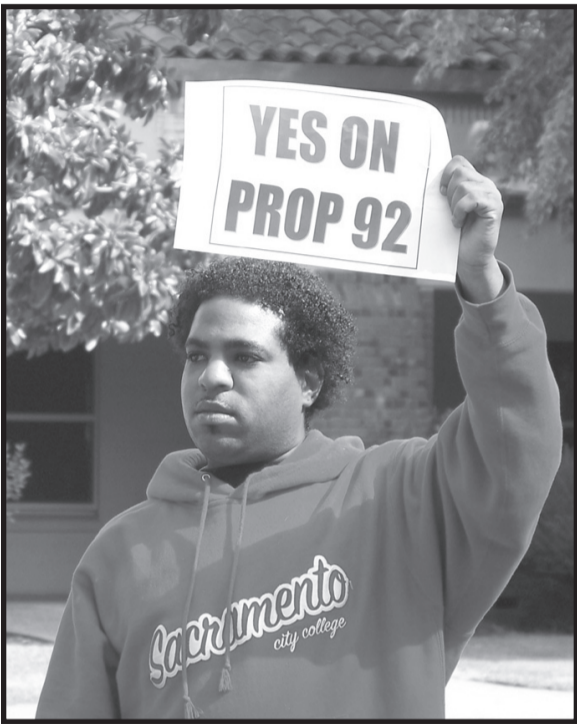


## YES ON PROPOSITION 92

### CFT Leads Community College Ballot Initiative Effort

**Community Colleges. Funding. Fee Limitation.**  
 Establishes in state constitution a system of independent public community college districts and Board of Governors...Requires minimum levels of state funding...Sets fees at \$15 a unit; limits fee increases.

- Guarantees minimum funding for community college growth
- Guarantees student fees will stay affordable
- Guarantees political independence for community college system



Sacramento City College student Marques Davison came to a rally to support Prop. 92. *Claire Conlon, photo*

California community colleges are the only opportunity that many Californians have to get a college education. CFT is leading the effort to pass Proposition 92 on the February 5 presidential primary ballot. Says CFT Secretary Treasurer Dennis Smith, a long time instructor at Sacramento City College, "Proposition 92 will benefit all Californians by providing open access to affordable, high quality post secondary education."

Prop 92 will return the community college student fee rate to \$15 per credit unit while

restricting future fee increases, and establish what one educator calls "the Prop 98 for community colleges" by guaranteeing a portion of the state budget for the community college system.

The initiative will create a separate funding stream within the existing Proposition 98 formula. Community college enrollment is increasing faster than K-12 enrollment. Carl Friedlander, president of the CFT's Community College Council, points out that

*(Continued Page 4)*

### No Child Left Behind: Let's Get it Right

Congress is moving to reauthorize the No Child Left Behind Act. After living under NCLB for the past five and one-half years, California educators know that substantial changes must be made to this law. NCLB has been ineffective in achieving its intended goals, has had negative unintended consequences that are incompatible with policies that do work, is at the mercy of a political process that can only worsen its prospects, and is based on premises that are fundamentally flawed. These problems include how student progress is measured, problematic accountability measures for providers of supplemental educational services, and inadequate resources for meeting the needs of our most disadvantaged students. Now is the time to correct problems with the law.

*(Continued Page 5)*

<b>Inside</b>	
CFT Supports Prop 92, Access to College	1
No Child Left Behind: Let's get it right	1
Healthcare: Right vs Privilege	2
Retiree health care "crisis" is overblown	3

## Health Care: A Right or a Privilege?

The difference between two recent statements speaks volumes about who in our society cares about people and who speaks for narrow privilege. In the September issue of *San Mateo Labor*, the monthly newspaper of the San Mateo Central Labor Council, Shelley Kessler, its presiding officer, says it straight out: “Access to health care should be a human right.”

The opposing point of view is rarely put so bluntly as that. But during the September 10 legislative debate over the labor-sponsored health care reform bill, AB 8 (Nunez-Perata), State Senator Chuck DeVore (R-Irvine) tried the direct approach.

“I would submit to you that health care is not a right,” DeVore said. “It is not a right, like the right to free speech, or the freedom of religion, or the right to be secure in our person against unreasonable search and seizure” (*Sacramento Bee*, September 11, 2007).

