



# Early Educator

CALIFORNIA FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

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## CFT hosts booth at LAUP Conference

California Federation of Teachers (CFT) members and staff hosted a booth at the Los Angeles Universal Preschool Conference and Education Expo held at the Los Angeles Convention Center on October 16 and 17.

The conference focused on the impact and trends of preschool education and gave preschool providers, parents, community and business leaders as well as elected officials the opportunity to discuss, share and explore how to better prepare our children for future successes through a high quality preschool education experience.

The conference featured more than 60 workshops that addressed issues such



*Early Childhood Federation of Teachers, Local 1475 activist and Head Start preschool teacher Aldo Gonzalez talks to other ECE providers and parents at the CFT booth at the LAUP Conference.*

as preschool advocacy, quality, teaching and curriculum including: Encouraging Parent-Child Interaction, Preparing for Kindergarten, Creating a Meaningful Classroom Ex-

perience and Understanding a Parent's Role in their Children's Learning.

The CFT contingent included Early Childhood Education Organizing Project staff Karl Beitel,

Karo Szymanska and Sandra Weese and CFT Local 1475 president Arleen Rivera and Local 1475 members Cynthia Norman and Aldo Gonzalez.

The CFT booth was a big hit at the conference. Numerous AFT free educational and professional development materials, such as the *Transitioning to Kindergarten* toolkit, the *Colorin Colorado* toolkit and the *Helping Your Preschool Child* series of booklets in English and Spanish were distributed. Local 1475 members also took the opportunity to talk to other early childhood educators about the benefits of belonging to CFT and encouraged them to think about forming their own union.

## Community Preschool meets with the Mayor of Sunnyvale



Community Preschool (CP) union members, union staff and parents met with City of Sunnyvale Mayor, Anthony Spitaleri, to update him on the progress of CP's first contract negotiations. The Mayor recognizes the importance of quality Early Childhood Education programs and has always supported CP teachers and staff in their fight to win a fair contract.

*Left to right: Karen Golosman, CP union member; Kristen McMullen, CP parent; Anthony Spitaleri, Sunnyvale mayor; Linda Medwin, CP union member; and Irene McMullen, CP grandparent.*

# Early childhood education makes all the difference

An Op-Ed by Betty Robinson-Harris

Commencement season is one of my favorite times of the year, a moment when I watch our eager young graduates celebrate in caps and gowns, confident that they will be ready for their next big step this fall – kindergarten.

A recently released final report in a series on preschool confirms what I have seen in 37 years of teaching: early childhood education makes all the difference in whether children succeed in school later on. The report by the RAND Corporation finds that children who start out behind tend to stay behind, and the achievement gap is evident as early as kindergarten.

The good news is high-quality early childhood education can narrow that gap by getting kids ready to learn. Even more exciting is that President Obama has made early learning a top priority, calling it the first pillar of education reform. He has included more than \$5 billion for it in the federal stimulus package, at least \$500 million of which could come to California. At a time when we are all searching for ways to turn the economy around, early childhood education is a strategy for economic recovery and long-term economic growth.

In 20 years at Burnett Child Development Center in the Bayview Hunter's Point community, I have

seen generations of children graduate from preschool with the social, emotional and academic tools they need to do well in elementary school.

Preschool provides children with a safe, consistent structure, and the social and emotional support they need. I've seen children who come to class crying overcome their shyness and make friends, share and volunteer answers at story time. Children who hit others when they're upset learn



Betty Robinson-Harris

to resolve conflicts with words instead. About half of my children are English language learners, and we build their vocabulary and pre-literacy skills so they leave preschool bilingual.

Unfortunately, only about half of low-income children have access to preschool, compared to 80 percent of children whose families make more than

\$100,000 a year, the RAND report says. Where I work in San Francisco, we are fortunate to be the first county to open our free, voluntary high-quality Preschool for All program to 4 year-olds in every neighborhood. However, as a First 5 San Francisco Commissioner, I know that learning begins at birth, and we must do even more to take advantage of that window of opportunity when infants' brains are rapidly developing.

I also work in after school care, and see many of my students once they have gone onto elementary school. It is astonishing what they recall – one of my former students, Juandell, told me that in preschool, “my brain just got bigger and bigger” and it “started me off on how to be successful.”

As a member of the Cali-

fornia Federation of Teachers (CFT) Early Childhood Education Committee, I know that a hallmark of a high-quality program is expert, well-trained teachers. Unfortunately, California lacks a well-designed, coordinated plan to prepare early childhood education teachers, a problem cited by RAND.

California is on track to addressing another problem identified in the report. Due to legislation passed last year, we are developing an early learning quality rating and improvement system to evaluate quality and provide financial incentives to reach higher levels.

One of my favorite parts about working at Burnett is knowing we are investing in our future and our economy by giving children skills they will take with them for the rest of their lives. I hope many of my students will have another occasion to don caps and gowns 16 years from now – when they graduate from college.

