



Early Educator

CALIFORNIA FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

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Berkeley rallies to save early care & education

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's May budget revision eliminated all state subsidies for child care programs and the Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD) Board of Education approved issuing layoff notices to most of its low-income preschool and child care program's staff in June.

On Thursday, August 5 almost 200 parents, teachers, children, ECE advocates and government officials gathered in front of the BUSD Administration building to protest proposed state funding cuts to early care and education (ECE)

programs that would force several Berkeley low-income child care and preschool programs to close their doors to hundreds of children if enacted. The Berkeley Federation of Teachers (BFT) along with other ECE advocates organized this rally to shine a light on who is truly suffering without a budget — Berkeley's kids.

Board members had previously voted to use district reserves to fund Berkeley's Excellent Academic Road to Success, a low-income child care program, as well as the preschool programs through August 31.

The BFT, the Berkeley Classified Council of Employees (BCCE) and parents gathered on August 18 at the BUSD board meeting to urge them to do the right thing and save low-income ECE in Berkeley. The School Board was considering a proposal to maintain some of the ECE programs until a state budget is passed. Thanks to the collective action of the BFT the proposal passed and saved 20 jobs and kept some programs open.



Parents and kids rally in Berkeley



BFT and BCCE members, led by BFT President, Cathy Campbell, and parents gather at BUSD board meeting to urge them to do the right thing and save low income ECE in Berkeley. Many carried "Pink Hearts, not Pink Slips" signs.

UC interns share experience working with Early Childhood Education Organizing Project

Going into this summer I had a very basic understanding of unions and the labor movement. Through the past three months my understanding has deepened greatly. Being able to personally work on various steps in an actual organizing campaign helped me to develop both a big picture understanding and an appreciation for the amount of detail and hard work that goes into every step of a campaign. Thank you Tanya, Sandra and everyone else who made this experience so wonderful!

—Becca Rozo-Marsh

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AFT President Randi Weingarten visits Los Angeles Head Start

On August 19 during her visit to Nickerson Gardens Head Start Center in Los Angeles, AFT President Randi Weingarten emphasized the need for access to high-quality preschool and early childhood education for disadvantaged kids. These programs are critical to closing the achievement gap and providing the building blocks for future success, in school and in life.

“Studies have clearly shown that a high-quality preschool program can have a positive impact on a child’s future success, and right now, too many of our most disadvantaged children are falling through the cracks and showing up to kindergarten already behind their peers,” Weingarten said. “If we

want to get serious about closing the achievement gap between the haves and have-nots, we must start by addressing issues related to early childhood education and school readiness.”

Weingarten was joined at

“At Kedren, we are committed to meeting the individual needs of the child and the family.”

the center by Dr. John H. Griffith, Ph.D., President & CEO of Kedren; Maria Elena Durazo, Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the Los Angeles Labor Federation; Arleen Rivera, President of Early Childhood Federation of



Weingarten and Kedren Head Start kids

Teachers, AFT Local 1475; Ernesto Saldana, Araceli Sandoval and Jenny Paul-Rapport, Representatives from Preschool California; Kedren EC educators who are AFT members; and parents and kids.

Award-winning children’s book author and illustrator Maya Christina Gonzalez read to the children from her bilingual book, *I Know the River Loves Me/ Yo sé que el río me ama*. The children each received a copy of this and another bilingual book courtesy of the AFT, as well as a Colorín Colorado tool kit for parents to help their children succeed in school.

The Kedren Head Start Center in Nickerson Gardens is an independent Head Start Center represented

by the Early Childhood Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 1475 and serves low-income African-American and Hispanic students, most of whom reside in the adjoining public housing development.

“At Kedren, we are committed to meeting the individual needs of the child and the family. By collaborating with local community-based programs, we are better able to integrate early childhood education with primary care, nutrition, mental health, family literacy, and social services, thus, strengthening the family unit and enhancing self-sufficiency,” said Dr. John H. Griffith, President/CEO of Kedren Community Health Center, Inc.



Weingarten with Local 1475 members and Kedren CEO, John Griffith.

Californians take early learning message to Congress

By Mike Rose, AFT Editorial Dept.

A broad segment of California's early childhood education community crossed the continent on September 28 to highlight the profound economic, educational and social benefits that spring from high-quality education opportunities for all young learners – advantages that can only be maintained in lean budget times if Congress remains a vital partner in this effort.

