

# ACT NOW

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## PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Happy New (school) Year!! It was an exciting NEA Representative Assembly for the ACT Delegates, Brian Jeffrey, Barbara Shiffermiller, Gloria Garcia, Joanne Crawford, and Don Schulteis, as well as Hank Mollet and myself (Jan Thornhill) who attended as State Delegates. In June, State Council had declined to endorse Dennis Van Roekel in his candidacy for NEA President and had not approved early endorsement of President Obama for re-election. After much spirited debate in both the California Caucus and on the floor of the RA, Dennis was re-elected, and President Obama was given an early endorsement by NEA, but not without some very strong recommendations from the body regarding communications with regard to education and union policies.

President’s Conference, as usual, provided an excellent opportunity to review the state budget as well as a chance to exchange information with other local presidents about how locals are dealing with their individual budget issues. The state budget, uncharacteristically, was completed before August, and there was no change for the worse since the May revision! Now it’s just a waiting game until the end of the year to see if the projected revenues match the actual revenues until then.

It’s also a quite active year legislatively! I hope that many of you have responded to the call to action on SB 161 (diastat). If



you are concerned about the cost of health insurance premiums, calls regarding AB 52 (which is in its third reading) would also be in order. On the Federal level, we are still working on rectifying the unfairness of the Social Security rules for California teachers.

CTA’s focus is turning to the issue of long range funding of public education. As we have seen in the past few recession years, the structure of California’s funding for education is too responsive to ups and downs of the economy. Public education funding needs to be stable and adequate in order for us to do our jobs. CTA’s Funding Public Education Workgroup is working to make recommendations about what can be done, and what CTA (all of us) can do to reach our goal of having the funding that shows that California is committed to its students---its future.

*Jan*

## THE OPENING BELL



### Leading the News

#### Tailoring Lessons To Different Kinds Of Learners Not Effective, Researchers Say.

[NPR's Morning Edition](#) (8/29, Neighmond) reports that according to psychologist Dan Willingham of the University of Virginia, "we're on more equal footing than we may think when it comes to how our brains learn," and that "teachers should not tailor instruction to different kinds of learners." Researchers say there is little evidence to suggest educational improvement based on targeting students with visual, auditory, and movement-based styles of learning. Instead, Willingham said, "it might be more useful to figure out similarities in how our brains learn, rather than differences." For example, NPR notes, "recent studies find our brains retain information better when we spread learning over a longer period of time, say months or even a year, versus cramming it into a few days or weeks."

### NEA In the News

#### California Test Scores Show Narrowing Achievement

The [San Jose Mercury News](#) (8/25, Noguchi) reports that data released this week from high school exit exams in California show that "for the first time," over 90% of the state's "black and Latino students passed both the English and math portions. ...The milestone comes five years after California started requiring students to pass the controversial test – a breeze for most seniors, a burden for many traditionally left behind – before they can graduate." The "encouraging" figures show that 94.6% of all students passed the test, and "numbers are steadily climbing among students at the bottom of the academic achievement gap that separates white and Asian students from black and Latino students."

#### NEA VP Eskelsen Named To President's Commission On Educational Excellence For Hispanics.

The [White House](#) (8/19) announced that President Obama intends to appoint NEA Vice President Lily Eskelsen "previously served as the National Education Association Secretary-Treasurer from 2002 to 2007," and was previously "a teacher at Orchard Elementary in Utah and, in 1989, she was awarded Utah Teacher of the Year. Ms. Eskelsen has also taught at the Salt Lake Homeless Shelter and at the Christmas Box Children's Shelter, and served as President of the Utah Retirement System."

### NEA in the News

#### Kansas Union Officials React To Missouri Teacher Social Media Law.

The [Topeka Capitol-Journal](#) (8/8, Deines) reports on the new law in Missouri banning teachers and students from engaging in private communication via such social media as Facebook, noting that the "law has drawn criticism across the US but also has shined the light on the increasing use of social media between teachers and students." The piece quotes Kansas NEA communications director Cynthia Menzel saying "the Missouri law is overreaching and the vast majority of teachers interact with their students 'in the school setting' and know what a proper relationship should be with their students, on or offline."

*"The Missouri law is overreaching... states Cynthia Menzel, Kansas NEA communication director."*



## THE OPENING BELL (CONT'D)



### NEA in the News (Cont'd)

#### **Missouri Teachers Association Sues To Block Social Media Ban.**

[Reuters](#) (8/22, Murphy) reports that the Missouri State Teachers Association filed a lawsuit Friday saying that Missouri's new law banning students and teachers from interacting on social media is in violation of free speech and is too vague.

#### ***WPost: In An Online World, State Laws Impede Teacher-Student Communication.***

In an editorial, the [Washington Post](#) (8/20) writes that teachers across the US are using social media to better communicate with students and facilitate learning. Yet "new laws and proposed measures are impeding teacher communication with students outside of school-sanctioned email systems" in states like Missouri. The Post concludes that schools "are right to be concerned" about school bullies and sexual predators online, but that "in a media universe where young people are often most engaged and motivated online, these laws only handicap learning and innovation."

