Wed., Nov. 18, HVP Workshop, SCTA, 4:00 – 7:00 pm

Wed.-Fri., Nov. 25-27  
Thanksgiving Holidays

Mon., Nov. 30<sup>th</sup>, Election  
Committee Mtg., SCTA, 4:00 pm

#### DECEMBER 2009

Tues, Dec. 1, SCTA Board of  
Directors, SCTA 4:00 pm

Wed. Dec. 2, Special Ed/  
Pupil Services Segment Mtg.  
SCTA 4:00 – 6:00 pm

Mon., Dec. 7, Human Rights  
Committee Meeting SCTA, 4:00

Thurs., Dec. 10, Rep Council  
Meeting, Casa Gardens, 4-6 pm

Mon-Dec. 14, Children's Center  
Segment Mtg. SCTA, 4-6 pm

Dec.22-Jan. 1, WINTER BREAK

### WHAT'S INSIDE

The School that Never Was.....	1
Collaborate, Collaboration.....	1
Zero Tolerance Policy.....	1
We Will Be Listening.....	2

Report From Region 2 Conference.....	2
You Need to Know about These District Forms.....	2
Sign Language for Classroom Management.....	2
Best Teachers in Poorest Schools.....	3

Inquiry Math.....	3
Region 9 Conference.....	4
Teaching Outside the Classroom.....	4
Plan Ahead or Fall Behind.....	4
Sox & Undes Drive.....	4

## We Will be Listening

**The needs of teachers can be achieved if we are insistent that the interest of classrooms and student are met first before anything else.**

By Manuel Villarreal, Executive Director

The school year has started with its usual series of ups and downs as well as clouds of uncertainty over state funding and federal funding with strings. In addition, as we head into the season of thanksgivings, there are indicators that point toward even more uncertainty in the future for our schools.

State funds for schools are going to be flat at best for the next number of years. The current contributions to school systems are built on questionable transfers and uses of funds that were never intended to run the regular programs. State receipts for income taxes continue to be down even with the 10% increase to speed up state revenues that will be further reduced at tax time after higher deductions are claimed to offset the 10% increase. Furloughed employees will pay less in taxes. The increase in stock earnings will be more than offset by prior losses. Higher unemployment means less state revenues. This means even less for schools. Thankfully, it could be worse.

Nationally, the leadership will increase the federal debt with more contributions for a stepped up Middle East war, will increase taxes to fund a form of national health care, and will continue to place divisive strings for schools and states to receive one time temporary funding for systems that emphasize teaching to tests and more charter schools for those who miss the moving targets. The truth is that teachers do not have a friend and supporter in White House and have some very questionable listeners in the state capitol. Thankfully, there was a change in leadership.

The current national tactic to improve education is another form of the top down and carrot/stick attitude that holds that starving school system and then offers tidbits as the way to cause improvement. The fingers will be pointed at teachers and their unions. Over the next few weeks, the state legislature will be debating whether to seek temporary tidbits of dollars at the expense of repeating the mistakes of No Child Left Behind's over reliance on test scores. This is the same state legislature that has the support of nearly no one in the state and the one that has the nerve to put pork barrels of millions of dollars in measures that have nothing to do with each other except that the pork pays for jobs for their friends. Business as usual means uncertainty is certain. Thankfully and ironically, these are our political friends who are making these decisions.

In past years, the good old days, educational systems and leaders touted collaboration, professional development, customer care, lower class sizes, community needs, adequate supplies and resources, special programs for special needs, and much more that would make this sentence too long. The abrupt about face is rather startling but not surprising. When dollars become scarce, those with power and authority will make sure their interests are met first. Those groups without the real or perceived power are relegated to the sidelines to wait their future.

SCTA will be listening to teachers to hear their desires for direction and will also be representing your policies. At the same time, SCTA will be trying its best to convince the School Board that our system needs an infusion of funds from a parcel tax or other sources to maintain our programs. The organization will also be listening to the state and national educational groups for guidance and clarity for actions that will support and improve public schools in positive ways. In the end (that's a bad start for a hopeful sentence) the needs of teachers can be achieved if we are insistent that the interest of classrooms and student are met first before anything else.