The American Federa-

tion of Teachers and the California Federation of Teachers took part in the coalition, which traveled from the Golden State to Washington, D.C., for face-to-face meetings with California lawmakers and congressional staffers. The visiting delegation was coordinated by Preschool California, a nonprofit early learning advocacy group in the state, and First Focus, a bipartisan advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families a

priority in federal policy and budget decisions. The delegation included voices as diverse as Fresno County Superintendent of Schools Larry Powell and Susan Sifuentes Trigueros, Regional Public Affairs Manager for Southern California Gas Company. Together, coalition members led a presentation at the U.S. Capitol on the state of early learning in California – an event that underscored how progressive federal efforts to support early learning have broad constituent appeal back home.

Congress deserves high marks for making early learning a priority under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), said several speakers at the Capitol Hill briefing. They described how desperately-needed resources made possible through stimulus funding had become a lifeline for early learning in communi-

ties across California and around the nation.

Nowhere is the support for high-quality, accessible early learning opportunities stronger than in the teaching ranks, said Sandra Weese, early childhood education organizing project director for the California Federation of Teachers, who spoke to the Hill audience. “Teachers have been telling us for years that it makes a difference” when children come to school healthy, confident and prepared to learn, Weese said. The AFT and its affiliates “have a long history and commitment to strong communities that offer a world-class education to kids, beginning at birth. We will work with groups to make it a reality.”

A key piece of that vision is professional compensation for early childhood educators, Weese stressed. That means an

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Becca Rozo-Marsh and Stephanie Altamirano

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I feel very privileged to have been trained under some of the very best union organizers in the field and to have seen their skills in action. Before this internship, I never truly understood the work that labor unions did, just like the majority of the American public. However this experience has shown me the essential work that the Labor Movement is working toward and how those efforts are intricately connected to almost any other social justice issue. I now feel very confident in my organizing skills and will take everything I learned into other social justice organizations I will work with now and in the future.

—*Stephanie Altamirano*



photo by Michael Campbell

(L to R) Hedy Anderson, Preschool California; Catherine Atkin, Preschool California; Jerry Lewis, California State Congressman; Sandra Weese, California Federation of Teachers; Jenny Paul-Rappaport, Preschool California; Susan Sifuentes Trigueros, Southern California Gas Co.; Kris Perry, First 5 California.

Governor Signs Senate Bill SB1381

The California Federation of Teachers (CFT) worked closely with other early childhood education advocates, like Preschool California, on SB 1381 by Senator Joe Simitian. The bill changes the date from December to September for which a child must turn five to start kindergarten and allows districts to provide transitional kindergarten for those students born between September and December.

With a bipartisan vote, both the Assembly and Senate passed SB 1381 (Simitian, Steinberg), the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 and the bill has been signed by the governor.

California's children began kindergarten at a younger age than children in almost any other state, often before they were developmentally ready to meet the challenges of

kindergarten. We were one of only four states that allowed children as young as 4 years old to attend kindergarten; at the same time, California has some of the highest academic standards for what we expect children to learn in kindergarten classrooms. SB 1381 will change the kindergarten entry date in California from Dec. 2 to Sept. 1, so children enter kindergarten at age 5.

Without any additional funds, SB 1381 will also create a transitional kindergarten for those 4 year olds who would otherwise be enrolled in kindergarten. Transitional kindergarten will be funded with the money that would have been spent on regular kindergarten for those 4 year olds with fall birthdays. This program will enable 120,000 children to develop the increased cognitive, social and emotional skills

they need for success in school. We also know that in delivering on its promise to better prepare our children for success in kindergarten and beyond, the transitional kindergarten program should provide a developmentally appropriate experience for our youngest kindergarteners.

Communities across California have already adopted this innovative reform, with programs launching or already implemented in Los Angeles, Fresno, Sacramento, Santa Cruz, Palo Alto, Torrance and Orange County, among others.

With this legislation in place, California's youngest learners are one step closer to entering kindergarten prepared to learn.

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end to the climate where "those who care for our cars and animals earn more than those who educate our youngest children."

Kris Perry, executive director of First 5 California, said that a strong federal role was essential in California, a state where budget crises have had "a dramatic effect on early learning and the social

safety net." She detailed how ARRA "dollars have helped California move forward, and we have some great outcomes to show for it."

The educators who visited Capitol Hill invited lawmakers to examine "how pre-K fits into the larger education dialogue," Preschool California president Catherine Atkin

told the audience. Early learning "is an issue that resonates with voters," she said, and strong programs for the youngest learners are "something that makes sense for kids, for policy and is something for [elected leaders] to care about."

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