

## CFT Members Help With AFT Booth at NAEYC

California Federation of Teachers (CFT) members Elaine Merriweather, Melissa Petersen, Betty Robinson-Harris and Joy Wi were all sponsored by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) to attend the annual National Association For the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) conference in Chicago last November. They helped staff the AFT booth at the conference and shared many of the AFT's early care and education (ECE) resources with ECE professionals from around the world.

Melissa Petersen has been a member of the ABC Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 2317 for more than 24 years and for the past eight years she has worked as an early childhood educator and been a member of the CFT ECE Committee.

Petersen said about her experience at the NAEYC in Chicago, "I was able to attend sessions and meet fellow early childhood educators from around the world. During our conversations, we all had the same concerns and goals regarding how we can better our profession and serve our students. As I talked with other folks I felt very grateful to be a part of the CFT/AFT because it was clear that I receive many advantages from my affiliation with the union that others in the ECE field do not enjoy.

- Networking with other educators in the field
- Attending conferences for ECE professionals and other education professionals
- Access to workforce

development and resource materials for my classroom

- Having a voice in policy and legislation that impacts my work

As a CFT/AFT member I have a contract that addresses my pay, wages and working conditions, but I am also provided with opportunities and experiences that I would not otherwise have."



*Pictured (L to R) AFT Organizers from around the country: Becky Lacey, Andy Lotrich, Melissa Peterson, Mary Jo Shannon, Elizabeth Belosi, Elaine Merriweather and Dorothy Gibson*

## Assemblymember Mark Leno Visits SOMACC

As part of their ongoing effort to educate California legislators about the benefits of quality preschool programs, Preschool California has been taking policy makers to preschool. On November 29, 2007, they took Assemblymember Mark Leno to Yerba Buena Gardens, one of South of Market Child Care, Inc's (SOMACC) sites. CFT represents the staff at SOMACC, AFT Local 6361, and we are very proud of the work we have done with them and SOMACC's director, Noushin Mofakham.



We congratulate SOMACC for consistently being hailed as a model program!

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A Union of Professionals

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*Assemblymember Mark Leno; Preschool California President, Catherine Atkin; SOMACC Director Noushin Mofakham; SOMACC teacher and AFT Local 6361 Secretary-Treasurer, Joy Wi, and SOMACC students explore the SOMACC's Yerba Buena site.*



# Early Educator

CALIFORNIA FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

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## NCS ECE Staff Vote to Join the CFT!!!

The 240-plus workers of Northcoast Children's Services (NCS) voted to form their union with the CFT/AFT on January 22, 2008! The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) election was the culmination of an exciting organizing campaign that began at a meeting with two NCS teachers in the spring of 2007. The workers of NCS called the CFT to figure out how to form their union to have a voice in the service they provide as well as their working conditions.

NCS is the largest Head Start operator and State Preschool provider in Northern California. They operate 33 sites from Garberville to Crescent City and have been serving Humboldt and Del Norte counties for decades.

After months of effort and untold number of hours meeting with colleagues, board members and management staff, the workers at NCS became convinced that management by itself could not make NCS the best agency it could be. They believed that positive change could only be instituted when all concerned parties cooperated and worked together. That meant management and the staff – including those who work directly with the children

every day, parents and citizens in the communities. After much discussion they decided to form a union to make sure that their skills and experience were fully utilized and valued.

With overwhelming majority support for joining the union and support from the community, NCS workers began attending NCS Board meetings asking to discuss the issue of union recognition. In October they made a formal request to be placed on the agenda of the November Board meeting, but NCS management refused. In response, dozens of workers from around the region came to the NCS main office in Arcata for a board meeting where they spoke during the public comment period about their desire to join the CFT. "We have already shown

overwhelming support for union representation by signing cards so an election shouldn't be necessary," said April Hein. "We would like our agency to respect our choice."

NCS staff has a long-standing commitment to the area's children and their parents and had hoped that management would respect their choice, recognize their union and negotiate in good faith. Unfortunately, the board refused, but undeterred, the workers pushed forward. The next step was a request for the NLRB to hold an election to recognize the union. The NCS organizing committee unanimously agreed to make this request and soon the wheels were once again in motion for an NCS union.