We at SCTA thank you for doing your best with your students.

## Report from CTA Region 2 Leadership conference

**It was fascinating to learn what happens at the state level...The sessions were well presented and informative.**

by Linda Hogg-Wood, Golden Empire

I want to thank SCTA for sponsoring me and allowing me to go and learn more about our state teacher's association. It was fascinating to learn what happens at the state level. I was able to attend three breakout sessions: Parent and Community Involvement, Being Assertive Doesn't Mean You're Pushy, and finally, Race to the Top..of What?.

Most of the information shared in the Parent Involvement session was common sense and most of us probably already do many of the ideas: newsletters or email parents on a regular basis, making parents welcome to come to the classroom, parent education or family nights at school. We were reminded that successful schools embrace four core beliefs found in a book by Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot. Those beliefs are: all parents have dreams for their children and want the children to succeed, all parents have the ability to support their children's learning, parent and school staff should be equal partners, and the responsibility for building partnerships rests primarily with school staff. One of the new emphases was on community partnering. The speaker, Mr. Donnell Jordan, pointed out that with decreasing funding and the negative media attention on schools, we all need to increase community involvement, and not just with the parents. Examples include having community organizations use the school, have businesses and faith-based organizations become volunteers at the school, and network with business and the media for positive publicity and assistance. Another idea was having the students create artwork about the school and what they learn and have the artwork on display at local businesses. When children know that EVERYONE is caring and supporting them, they feel better about school and parents feel that they are supported and respected.

The second session on assertiveness was a reminder that we need to be assertive, not aggressive in our communication style. This includes communicating with our peers, our administrator, parents, and teaching our students good assertive communication styles. The most important step in effective assertive communication is good listening. Another step is practicing positive body language... language that shows you care about what the other person is saying. Finally, when you have something to say, make sure you know what you want to accomplish, speak clearly and slowly, and don't expect to have results immediately. Like fine wine, some ideas have to sit before they become reality.

The final session I attended was an incredibly fast paced presentation on the Race to the Top, the new proposed federal competitive grant program. The first most important fact: this would be a one-time only funding of anywhere from 200 to 500 million. Second, the regulations are not even finalized, although our state legislators are rushing to change California law based on proposed language. Finally, the bad idea from this RTTT, is that the federal law would require California to change its current standards system and require a new testing system...all at a cost much higher than the available one-time funds. Basically, if the RTTT is finalized, it is just No Child Left Behind in sheep's clothing. It is not true reform.



## You Need To Know About Some of These "District Forms"

**18 Hour Professional Development Credit and your ID number**

By Seth Bramble, Executive Director

It used to be that when you signed up for a Professional Development activity in order to attain 18 hours credit, those who had not registered through the District website would have to fill out some bubble scan-tron form which would ask for a User ID number. If you forgot it, the District would look it up (usually Tina Chuck in SCUSD Professional Development, 643-2134). The District has done away with the scan-tron bubble form this year. It is extremely important that you know your User ID number. This number (also called your PSL #) can be found on your pay check/stub on the top left corner under "Employee ID." Write down the number on your hand in permanent marker or put it in your wallet or purse so that it is readily available. You will need to write in on sign in sheets for 18 hour credit. If you forget, the District will still look it up but with budget and staffing cuts, it could take much longer than it has in the past. Article 12 of the collective bargaining agreement explains that three additional days (18 hours for K-12 and 24 hours for non-management specialists) were added to the salary schedule for staff development. These days are part of the work year and are mandatory. Failure to complete these hours by May 31 could mean not only that the District will dock 3 days pay, but that you will not receive credit for completing a full year's service from the California State Teachers Retirement System (CalSTRS).