Imagine you had the misfortune to be one of the nearly 7 million Californians without health insurance. You might be between jobs. You might be one of the several million of those working for an employer that does not offer health coverage. You might have a pre-existing condition that would disqualify you from insurance. In other words, through no fault of your own, you and your family might not be covered. If this were you, who would you prefer to be your triage nurse in the emergency room when you arrived with your bleeding child—Shelley Kessler or Chuck DeVore?


Governor Schwarzenegger has vetoed AB 8, the Legislature’s compromise health care bill, leaving him without a mechanism to fulfill his promise to deliver health care reform. By the time you read this, the Legislature’s Special Session may be over and with it the chance to put in place this year an overhaul of the state’s crumbling health care non-system.

At the same time as CFT joined with labor in the practical push for AB 8, we continue to work on the long term effort to educate the public about the best possible solution to California’s health care problems, and the one that would indeed fulfill our belief that health care is a right, not a commodity or privilege: SB 840, State Senator Sheila Kuehl’s California Universal Healthcare Act, which

the Senator reintroduced this year after the governor vetoed it last year.

Kuehl’s bill would enact a “single payer” health care system in California, similar to the Canadian model that leaves health care provision in a mix of public and private hands, just as in the U.S., but cuts out the wasteful health insurance industry, which takes between 25 and 30% of every health care dollar spent in the United States for administrative overhead and profit. It would cover everyone involved in our schools. The average school district in California spends 14.6% of payroll on employee health care costs. Under SB 840, that cost would become less than 12% of payroll, and extend coverage to students and their families, as well as employees.

Senator Kuehl, recognizing that Schwarzenegger would repeat his veto of a year ago if she pushed SB 840 through the Legislature again, has held the bill over, making it a two-year bill. This allows her—and her allies such as the CFT—to continue to educate the public about the virtues of single payer while building the necessary support for what will probably turn out to be a ballot initiative sometime in the not too distant future.

Employment-based health care bargaining is how school employees continue to get coverage in California school districts, but collective bargaining for health care is taking place as our market-based health care system continues to implode. AB 8 represented a modest and necessary improvement of the current system. But the governor capitulated to pressure from business opponents of the legislation. SB 840 is what we need, and what we can get if we plan carefully and keep our eyes on the prize. 



H/KT Cartoons

## Retired teachers' health care "crisis" is overblown

By Marty Hittelman, President, California Federation of Teachers

As published in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 9, 2007

Although teachers are underpaid for the valuable work that they do, most of them have at least been able to count on district-provided health insurance after they retire. But rising health care costs are putting pressure on school and college districts to reduce or eliminate health insurance for their retirees. One proposed solution, pre-funding, doesn't address the root of the problem and may make matters worse.

For retired teachers, the thought of losing their health insurance coverage is terrifying. It also makes them mad. Health insurance coverage in retirement is deferred compensation; like a pension, it comes from having put aside a portion of salary for the proverbial rainy day. Alex Pappas, who retired recently from decades of teaching in the Peralta Community College District, used to serve on the union bargaining team, specializing in health care benefits. He says that the faculty lost "about two thirds of a percent per year" in salary to pay for rising health care costs.

While retirement might be a long way off for young educational employees, the possibility of losing health care coverage years down the road might make many of them rethink their career paths. Jessica Quindel, a high school teacher in Berkeley, acknowledges her fear that "if these threats to my health and retirement benefits become reality, I might have to leave teaching."

As retiree health care costs go up, school districts are receiving advice about what to do from different sources. One is the Governmental Accounting Standards Board, or "GASB." Despite its name, it is not a government agency. It is a private sector organization that provides government agencies with advice about what it believes are acceptable accounting principles.


GASB is saying that school and college districts should pre-fund retiree health care benefits, instead of operating, as most do, on a pay-as-you-go basis. This may sound reasonable, but there are two problems with pre-funding. One is that actuarial projections upon which payments are based are highly speculative, and depend on a number of ever-changing factors. In the overwhelming majority of cases, pay-as-you-go has been working well for school district retiree health care and should continue to do so.

There is confusion in many people's minds, encouraged by anti-public sector ideologues, between

pension obligations and retiree health care costs. The latter represent a tiny fraction, around 2% of district budgets (the problems involved in funding public employee pensions have also been exaggerated, but that would require another article to discuss). Any future difficulty that might arise from a pay-as-you-go approach to retiree health care will be relatively modest, and won't emerge for years, which gives us time to come up with reasoned solutions.

