

VEA Voice

Volume 3, Issue 8

September 2011

President's Message

Happy New School Year!

Welcome back to the start of another school year. I hope that many of you were able to have an enjoyable summer, one in which you were able to recharge your batteries to come back and do the work of best meeting the educational needs of our students.

My summer was a good one as my husband and I celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary in August. I went completely off the grid (didn't answer e-mails or phone calls) for that week. Sometimes we need to do that in order to really focus on those things that are most important to us.

At our mandatory meeting led by the district, I regretfully was not asked to welcome you back. I've enjoyed the past two years being able to welcome everyone back and also give the members I represent a broad overview of VEA's roadmap for the upcoming school year. Following are a couple of items that I would have presented in an opening address to you.

First, we started negotiations with the district on re-openers to the contract. Your Bargaining Team, chaired by Sheila Gradwohl, met with the district's negotiation team, chaired by Dr. Damelio, in the beginning of August. Pay-cut days continue to be proposed by the district, but nothing has been tentatively agreed upon. As we continue our negotiations, the Bargaining Team has kept in mind the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed with the district earlier this year. The MOU clearly stated the need for the district to work with VEA to develop a Health Benefits committee. It is unreasonable for the district to ask us to take further cuts in our pay without trying to get its employees a better deal on our health benefits.

Second, the school board currently has three seats open. I

would have addressed this fact & the fact that it is incumbent upon school board members who have sought & have received our endorsement to talk to VEA before important decisions are made that impact the students & teachers of Vallejo.

This year we are taking a new look at how to handle races for our school board candidates. For the first time, we will be asking our membership on who to endorse or whether we should endorse anyone this year. Our plan is to host up to two candidate forums during the 1st week of October. Additionally, four of our members who live in Vallejo are willing to host Board members & candidates in their homes. Be sure to come to one of these events to have your say. More information on specific dates & times will be out within the next week.

Finally, this issue of the "VEA Voice" is jam-packed with a lot of information. Make sure to read the article about the State Budget Triggers, which may directly impact the direction of our negotiations with the district. Also, share information about the State Lotto (& how it hasn't really helped fund education) and the Tax

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President’s Message

Fairness article with your friends and neighbors. As educators, we tend to make do with the very little we get. Now is the time to start educating the public about how our working conditions impact our students’ learning conditions.

Regards,

Christal Watts, President

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* * * * *
 * VEA is hosting its 3rd Annual “Helping Hands” event *
 * the from Monday, September 26th to Thursday, Septem- *
 * ber 29th. We need volunteers to take an hour out of *
 * their day to help set-up, distribute supplies and tear *
 * down at the end. We will be at the following locations: *
 * • Monday 9/26—JFK Library *
 * • Tuesday 9/27—Springstowne Library *
 * • Wednesday 9/28– South Vallejo Community Center *
 * (by Patterson) *
 * • Thursday, 9/29—Omega Boys & Girls Club *
 * We will need volunteers from 3 p.m. to 6 *
 * p.m. for these four nights. Contact Ron *
 * West, VEA’s Community Outreach Chair at *
 * gowest42@pacbell.net. *
 * * * * *



Facts about State Budget Triggers

Since early August, we have all witnessed the extreme volatility of the stock market. State revenues are coming in lower than expected and that will trigger additional state budget cuts. It is normal to be anxious about how this will affect our lives, the California economy, the generation of tax revenues, and the funding of public education and other essential services.

- When the state budget was passed in June, it was built on the projection that tax revenues would be \$4 billion greater than those contained in the Governor’s May Revision. At that time, revenues were already ahead of projections by \$1.3 billion. On August 9, the State Controller released his monthly report showing revenues were down \$538.8 million. This was followed by two other reports – one by the State Board of Equalization (BOE) and the other by the Department of Finance – that saw these projections move yet again. The BOE contends the state received \$1.64 billion in sales and use tax revenues for the month of July, although the Controller recorded only about \$1 billion. The discrepancy comes from the different ways that state agencies account for revenue.

So what’s it all mean? Who to believe? What to do?

1. We must not overreact to daily ‘factoids’ but should keep an eye on the trends in state revenue between now and December 15, the date when the Department of Finance must determine whether state revenues have met the necessary projections.

2. We must not rush or be pushed into acting prematurely. Trends in state tax revenue will be clearer by early November.

3. We must remember that the triggers are tiered and reductions are bargained.

- If revenues are \$500 million below projections nothing will happen.
- If revenues are more than \$500 million but less than \$2 billion below projections nothing will happen to K-12 education funding.
- Any cuts to public education are proportional. If revenues are more than \$2 billion below projections, any changes will be determined by how much revenues fall below the projection. (Remember at the time the budget was passed, the state was already \$1.3 billion of where revenues needed to be to insulate K-12 spending from any reduction.)
- Any reductions in the length of the school year must be bargained locally. February 1, 2012 is the date when the ability to bargain a reduction of up to 7 days becomes operative. It closes for all practical purposes by mid-June and negotiations should be concluded by June 30, 2012.