### ADA Accommodations

Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act requires an employer to provide reasonable accommodation to qualified individuals with disabilities who are employees, except when such accommodation would cause an undue hardship. The District provides forms (usually Marianne Clemens in SCUSD Risk Management 643-9421) that may be of concern to you if you are in need of an accommodation. The packet includes a "Authorization for Release of Medical Information" form for the District to get access to your personal medical history. You are under no obligation to provide this access and it is SCTA's recommendation that you not sign this release. If you are encountering problems with this process and are a member of SCTA, it is a good idea to call our office and get a referral to an attorney who can help assert your rights regarding ADA accommodations. The duty to provide reasonable accommodation is a fundamental statutory requirement because of the nature of discrimination faced by individuals with disabilities. Although many individuals with disabilities can perform jobs without any reasonable accommodations, there are workplace barriers that keep others from performing jobs that they could do with some form of accommodation. These barriers may be physical obstacles (such as inaccessible facilities or equipment), or they may be procedures or rules (such as rules concerning when work is performed, when breaks are taken, or how essential or marginal functions are performed). Reasonable accommodation removes workplace barriers for individuals with disabilities.

### Some Teachers Use Sign Language to Aid in Classroom Management

The Washington Post (10/16, B1, Brown) reports on the front of its Metro section that in addition to instructional goals, teachers "must confront a more pressing problem: how to manage children's urgent requests, in the middle of the most carefully planned lessons, for permission to sharpen pencils, get drinks of water or visit the bathroom." According to the Post, "One solution, a growing number of teachers are finding, is learning to speak without sound." Sign language "has become a saving grace -- a way to communicate without interrupting instruction."

## NEA To Encourage Best Teachers To Teach At High-Need Schools.

Use Today (10/1, Toppo) reports that the National Education Association “will encourage local chapters to ignore contract provisions that in the past have kept school districts’ best teachers out of schools that serve mostly poor and minority students.” In testimony before the House education committee on Tuesday, NEA President Dennis Van Roekel said the move “is part=2 0of the union’s ‘Priority Schools’ campaign that will also encourage ‘the most accomplished teachers-members’ to start their teaching careers in high-needs schools, remain there or transfer there.” The NEA “has come under fire from critics for supporting contracts that allow experienced teachers with more seniority to transfer to schools that serve more middle-class children.”

Jay Mathews wrote in a “Class Struggle” blog for the Washington Post (9/30), “Data show that schools in poor neighborhoods tend to have a disproportionate number of unqualified, inexperienced or out-of-field teachers. That compounds the schools’ many academic challenges.” Thus, NEA President Dennis Van Roekel “said in prepared testimony that the union would ask ‘every local NEA affiliate to enter into a compact or memorandum of understanding with its local school district to waive any contract language that prohibits staffing high-needs schools with great teachers.’”

\*Editors Note-This was taken from the NEA Opening Bell and this was President Tuttle’s response.

I find this first article that NEA Encourages Best Teachers to Teach at High Needs Schools to be VERY OFFENSIVE! I can not believe that Sacramento is in a world of their own! Our teachers do not look at leaving low performing schools to go to schools with top performing students. Frankly the opposite is true! I was talking with a teacher yesterday that chose a low performing school during the surplus placement last spring when her school was closed (enrollment down). She loves her school and the students. She feels appreciated and valued. It is NOT the students BUT the SITE ADMINISTRATOR that makes the difference! Linda Tuttle President

## Few New York City Schools Serve Freshly-Cooked Meals.

The New York Times (9/30, D1, Severson) reports on the front of its Style section that many advocates for healthier school food “have begun to believe that the only way to improve what students eat is to stop reheating processed food and start cooking real, fresh food.” However, “little actual cooking goes on in the nation’s largest public school system, largely because little of it can,” as only about “half of New York’s 1,385 school kitchens have enough cooking and fire-suppression equipment so cooks” can prepare food over an open flame. New York “is not that unusual. More than 80 percent of the nation’s districts cook fewer than half their entrees from scratch, according to a 2009 survey by the School Nutrition Association.”