The other problem is that by setting aside large amounts of money now, adding pre-funding to pay-as-you-go costs, out of limited school budgets, classroom programs will suffer and so will school employee salaries – all due to an actuarial crystal ball that may well turn out to be cracked.

The best solution might be to continue funding school employee retirement health care on a pay-as-you-go basis, while seeking to control and reduce health care costs. This could be accomplished in a number of ways. The best choice would be to legislate universal health care coverage, as proposed by State Senator Sheila Kuehl's SB 840. This would solve the problem for local school districts in one bold stroke—not only for retiree coverage, but for the rising costs of health insurance for employees as well (not to mention coverage for students and their families). Public pressure has been building for this type of solution for some time. According to a Public Policy Institute of California poll taken in June, two thirds of Californians support government-guaranteed universal health care coverage. Of course, even with such public support, achieving universal health coverage might take some time, especially given the deep pockets of its opponents, especially the for-profit health insurance industry. But there are other ways to control the rising costs of health care right here and now. The California Health Care Coalition has shown that we could significantly reduce medical costs while improving the quality of care by requiring providers to make available transparent data on diagnoses, treatments and outcomes. Shining the light of day on such data would enable purchasers of health insurance to choose the most effective and least costly providers of health care.

School and college administrators shouldn't be panicked into adopting GASB guidelines, diverting scarce funds from current educational needs. It makes more sense to address the real reasons why retiree health care costs are rising. Anything else would harm students and school employees, and break the promise of post-employment health care made to retirees. 

## CFT Supports Prop 92

(From Page 1)

“It makes no sense to base community college funding on K-12 enrollment. The Community College Initiative will direct funding to where the college students are, without harming K-12 funding.”

This initiative will help ensure that California Community Colleges continue to fulfill their mission of providing affordable education and advancing California’s economic growth by continuously improving the state’s workforce. Economists estimate that every investment of one dollar in community college returns three dollars to the state’s economy.

Los Angeles high school teacher Josh Pechthalt says, “I support Proposition 92 because it keeps K-12 funding guarantees in place while ensuring a baseline of support for community colleges. It’s a win-win for K-12 and community colleges.”

California’s tradition of low student fees and financial aid has made community colleges a gateway to a better life for millions of Californians.

The California Community College Initiative requires minimum levels of state funding for community colleges. It allows community college funding to increase with the growing adult student population.

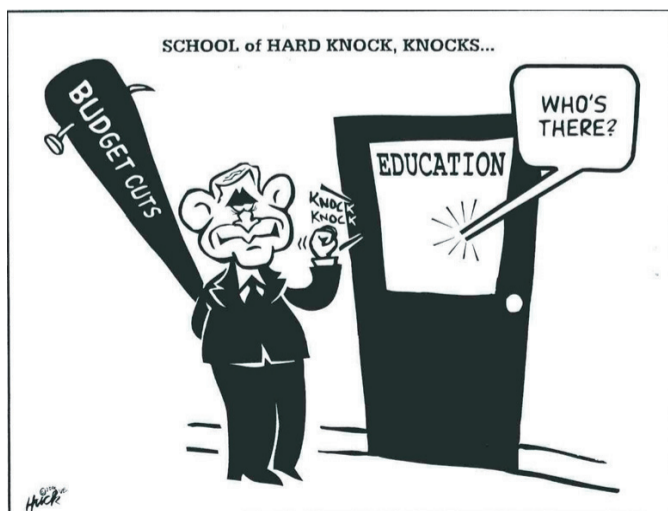
“High school teachers care about what happens to our students after they graduate,” says Josh Pechthalt, vice-president of United Teachers Los Angeles, and a high school teacher in L.A. Unified. “I support Proposition 92 because it keeps K-12

funding guarantees in place while ensuring a baseline of support for community colleges. Prop 92 is the Prop 98 for community colleges. It’s a win-win for K-12 and community colleges.”

Prop. 92 also establishes in the state constitution a system of independent public community college districts and Board of Governors. The ballot measure is supported by Community College League of California (the organization of community college trustees and CEOs), in addition to every major community college faculty organization and the California Federation of Teachers.