Despite the holiday slow-

down the NCS organizing committee continued to reach out to their co-workers and maintain support for the union. The ballots were counted on Tuesday, January 22nd in the NLRB office in San Francisco and the NCS employees sent a message to management with a strong majority voting YES to have a voice at work. NCS organizing committee members said the following in reaction to the victory:

• "We are so pleased with the integrity of our colleagues and the courage they showed in standing up for themselves and for what is right," said Jennifer Turley.

• "We thank NCS parents and the northcoast community for their support during the last year. Now is the time for all of us to come together on behalf of the children and families we serve," said Connie Pardi.

• Cindy Lindgren said, "We want to work together with NCS management and engage in a constructive dialogue that we hope will lead to quick agreement on a fair and just contract, which is in everyone's interest."

Congratulations NCS staff and Welcome to the CFT/AFT!



*NCS staff come together and make plans to form their union.*

## Building Support for Preschool Among Union Members: The CFT and AFT Partner and Win Support from Packard Foundation

The California Federation of Teachers (CFT) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) are working together to build support for preschool for all in California among union members, unions, allied organizations and other educators. High-quality early childhood education programs for four year-olds ensure that kids enter kindergarten ready to learn. Making quality preschool available to all families is more important than ever: California has fallen behind on many key indicators of educational performance, threatening the future of the state's children, its workforce, and its long-term economic prospects.

Today, our students score below the national average on nearly every measure -- reading, writing, math and science. We are short on teachers, with an average of 1 teacher per 20 students, compared to a national average of 1 to 15. We consistently rank below the national average in our resource commitment to students -- spending about \$8,000 per pupil. In fact, according to a report commissioned by the state's legislative leaders last year, California needs to invest up to \$25 billion more a year in education just to catch up, but with forecasts of a \$14 billion hole in next year's budget, what was to be the year of education reform may be no more.

What do we do to improve student outcomes in this

difficult environment? Find efficiencies and invest wisely. One smart use of scarce resources in efforts to raise student achievement and bridge the achievement gap is to expand public funding for preschool education. Research shows that high quality early education for preschool-aged children better prepares kids for kindergarten in both social and academic areas, from pre-reading skills to early math concepts helping to lay a foundation for their performance later in school.

To assess and evaluate the potential of increasing public investment in early childhood education, the RAND Corporation was commissioned to conduct a comprehensive study of California Preschool in an effort to improve understanding of achievement gaps in the early elementary grades, assess the adequacy of preschool education currently given, and determine what efficiencies or additional resources might be brought to bear in early care and education.

The first two of four reports in its California Preschool Study are now out -- [http://www.rand.org/labor/projects/ca\\_preschool/](http://www.rand.org/labor/projects/ca_preschool/) -- and already there are some very interesting findings. For example, the research reveals that the achievement gap evident among California's K-12 students exists at the starting gate, when kids first enter kindergarten. The studies show that the school readiness gaps found in kindergarten

closely match those gaps in achievement seen at the elementary school level, highlighting that groups of students who start school behind tend to stay behind.

Further, the pre-literacy gap at age 3 is as great as the achievement gap many years later in school, with almost two thirds of third graders falling short of state standards in English-language arts and more than 40 percent missing the standards in math. Some groups of students are falling short by even larger margins: African Americans, Latinos and economically-disadvantaged children. Clearly, this achievement gap does not have a single cause, and it will not have a single solution, but quality preschool matters and given that access to preschool for California's roughly half million 4 year-olds is limited and its quality is low, this is one important place to focus our efforts.

The CFT's Early Childhood Education Organizing Project is doing just that. Supported by a grant from the Packard Foundation, the CFT/AFT is engaged in efforts to use this information from the RAND studies as the foundation for data-driven discussions in an effort to build support and activism for voluntary preschool for all in California among union members, working families, allied organizations and key leaders within these constituencies. We'll be finding and mentoring

individual champions who can help lead the effort in their communities to secure preschool for all three- and four-year olds in the state of California and we will be keeping you posted along the way.