## Institute Of Medicine Recommends School Lunch Overhaul.

NBC Nightly News (10/20, story 2, 2:15, Williams) reported, “The prestigious Institute of Medicine today recommended a big overhaul in this nation’s school lunch programs.” NBC (Costello) added, “While the nation’s schools served lunch to 30 million kids and breakfast to 10 million each day, the cafeteria standards haven’t been updated in 14 years. The new recommendations call for school lunches to offer 2



Pictured above: Melissa Stepanich, SCTA Elementary Director  
Pictured Below: Nancy Fong and Cory James, teachers at Earl Warren. They all represented teachers at the District’s Open Enrollment Fair on Nov 7th at the Serna Center.



1/2 to five fruit servings each week, up to 2 1/2 servings of vegetables each week, nine to 13 servings of grain with at least half and whole grains, skim milk, and in addition to minimum calorie suggestions, for the first time, age-specific calorie ceilings, too. But implementing all of those ideas will likely mean school lunch programs could get more expensive,” so “the researchers want the USDA, which administers school lunch programs, to help pick up the tab.”

ABC World News (10/20, story 9, 2:30, Gibson) reported, The Institute of Medicine says to combat obesity, schools should be serving more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains and cut down on fat and sodium and set maximum calorie levels for meals. But that’s expensive.” ABC (Besser) added, “In the last 20 years, the national rate of childhood obesity has tripled.” Tony Geraci of Baltimore’s Public Schools “has revamped school lunches in one of the nation’s toughest urban areas, with one restriction: he couldn’t spend a penny more to do it. He added more fresh produce from local growers, cutting down on transportation costs. And he introduced ‘Meatless Mondays’ in all 218 schools, a first for a US public school system.”

Jennifer LaRue Huget wrote in “The Checkup” blog for the Washington Post (10/20) that the “new rules would, for the first time, establish an upper limit for calories. ... The guidelines also embrace a gradual reduction in sodium content over the coming decade, noting that too dramatic a cutback would leave school food unpalatable.”

**Op-Ed: Federal Government Should Promote**

## Florida District Sees Some Gains With “Inquiry Math”.

The Orlando Sentinel (10/1, Weber) reports, “Gains in student test scores offer evidence that a controversial approach to teaching math is working in Seminole County public schools, district officials said Tuesday night. Since Seminole began using ‘inquiry math’ in middle schools three years ago, they said, the number of students scoring at the proficiency level in math on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test has risen from just over 67 percent to nearly 73 percent.” In the program, “teachers don’t explain formulas or ways of solving problems. Instead, they encourage students to work in small groups and discover solutions on their own.” That “has brought complaints from some parents and even some teachers, who question the effectiveness of the new instructional method and call it ‘fuzzy math.’” Yet at Tuesday’s school board meeting, “most of the approximately 130 people who showed up were teachers and principals supporting the new program.”

## Roughly 250,000 Education Jobs Saved, Created From Stimulus Bill, Report Says.

The Washington Post (10/20, A4, Anderson) reports that federal stimulus funds have “created or saved 250,000 education jobs, the Obama administration announced Monday, although states and school systems continue to face enormous fiscal pressures.” The announcement highlighted a report, issued by the White House and ED, suggesting that “without \$67 billion in federal aid provided through Sept. 30 under the economic stimulus law, state and local budgets for public schools and higher education would be hemorrhaging. The report previews more detailed education jobs data that will be announced Oct. 30.”

The Washington Times (10/20, Weber) adds that “the report being released by the White House’s Domestic Policy Council -- in cooperation with the US Department of Education -- shows money from the \$787 billion” stimulus bill “has enabled states to cover nearly all of their projected education-budget shortfalls for fiscal 2009 and 2010.” Bloomberg News (10/19, Goldman) added that the stimulus plan “has allowed school districts and universities to avoid layoffs and states have been able to restore ‘nearly all of their projected education budget shortfalls’ for fiscal years 2009 and 2010, the White House said, citing preliminary data in a new government report.” Yet, even “with stimulus spending, job growth lags behind other indicators of a recovery. The unemployment rate rose to 9.8 percent last month and the president has said he expects it to exceed 10 percent before it starts coming down.” The Wall Street Journal (10/20, Pulizzi) also covers this story.