#### **Missouri NEA Looks to Work With Legislature On Tweaking "Facebook Law."**

The [Missouri News Horizon](#) (8/23, Aldrich) reports that NEA's Missouri Chapter "will get a chance to talk with a representative for State Senator Jane Cunningham, seeking clarification of the controversial 'Facebook Law.' Missouri NEA President Chris Guinther says his organization will host a conference call Tuesday morning" to discuss "the possibilities of fixing the law" with members of Cunningham's staff. "Legislation limiting electronic communication between teachers and students was part of a larger bill that, among other things, seeks to protect students from teachers that commit sexual assault." However, teachers have filed suit against the legislation arguing that it limits beneficial legitimate conversation between teachers and students.

The [St. Louis Beacon](#) (8/23, Singer) reports that the lawsuit claims that the law would ban a teacher from "friending" one of his or her own children. The law "becomes effective this coming Sunday. Since it was passed and signed by Gov. Jay Nixon, school boards have been trying to come up with policies, as required, to govern private online communication between teachers and current or former students." This piece also mentions the MNEA conference call.

#### **Author of Missouri "Facebook Law" Willing To Work With State NEA.**

The [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#) (8/25, Bock) reports that Missouri state Sen. Jane Cunningham (R), who penned a law "that some say could effectively stop the use of Facebook between teachers and students, is "willing to work through what she describes as ambiguity in the legislation." However, "it's unclear whether both sides can secure a quick remedy." Critics of the soon-to-take-effect law say it risks "cutting off even the most innocent online exchanges between teachers and students, such as questions about homework assignments or an upcoming athletic practice." The Cunningham and the Missouri NEA say they hope to craft "a cleanup bill that would disarm a dispute attracting national attention."



## THE OPENING BELL (CONT'D)



### NEA in the News (Cont'd)

[KSDK-TV](#) St. Louis, MO (8/25, Stevens) reports that the “controversial Missouri ‘Facebook’ bill may be undergoing some changes,” even as the Missouri State Teachers Association and the American Civil Liberties Union have filed lawsuits” in opposition to the bill. Cunningham says the measure “will help protect children from sexual assaults in schools,” though she and the MNEA “have agreed that some language in the bill needs clarification.”

Meanwhile, the [Jefferson-City News Tribune](#) (8/25, Watson) reports that the MSTTA and other “education lobbyists” met with Cunningham about “ways to draft compromise language” for the bill on Tuesday. [ABC News](#) (8/25, Potter) also covers this story.

### Law & Policy

#### California Expected To Delay On Standardized Test-Based Teacher Evaluations

The [Orange County Register](#) (8/27, Leal) reports the Obama Administration “is widely expected in September to require such data-driven teacher grading systems as a condition of granting a statewide waiver to the much-maligned No Child Left Behind test standards,” but “California is likely to shrug off” this new set of requirements. Earlier this year, Obama “won a key endorsement when” the National Education Association said “it would support Obama’s efforts as long as tests were ‘developmentally appropriate, scientifically valid, and reliable for the purpose of measuring both student learning and a teacher’s performance.” But late last week, California Superintendent Tom Torlakson “asked Duncan on Thursday to consider an unconditional waiver, suggesting the state might not qualify under Duncan’s plan and arguing it would be unfair for the federal government to demand overhauls without providing money to implement them,” the Register noted.

### Also In the News

#### In Debate With Rhee, Ravitch Says Teachers Being Demoralized.

The [Washington-Post](#) (8/19, Layton) reports, “Michelle A. Rhee, the former D.C. schools chancellor whose take-no prisoners stance shook up the city and transformed her into a leader of the school reform movement, parried with Diane Ravitch, an education historian whose criticisms of charter schools and high stakes testing has made her a hero to teachers’ unions and many defenders of traditional public education. The Martha’s Vineyard encounter was the pair’s first faceoff in person.” Ravitch, “a former assistant education secretary under President George H. W. Bush, maintained that teachers are being scapegoated. ‘I have been seeing profound demoralization among teachers in America today,’ Ravitch said. ‘It is almost hard to convey. Teachers feel they are being held accountable for social conditions beyond their control.’”



## CALSTRS

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### **MAINTAINING YOUR BENEFITS....**



#### **DON'T LOSE YOUR MEMBER BENEFITS WHILE ON LEAVE!**

Unfortunately, while you are on a leave of absence and your paycheck ceases, your CTA membership dues deductions will cease as well. This lapse in membership is often missed until the need to utilize Member Benefits programs.

Contact the ACT office at (909) 390-5534 or the CTA Membership Accounting Department at (650) 552-5278 or email [membership@cta.org](mailto:membership@cta.org) to arrange for continued membership during your leave of absence. If you have questions regarding your Member Benefits, please contact the CTA Member Benefits Department at [member\\_benefits@cta.org](mailto:member_benefits@cta.org).

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