

Outrage and Optimism
State Council – Carolyn Doggett
June 5, 2011

Good Morning State Council.

Outrage and optimism.

That's what I want to talk to you about today.

Because like many of you I am fed up and outraged over what's happening to public education and educators today.

But I am also the eternal optimist.

I'm Optimistic, because we have proven time and time again that through organizing and collective action, we can control our destiny and build a better future for our students, our schools, and our communities.

It will take hard work and won't happen all at once, but I believe we are on the right course to make change happen.

Before I get into my speech, I want to take a moment to again recognize David for his outstanding leadership as CTA President.

It's been an honor and a pleasure to work with you David, and I thank you for the respect and appreciation you have always shown for staff and the work we do on behalf of members.

When Dean is sworn in later today, he will be the sixth CTA president that I have been honored to work with.

I am excited and committed to being there to support him and his goals moving forward.

I also want to thank Council for approving the CTA Budget yesterday.

I want to thank Gail and the budget committee for all their hard work.

It was not an easy task this year.

As I said in April, as your executive director, I take my fiduciary responsibilities very seriously and the entire management

team is working diligently on the austerity measures approved by the CTA Board.

CTA management is taking a two percent pay cut in September.

My goal is to always meet the needs of our members and to keep CTA in a position of strong financial stability.

Teaching under the best of conditions is challenging, and things have certainly changed since I started back in 1967.

Yes, I am getting old.

But what has happened over the last several years has made your jobs the most challenging in our society.

As I express my outrage and optimism, I'm going to use an article written by a teacher here in Los Angeles.

Some of you may have read it.

Kathie Marshall is an English teacher with 40 years of experience.

The article was published in Education Week.

As Kathie said, I'm not just mad – I'm outraged.

The continuing onslaught against public education is unprecedented.

I'm outraged

that President Obama has so let down public educators by enabling the continuing rhetoric against bad teachers and failing schools, all the while neglecting to undo the worst aspects of "no child left behind".

Let me say, if there is anything positive about NCLB, it is that it forced some folks to take a closer look at our schools of greatest need.

And that is important.

But unfortunately, NCLB has taken public education in the wrong direction and all the research proves that.

The excessive focus on standardized testing, narrowing of curriculum, and impossible goals are destroying quality teaching and learning – especially for minority and lower-performing students.

And despite all the promises from President Obama about fixing NCLB, his Blueprint for Reform and Race to the Top program are more of the same and in many ways worse.

States and schools are now competing for federal funding that is all predicated on four unproven options for reforming struggling schools.

Firing all the teachers or shutting down schools does not help students.

It abandons them and their families.

Research shows that privately managed, charter schools are not performing any better than other public school and they are not the golden answer.

I'm outraged

that Secretary of Education Arne Duncan continues his laser like focus on teacher evaluations and monetary rewards based on unreliable standardized test scores.

This focus on standardized testing is obscene.

Talk about a program that is “in need of improvement.”

Duncan rolled out all these Race to the Top ideas in Chicago first.

Last year, the Chicago Times declared "Renaissance 2010" a disaster that decimated 80 schools.

Test scores didn't improve, displaced students ended up in other low-performing schools and the mass closings led to violence as rival gang members ended up in the same classrooms.

And while Duncan and Obama like to talk of national test score comparisons, there's little talk about what high-performing countries actually do: fund schools equitably, invest in high-quality teacher preparation, professional salaries, a curriculum that focuses on problem-solving and critical thinking skills, and little use of student tests.

In fact, none of them have multiple-choice tests.

I'm outraged that Michele Rhee is still a media darling appearing on CBS and Fox news to publicize her "Save Great Teachers" campaign and undo teacher seniority layoffs, as though all great teachers are among the recently hired.

I call her the reform huckster.

It's Michelle First, not Students First.

Because we now know the real story in D.C. schools.

An investigative report in USA Today found an extraordinarily high number of erasures on the standardized tests of the schools she hailed as successful.

And while she touts the uncredentialed approach of Teach for America, educators in Finland and Shanghai are required to have master's degrees, because those high-performing countries believe education, pedagogy and experience matter.

I'm outraged

that a handful of extremely wealthy individuals increasingly control the policy agenda and use their big buck to force corporate solutions on schools where many students are suffering the consequences of poverty and Wall Street's reckless raids on the economy.

The Billionaire Boys Club, including Gates, Broad, Walton and the Koch brothers, are accountable to no one.

Yet they are driving education policy decisions and using taxpayer dollars to make it happen.

Their agenda of running schools as a business is about profits – not students.

Kathie continued.

I'm outraged

that scores of media continue to exclude teacher experts and teacher leaders from substantive conversations about education reform.