**Stimulus Has Saved 6,000 Education Jobs In Los Angeles, Report Finds.** The Los Angeles Times (10/20, Markman) reports, “Some 250,000 education jobs have been saved or created by the economic stimulus package, according to a White House report released Monday. ... According to the report, more than 6,000 education jobs in Los Angeles were saved by stimulus funds.” White House Domestic Policy Council Director Melody Barnes is quoted saying that the stimulus bill also helped “avert massive class [size] expansion.”

**Vegetable-Eating Among Youth.** Marcus Weaver-Hightower, an assistant professor of educational foundations and research at the University of North Dakota, wrote in an op-ed for Education Week (10/20) that President Obama “is fond of saying that parents have a responsibility to their children’s education to turn off the TV and video games, an idea reiterated in his back-to-school speech to U.S. schoolchildren.” Yet, what Obama “neglected to mention...was the importance of the school cafeteria. He should have told America’s students to eat their vegetables.” Among other measures to promote vegetable eating among youth, Weaver-Hightower calls for child nutrition to be a responsibility of ED, as currently, “the school lunch program is run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, whose mission is to help agribusiness first, kids second.”



## Reminiscences of a CTA Region 9 Attendee

By Bob Nosler, SCTA Treasurer

Dear People,

Back! In one piece!

I drove up on Friday afternoon, zipped back on Sunday afternoon. Between the beginning and the end we had rather a full schedule, but it wasn't an impossible one.

As an item of torture, they fed us extremely well. Well, not torture. But the food was good, and I gained a bazillion pounds...which I don't need!

On Saturday, the speaker in the General Session was John Mockler. He has a consulting company that puts together data from the California Department of Education so that normal people can understand it. (I looked up the guy on the Internet, but the name is not unique. There's even an Australian one and a dead one.) The bottom line on his presentation was that an awful lot of people just do not understand statistics. And those stats that do get used, are utilized to say mean, very inaccurate things about American public Education. African Americans, Hispanic Americans and other ethnic and racial groups are actually doing a whole lot better than in the past...but they aren't getting their deserved credit. 'Seems to me, I read a little book way back in high school called "How to Lie with Statistics." Yup. And a lot of people really don't understand the difference between a percentile and a percent. Or quartiles. Or medians. Or... well, you get the idea.

On Saturday, I went to two sessions put together for treasurers. They were taught by Chrystell Santa Cruz, a CPA who does a lot of CTA's accounting. Sharp cookie. One session was on good business practices: tax status, codes of ethics, budgeting, financial reports, two signatures on checks, spread sheets, written policies, audits, etc. The other session was on more esoteric things: agency fee requirements, Hudson Notice mailings, levels of reserves, stipends, PERB requirements, IRS forms, and PAC contribution reporting. There is rather a lot to learn, and some people in those sessions are just starting. This does not mean

## Teaching Outside of the Classroom

By Joe Barnett

We are aware that changes are going on around us. These are changes that may affect the way we get our health care, the way schools will be run in the future and hundreds of other policy choices. These decisions will impact our lives, the lives of our families, our friends, and our students. Each of us has to determine our own role in the process as society approaches one crossroad after another. Do we sit on the side and hope someone does it right, or do we get up and get active to make sure our educated voices are heard?

I teach because I believe in education, not just in the classroom, but in our lives outside of school. Recently, I had an opportunity to share my teacher perspective and to listen to the concerns of other thoughtful citizens at town hall meetings here in Sacramento.

In the past two months, Congresswoman Matsui had two town hall meetings regarding Health Care Reform. An over the phone meeting had 11,000 participants. The second meeting was in person and had a crowd placed in a second room after the Sutter Middle School auditorium overflowed. While not chosen to speak at that time I was able to leave the Congresswoman with a suggestion that true Health Care Reform contain provisions for federally funded School Nurses in all of our schools and how they should be valued as an important part of providing health care to our children. I explained my concern for diabetic children and others who require regular medical assistance when they are in a school where there is no nurse.

The importance of school nurses was heard again, when I spoke at Capitol Public Radio's town hall. I also expressed my support for hospitals that asked kids "where it hurts" instead of "where were their passports". The full room meeting was broadcast over KXJZ, and support for nurses and our students was again addressed.