For more information on the state budget & its impact on education, go to www.cta.org.

Survey

Please complete the questions below & return to your site rep or through interdistrict mail to Christal Watts, Vallejo Education Association.

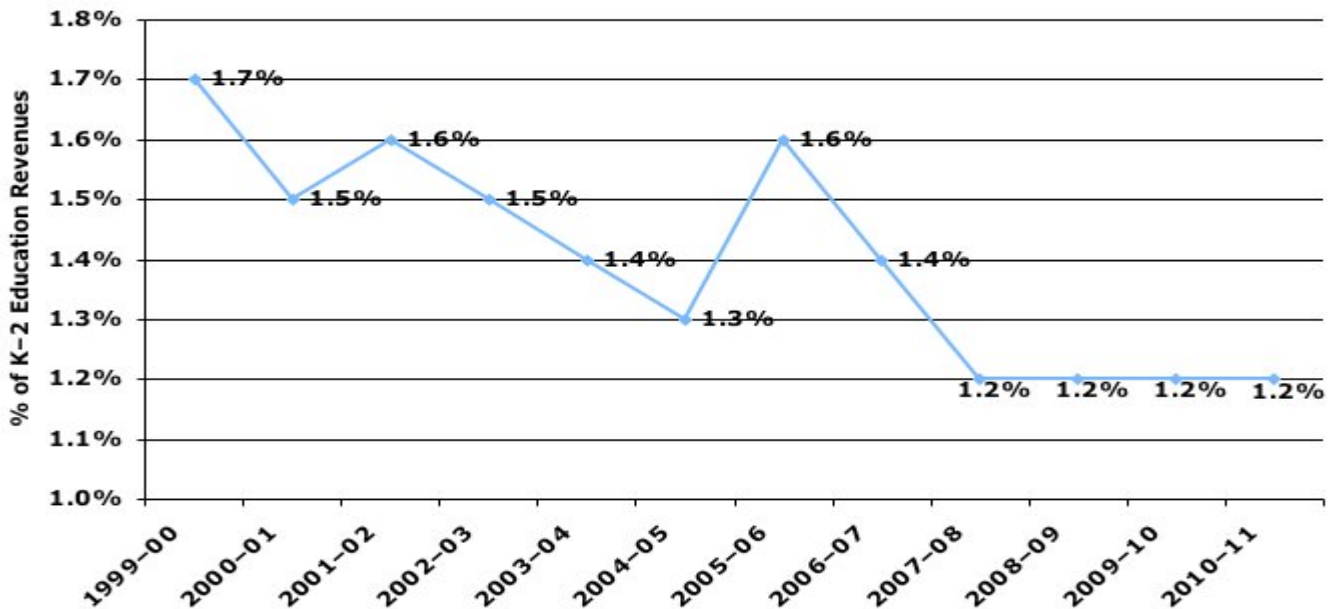
1. I am generally pleased with the VEA newsletter: yes/no
2. I want there to be more articles on: good news at school sites state budget information bargaining briefs good teaching strategies upcoming events other:

3. I know who my site representative is at my school site & know how to contact them if I need help. yes/no What is your school site? _____
4. I know how to sign up for VEA's electronic newsletter. yes/no.
5. I know how to sign up for VEA's text messaging system. yes/no.
6. I know who my VEA director is for my site level. yes/no. What level are you? preschool, elementary, middle school, high school, adult school, special education.
7. I know who the leadership is for VEA. yes/no. Clip and return
8. I know that VEA has a facebook page, twitter feed, website (circle all that apply).

State Lotto Barely Helps Fund Education



The State Lottery has provided less than 2% of K-12 education revenues during the past 12 years



Note: Data from 1999-00 and 2008-09 are based on estimates.

Data: California Department of Education (CDE), 11/10

Adapted from EdSource's [2011 Resource Cards on California Schools](#).

New Grievance Process Explained

Due to the high number of grievances filed, VEA Leadership was presented with a new plan on handling grievances by VEA President Christal Watts. This new plan shifts the burden of grievances from one person to Directors on VEA's Executive Board. Below is the information outlining this new grievance process.

Grievances will have an oversight committee chaired by Sue Levy, and Christal Watts. When filing a grievance, the unit member needs to contact their VEA Director. VEA Directors will be the first point of contact for the unit member.