### Community College Facts

- More than 70% of students taking college classes in California are taking them at community colleges.
- Community college enrollment is 2,549,000; CSU undergraduate enrollment is 332,000 and UC undergraduate enrollment is 159,000.
- Two-thirds of CSU graduates and one-third of UC graduates begin their college careers at a community college.
- Community college fee increases hurt student enrollment. When fees were increased in 2004, 305,000 fewer students than expected enrolled in California Community Colleges.
- Taxpayers realize a \$3 return for every tax dollar invested in community college education.



H/KT Cartoons

## No Child Left Behind:

(From Page 1)

One reason educators criticize NCLB is that it has distorted teaching and learning. Elevating standardized tests to a higher importance than any other measure of student progress has led to the absurdity of imposing multi-hour tests on second graders, whose developmental level is ill suited to such endurance exams. There are many ways to assess learning, and some are more appropriate to certain types of learning than a standardized test. Focusing on basic skill tests narrows what should be a broad liberal education. Not every answer fits in a bubble you can color in.

Standardized testing mania has devalued other ways of learning and assessing learning. Some students perform better orally than in writing. These students are penalized under NCLB. Critical thinking skills may be more important in life than memorization or applying formulas. Yet critical thinking is much more difficult to assess in a standardized test. Overemphasis on standardized tests forces curriculum into over-concentration on those matters that are most often found on the standardized tests. “Teaching to the test” has forced educators to decrease emphasis on many important subjects in order to meet test score goals. CFT supports performance-based assessment, rather than multiple-choice assessments, and programs that prepare students to be active learners.

### Teachers are more than students’ test scores

One proposed feature of NCLB is to “pay to the test,” that is, mandate the use of test scores to evaluate teachers for determining salary. Just as overemphasis on test scores distorts learning, assuming that a teacher’s skill or effort is directly reflected in students’ test scores distorts teaching. Students’ test scores are influenced by a number of factors over which teachers have little or no control. How prepared is the student to learn and to have that learning assessed? The same teacher may help produce widely different test scores in two different students, two different classrooms of students, or two different schools.

Students’ backgrounds and their advantages and disadvantages vary widely. NCLB ignores the impact that poverty, inadequate housing, lack of access to quality health care, and social class have on student learning. Decisions about teacher compensation should be made in the collective bargaining process by local district officials and teachers—the people most knowledgeable about what works in their schools.

A number of AFT local unions have helped develop professional compensation plans that consider



Sue Westbrook, president of the CFT Early Childhood/K-12 Council, testified on Friday, October 5, before the Assembly Education Committee hearing about the proposed Congressional reauthorization of ESEA/No Child Left Behind.

Mike Weimer, photo

student test scores as one of a number of important factors in how teachers should be compensated. However, a move by the federal government to require such provisions be adopted by all school districts in the country might well prove counterproductive, as such provisions tend to force teachers to teach to the test instead of teaching to the real needs of their students.

### Fund NCLB

NCLB has never been fully funded. It is extremely harmful to public education to set standards that are unachievable without sufficient resources. The CFT believes that attention and resources should be focused on improving the whole school by dealing with infrastructure issues, providing for a solid curriculum, addressing safety and discipline issues, developing programs for parental involvement and supporting staff with strong professional development. These incentives will make schools appealing to students, their parent and to teachers.

Congress should take the time to fix NCLB, provide adequate funding, and refrain from forcing one-size-fits-all solutions on the thousands of local schools across California.

### Hear teachers’ views on these topics

CFT members are available to comment on the NCLB reauthorization, Prop. 92, health care and other education issues.

You may also go to [www.cft.org](http://www.cft.org) for more information.

California Federation of Teachers  
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO  
1201 Marina Village Parkway, Suite 115, Alameda, CA 94501



“Congress must take the time to get the No Child Left Behind Act right this time around. Children are more than test scores. Not every challenge they confront in life will be answered by coloring in a bubble. NCLB’s overemphasis on standardized tests has corrupted the learning process.”

*Marty Hittelman*  
*President, California Federation of Teachers*



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**California Federation  
of Teachers**

**Marty Hittelman, President**

Phone: (818) 843-8226

**CFT Bay Area Headquarters**

1201 Marina Village Parkway #115  
Alameda, CA 94501

Phone: (510) 523-5238

Fax: (510) 523-5262

**Communications Director**

Fred Glass

Cell Phone: (510) 579-3343

**Media Relations**

Steve Hopcraft

Hopcraft Communications

3551 N Street

Sacramento, CA 95816

Phone: (916) 457-5546

Fax: (916) 457-5548