This fall offered occasions to discuss education policy. In the downtown City Library, I challenged Secretary of Education, Arnie Duncan, regarding the use of standardized tests in the evaluation of teachers and of the value of charter schools as a keystone in the education reform movement. Last month, our school district hosted a meeting regarding the problems faced by program improvement schools, and I was there. During a breakout session one administrator made it clear that he didn't want to hear any teacher bashing or he would not bring teachers to any future meetings. It was good to know that administrators can appreciate what we do, and what we are up against.

Finally, as an elected alternate to the CTA state council, I attended the fall meeting in Los Angeles. There I was able to help write new policy and to amend old policy so CTA could be clearer in our desire to impact educational policy as it applies to teacher evaluations and the role of charter schools in our districts. I write this not to bring attention to what I am doing, but to remind all teachers of the abundant opportunities to educate the public about the challenges we face, the need for social and economic justice and its impact on our students. We are teachers, not because we earned a diploma, not because we got our certification, but because it is what we do every day of our lives. We teach, and our classroom can be every meeting hall, and any encounter that allows us to tell our story.

I know everything! I've just been lucky enough to have been treasurer for the SCTA for quite a while. Also, just when you figure you have a lock on things, the Feds or the State or CTA require something new.

On Sunday, the final session I attended was about STRS. It was taught by STRS ombudsman Tom Barrett and CTA specialist Steve DePue. Again, there was a ton of information to absorb: defined benefits, retirement incentives, survivor benefits, age factors, buying "air time," unused sick leave, Service Credit, et cetera. And each teacher has her or his particular variations on the theme. They said they could have gone on for four hours, and I believe them! Bottom line: Explore the STRS web site and begin to explore your own possibilities.

The final general session speaker was Lily Eskelsen, NEA VP. She was funny and informative. Her main idea was that we are trying to run our schools on a business model that doesn't work with humans. We are not manufacturing kitchen appliances! And at the moment, we're not having much fun, and it's not helping our students. Lily suggested, facetiously, that we all move to Finland where they are not so locked into test scores. Of course, in Finland, they are largely homogeneous in their population. There are not many poor or rich folks. Most people are middle class. There is lots of parental support of public education with no private schools, no vouchers. There's continual collaboration between colleagues in schools. And the students are expected to do well... and they do. Finally, they threw out standardized testing. It was really telling when she described a conversation between her and a teacher in Finland. After listening to what we are going through over here, that teacher ended up feeling pity for us and our students! Ouch.

I had a very educational weekend. I almost felt I could apply for units over at CSUS.

## Plan ahead, or Fall Behind

By: Christine Coit, High School Director

To maintain your standard of living when you retire, you may need 80-100% of your pre-retirement income. Now, with the average CalSTRS benefit replacing 63% of your pre-retirement income, it's necessary to find other means to close the gap between your pension and your actual needs. Contributing to a 403(b) plan is an excellent choice for educators, with three clear advantages:

1. You can save on taxes now, because you contribute money pre-tax.
2. Your earnings are tax-deferred, meaning you will save on taxes later.
3. You can set up your contributions as payroll deductions, making saving easy and convenient.

Interestingly, however, only 30-40% of CTA members participate in such a plan.

To help you plan wisely for your retirement, CTA has launched [ctainvest.org](http://ctainvest.org). By visiting the website, members can use a host of calculators, view webinars, and have access to over one hundred articles on investing and financial planning.

## SCTA ANNUAL SOX & UNDIES DRIVE

**November 8 – December 18, 2009**

Fill the *PTA Clothes Closet* with  
**New Socks and Undies** for all Ages

Please bring all collected items to SCTA (5300 Elvas Avenue) for inventory. Make sure your donation is marked with the name of your school site.

Segment/School with the most donated units will receive breakfast courtesy of SCTA.

Questions? Contact Melissa Stepanick  
(Hubert Bancroft Elementary) – 916.382.5940.



Sacramento City Teachers Association  
5300 Elvas Avenue . . . Sacramento, CA 95819  
Phone: 916.452.4591 ---- Fax: 916.452.4675