1. The unit member will contact the Director that is responsible for their school site if there is an issue that may lead to a grievance. The Director will have the first meeting with the unit member and walk them through the grievance process. The Director will attend (if necessary) the first informal meeting with the site manager to try to prevent a grievance being filed at a Level 1.
2. Once the grievance is filed, the unit member notifies the Director and provides a copy of the grievance to the Director. An e-mail will be sent to the Grievance Chairs so timelines can be tracked on the Grievance calendar (through Google calendars).
3. If the grievance is denied at Level 1, the

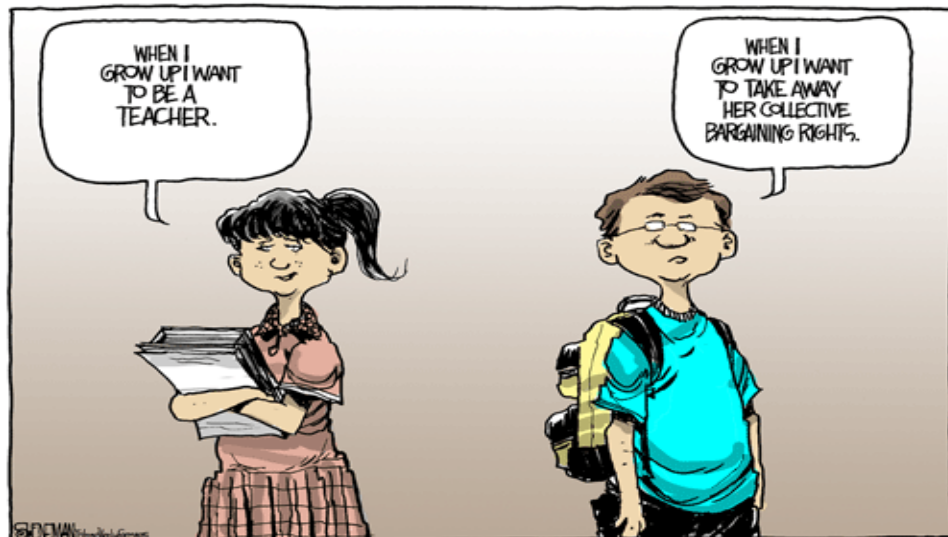
unit member will provide a copy of the denial to the Director. The Director will outline the next step. The unit may choose to file a Level 2 & will need to notify the Director.

4. At Level 2, HR receives a copy of the grievance. HR notifies the grievance chairs that a Level 2 has been received.
5. At Level 2, the unit member will notify their Director when a meeting has been scheduled with HR. The Director will attend the meeting the unit member.
6. In ongoing meetings calendared throughout the school year, the Directors will provide ongoing updates to the any grievances that they are handling.
7. If a grievance goes to Level 3: Grievance Panel, the unit member and one of the grievance chairs will attend the panel hearing.
8. The Directors will provide ongoing updates on the status of grievances filed to the e-board & rep council as part of the reporting process.

For more information on the Grievance Process, refer to the VEA/VCUSD contract, Article 17.

VEA Directors:

Elementary Marie McPherson, Loree Tackmier, Teri Nutt



School Health Benefits Pool

California's public education community faces an unprecedented financial crisis due to a combination of the most significant budget cuts in the state's history while health care costs to school districts and their employees are increasing at alarming rates. Districts and employees spend more than \$6.7 billion on health insurance premiums alone each year, and these costs have increased by more than 114% over the past 10 years—more than 226% faster than the cost of all other educational expenditures. The status quo is no longer sustainable, and there are no viable solutions being offered by the government at either the state or federal level, by the provider community or health benefits industry. While a federal health care reform bill has been recently signed into law, the bill does not mandate any changes in existing negotiated health care plans. And while districts and unions have made every effort to cut costs, such as participating in voluntary pools, it is simply not enough. Districts and unions are urgently seeking new and innovative ways to reduce costs and improve the health of their employees.

Today we have an enormous opportunity to meet these challenges. The California Education Coalition for Health Care Reform (CECHCR) has studied this issue in depth and is proposing a solution that promises a new direction in health care purchasing for the education community. By harnessing the purchasing power of California public education into a single statewide risk pool covering 1.6 million lives, this pool will become the second largest purchaser of health care in the United States and create great potential for lowering costs and improving the health of our employees. Districts and employees will benefit from increased economic leverage in purchasing and negotiating health care benefits that will result in immediate and near-term cost savings and longer-term advantages such as fewer administrative burdens, fewer resources needed for labor and management health benefits bargaining, and

improvements in patient care, preventative medicine and wellness initiatives services.