***Betty Robinson-Harris, who teaches preschool at Burnett Child Development Center, received the Mayor's Teacher of the Month Award last year. She is also a First 5 San Francisco Children and Families Commissioner and a member of the California Federation of Teachers Early Childhood Education Committee.***

## Welcome Karolina Szymanska

Hello! My name is Karolina Szymanska and I am the new organizer for the Early Childhood Education Organizing Project. I recently graduated from the University of California, Berkeley with a bachelor of arts in Sociology. At UC Berkeley, I was involved with the service and patient care workers' union, AFSCME 3299, as well as the Alameda Central Labor Council. The organizers

and workers at Local 3299 and the Council inspired me to follow the same path and to continue the fight for social justice.

This past summer, I interned with the California Federation of Teachers through the UC Berkeley Labor Center Summer Program. I thoroughly enjoyed my experience and became a full-time staff organizer at the end of August. I am extremely

excited to continue my work with the ECE Project. Teaching has always been my second passion and I believe that all educators deserve fair and just wages, benefits and working conditions.



Karolina Szymanska

## Budget deal devastates California education

On July 28, 2009, the Legislature finally passed and the governor signed a budget intended to address a \$24 billion deficit. The Fiscal Year 2009-10 budget came on the heels of a mid-year budget revision in February that had already sought to address a projected two-year deficit of \$41.8 billion through a combination of spending cuts (\$14.9 billion), new revenue measures (\$12.5 billion), borrowing (\$5.4 billion) and new federal funds (\$7.9 billion). All told, over the last two fiscal years, the budget gap has totaled \$65 billion. The hemorrhage appears unceasing, as a new budget gap of \$8 billion is currently being projected for the next fiscal year, raising the specter of further cuts in vital services.

To date, early care and education (ECE) programs have avoided the type of

draconian cuts implemented in K-12 and higher education. Total appropriations from the state general fund passed through the California Department of Education have been flat between FY 07-08 (total of \$2.568 billion) and FY 09-10 (just under \$2.6 billion). Over the last two years, there have been no cost of living adjustments (COLA), growth adjustments, or increases in the standard reimbursement rate – the rate at which the state reimburses ECE providers for subsidized childcare. As a result, real (inflation-adjusted) funding levels have fallen by 3-4% between FY 08-09 and FY 09-10.

Despite reductions in revenue allocations, total employment in ECE has been rising. According to data published by the Employment Development Department (EDD), in the first quarter of 2007 a total

of 98,800 persons were employed as ECE workers. By first quarter 2009, this number had risen to 105,710, an increase of almost 7,000. However, despite increased employment, the hourly wage and annual earnings of ECE providers have been flat over this same period, with no increase in real (inflation adjusted) terms. Earnings remain low on average. The median annual salary for childcare workers was \$23,687 in data reported for Q1 2009, while that of preschool teachers was \$30,472 in this same period.

The ongoing fiscal crisis at the state level reaffirms three things. First, it is imperative that California rescind the 2/3 legislative majority required to pass a state budget to avoid ongoing legislative deadlock. Second, we need to revisit Proposition 13 by institut-

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*“To help meet these goals, The California Federation of Teachers Early Childhood Education Organizing Project will continue its work to engage our members and locals to position the CFT to more effectively organize new members into the AFT, and to have more input on policy and legislation that impacts our ECE members work.”*

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ing a “split roll” that would shift tax burdens onto wealthy property owners and large corporations. Third, ECE workers, more than ever, need unionization to build political power. This is particularly urgent given the protracted, multi-year nature of the

fiscal crisis that will continue to impact those employed in ECE and the quality of ECE services.

To help meet these goals, The California Federation of Teachers Early Childhood Education Organizing Project will continue its work to engage

our members and locals to position the CFT to more effectively organize new members into the AFT, and to have more input on policy and legislation that impacts our ECE members’ work.

## CFT Fact Sheet on RAND California Preschool Study: Report urges investments in early childhood workforce

Only one of every seven California children is in a high-quality Pre-K program, and those with the biggest readiness gaps are least likely to attend center-based preschool at all. These are just some of the facts contained in a new California Federation of Teachers (CFT) fact sheet.

Based on the latest RAND report from the California Preschool Study, and available in

English and Spanish, this fact sheet is part of the CFT’s ongoing effort to inform the public about the importance of quality preschool.

It details RAND’s recommendations including improving the early care and education workforce development system to better prepare preschool teachers to deliver high-quality programming as a key to boosting preschool quality.

For more information and to download copies of the fact sheet, in English and Spanish, please visit the link below:

<http://cft.org/index.php/early-childhood.html>

If you would like hard copies of the fact sheet mailed to you, please send an email including your name, organization, address and number of copies requested in English and Spanish: [sandraweese@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sandraweese@sbcglobal.net)

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Elaine Francisco makes copies of the CFT’s RAND Preschool Study 4 fact sheets available to Skyline Community College faculty and staff.



Students in the CFT ECE Committee’s RAND Preschool Study 4 presentation at a Skyline Community College ECE class.