I'm outraged that 15 more of my school's most talented, experienced teachers are going through the turmoil of Reduction in Force notices – informed that they may, in fact, be jobless after June.

I'm outraged that the workforce at my large high-needs middle school, where we accomplished the nearly unheard of goal of increasing the state Academic Performance Index score by 47 points last year, continues to be gutted.

How are we to make do next year with two assistant principals instead of four?

With four clerical workers instead of 12?

With one custodian instead of five?

No librarian?

No literacy coach?

No math coach?

No nurse?

The state budget deficits are crippling our schools and colleges.

We've lost 40,000 educators over the last three years.

And we'll likely lose more this year.

But the students have not gone away.

So now we see average class sizes creeping back up to 30 to 1 in the primary grades and 40 to 1 in upper grades.

I'm predicting that the next special credential you will be required to get is one in crowd control.

In higher education, student fees have gone up more than 200 percent.

But thanks to all of you,
I have hope.

The State of Emergency activities last month were amazing.

From Siskiyou County on the Oregon border to San Diego County, students, parents, educators, education support professionals, and others were out spreading the word.

We were telling our stories, telling about the impact of budget cuts and calling on lawmakers to pass a state budget with tax extensions to prevent deeper cuts to education and other essential services.

As I told of group of students from Hoover High School in San Diego: This rally, this week...is about you and your future.

But that week was only part of the journey.

We have to finish the work to get what we need on this state budget and to get the two votes needed in the Assembly and Senate.

We have to keep making calls and keep making our voices heard.

We must join with our labor coalition partners to make phone calls and walk precincts in those targeted districts.

And if push comes to shove, and we end up having a special election, we have to be ready to fight for those temporary taxes at the ballot box as well.

But we must also stay focused on our long-term goal of tax fairness and ongoing, stable funding.

I'm outraged

that California politicians have so destroyed the eighth largest economy in the world that we are close to having a third-world educational system in place.

By handing out tax breaks to big corporations, the corporate tax burden has dropped in half since 1981, while the individual taxpayer's burden has risen by a third.

Kathie said,

I'm outraged

that the tireless dedication of my principal is being rewarded with the continual pressure to perform her job and to demonstrate teacher effectiveness and student learning.

I'm outraged that my students, growing up in one of the poorest communities in Los Angeles, are expected to perform better than ever while being provided with fewer and fewer resources in and out of schools during these dismal economic times.

Who cares about students who've lost their homes? Lost a parent? Speak little English? Didn't eat yesterday? Don't have healthcare?

As Linda Darling-Hammond put it, the answer of education reformers to poor

children: "Let them eat tests."

I'm outraged

that after a decade of ill-informed rants against bad teachers and failing schools, now the pundits and politicians are coming after our pensions and health benefits.

With the added insult that in 15 states, educators don't get Social Security benefits.

I'm outraged

that so few Americans attempt to understand the dedication and long hours that are required in the teaching profession and so easily accept media portrayals of teachers as being overpaid for their "cushy part time" jobs.

Most of all, I'm outraged over the growing negative impact on teachers and the education profession of all of the above. Across the country, educators are feeling disrespected, unappreciated, threatened, demoralized, and defeated. Nonetheless, you appear daily before your treasured students with a smile and a new, important lesson for day.

All these rants beg the question: When will those in power and position finally understand that in order to have a strong, vibrant, economically sound future for America, we must give educators respect, empower them to reform their profession, and support them with adequate finances to realize our dreams for all our students?

But as I said,
I'm still optimistic.

And my plea to you:
Don't give up.

Don't ever, ever give up.

I am an eternal optimist.

As a fourth generation Californian and a fourth generation teacher,
I am not giving up.

I am optimistic and hopeful for our future.

I'm optimistic when I see the success of CTA's Quality Education Investment Act.

I'm optimistic when I see the impact of teacher-led reforms through CTA's Institute for Teaching.

I'm optimistic when I see the work of the Teacher Evaluation Workgroup that is tackling how we can build an evaluation system that is designed to strengthen the knowledge, skills and practices of teachers to improve students.

I'm optimistic because of our new leadership team here at CTA: Dean, Eric and Mikki – are education leaders who are going to fight every day for the members of CTA and the students of California.

I'm optimistic because all of you in this room give me hope.

Even when the work is challenging and setbacks come, never forget that with the work you do in your classrooms, you are building a better future for our children and our state.

Never forget that when you speak up for what you believe in and speak out against injustice, you are making a difference.

Robert Kennedy said,

“It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped.

Each time a person stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope.”

Each and every time you speak out for our students and public education you are sending a ripple of hope.

Thank you for your courage and commitment.