This proposed school pool design developed by CECHCR is a result of an extensive investigation and interview process conducted to ensure that the fundamental elements of the design represent the diverse interests and needs of its members and the public education community. CECHCR's findings are detailed in this Paper. In summary, for the successful implementation of a statewide pool, CECHCR has concluded:

- The pool must be sufficiently large to provide significant economic leverage to drive down costs.
- The pool must provide a range of affordable plans that equal or exceed current offerings.
- Provider networks must be value-based designs that promote quality outcomes and appropriateness of care.
- Local control must be maintained over which active and retiree benefits are offered and the level of employer and employee contributions, with these issues continuing to remain subject to the collective bargaining process at the local level.
- Plans must incorporate active health promotion programs and incentives to increase health status.
- Governance of the pool must include representation of all funding stakeholders and assure ongoing responsiveness to local education community needs.
- Administration of the pool must be provided by an organization with extensive experience in this area.
- Transition to a statewide pool must be orderly and based on specific criteria.
- The statewide pool and transitional voluntary pools must be held to objective performance criteria.

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School Pool (continued)

Saving substantial money for our districts while implementing better coverage and better health outcomes are the goals of this school pool initiative. CECHCR looks forward to a continuing dialogue with CECHCR member organizations and other interested parties in order to improve on our best thinking about pool design and implementation, and to providing leadership in a collaborative effort that works toward achievement of a statewide public education risk pool.

For more information on CECHR, go to www.ccscenter.org/cechr.

Factoids

- Twenty years ago the salary difference between a US CEO and a factory worker was 40:1. A few years ago it was more than 400:1. J. Micklethwait and A Wooldridge, writers on globalisation, 2000
- Some 57 million U.S. workers say they would join a union if they could. Peter D. Hart Research Associates, December 2006
- Between 2007-09, Wall Street's profits rose 720% between 07-09, unemployment increased 102% & American's home equity decreased 35%. New York State Comptroller, Federal Reserve, and Bureau of Labor Statistics

Tax Fairness: Is it Right? Is it Just? Is it Fair?

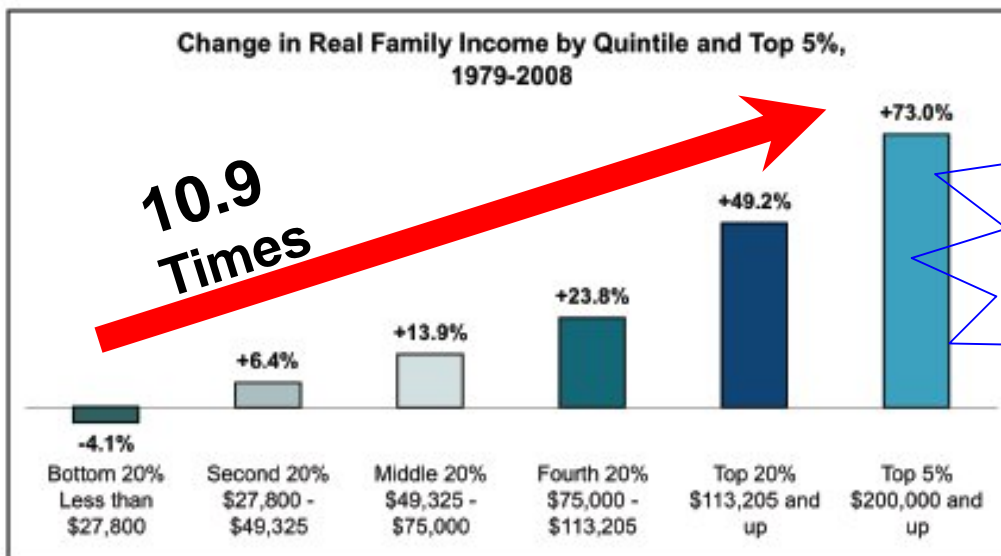
As educators, we are faced every day with issues and concerns from our students and are called upon to settle disputes. In deciding these questions for (or with) our charges, we strive to render decisions that we can defend as based on solid values that we feel are right, just and fair.

This is the first in a series of articles about whether the America we live in today lives up to that simple mantra.

Our elected leaders seem to have forgotten how to ask these basic questions when casting votes on essential questions of public policy. Is it more important to keep the bankers solvent than to keep people in their

homes? Is it more important for poor children and the disabled to have access to adequate medical care or should top income earners and large corporations pay fewer taxes? Should we invest more in public education or give tax breaks for corporate jets. Is it right, is it just, is it fair?

Below is a chart of how increases in income have been distributed over the past 30 years. We can see that the family income has dropped for our poorest citizens while the wealthiest have had a 73% increase. Is this what the income distribution should look like in a society that is right, just and fair? What should it look like for our students and ourselves?



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Historical Income Tables, [Table F-3](#) (for income changes) and [Table F-1](#) (for income ranges in 2008 dollars).