Visit the CFT homepage @ [www.cft.org](http://www.cft.org) and click on "New research supports investing in effect pre-K!" and you will be taken to the ECEOP page where you will find: news clips, easy to download PowerPoint presentations, fact sheets and other documents. One-page handouts and sample letters to the editor for you to use when writing elected leaders and others, along with other materials are forthcoming. And, if you haven't done so already, sign up for CFT Small Talk: Quick news for early care professionals!

Ultimately, the goal is to make sure that all children have access to high-quality early childhood education. To do this we must transform the quality of children's early childhood experiences, extending high quality into pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. In the end, successful early childhood programs will prepare all children by requiring highly trained teachers with strong vocabulary and language skills, high adult-to-child ratios and adequate physical space for children to play games that prepare them to be productive members of society and succeed later in life.

## New Report Calls on California to Provide Every Child With Quality Preschool Opportunities

As the year of education reform begins, the Governor's Committee on Education Excellence is poised to release recommendations for education reform, including a commitment to expanding access to effective pre-kindergarten to all of California's children, starting with those who need it most.

While the official release of the CEE recommendations is not expected until next week, a draft of the committee's report was recently posted on the San Jose Mercury News's website.

Noting the importance of early childhood education, the report calls on the state to "provide every child with quality preschool opportunities to ensure that they begin school ready to undertake the challenges of kindergarten and the primary grades." The committee proposes that efforts to expand access should begin with low-income kids and communities.

Students who participate in preschool programs have higher standardized test scores, higher rates of high school graduation and college attendance and lower rates of special education placement, grade repetition and criminal activity, according to the Chicago Child-Parent Center study cited in the report.

The committee recognizes that to get these kinds of positive

results from pre-k, California must improve preschool quality, particularly by establishing preschool learning foundations, implementing a quality rating system for preschools and investing in preschool staff training and workforce development. The committee realizes that well-trained teachers are one of the hallmarks of an effective pre-k program.

The inclusion of strong pre-k recommendations in the report highlights that high-quality pre-k is an important first step in education reform. Providing pre-k programs that boost children's abilities in early childhood reduces the need for schools to help them catch up later. As recent research from the RAND Corporation confirmed, effective pre-k helps narrow

the achievement gap by addressing the school readiness gap.

Educating California's children is an investment in the state's future. "Research and common sense show that waiting until kindergarten or 1st grade to begin educating our children is educationally foolish and fiscally unwise," the report states. Preschool is one of the few interventions that not only improves student achievement but also pays economic dividends by reducing state spending on K-12 education and criminal justice, making pre-k a win-win for strategy to improve our education system and our state's fiscal health.

To learn more about the recommendations, read editorials from the Sacramento Bee and the San Jose Mercury News and an op-ed by committee chairs Ted Mitchell and Dede Alpert.

## Welcome to AFT's Newest Team Member

Hello! My name is Jessie McDonald and I am the newest member of the Early Childhood Education Organizing Project! I am excited to be working with Sandra and Tanya on this project. Originally from Bethesda, Maryland, I spent my university years in Boulder studying philosophy at the University of Colorado (CU). While in Boulder I got my start in organizing, working hard for several campaigns on campus, spreading awareness about issues varying from Sweatshop Abuse to Free Trade Agreements. In the spring of 2006, I graduated from CU with honors and received my BA. Before graduating, I spent a summer with the AFL-CIO working to help hotel employees in New York City to prepare for their contract negotiations. I also picked up a good deal of Spanish during a semester abroad in Ecuador.

Since graduation I have been traveling and exploring different opportunities and climates. My journey began in Southeast Asia, where I traveled for three months and got a glimpse of cultures that I had never seen before. I then returned to Colorado to soak up one last snowy winter with my good friends in the mountains outside of Boulder.

2007 held an exceptionally long winter for me, as just when the snow cleared up in Colorado, I moved right back into the blizzards of Massachusetts. I stayed in Massachusetts until the sun was shining fully in August working for the Student Conservation Association inside the Parks and Forests maintaining hiking trails and fighting erosion. In September, I jumped in a car and took the long road to my new home of California via Colorado and Utah. It has been a beautiful journey and I am excited to get my feet wet here in the Bay area working hard to bring the diligent early childhood educators the benefits and respect that they deserve!



Jessie at the CFT office in Alameda