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## CFT CONVENTION WORKSHOP **Reasoning with Angry Parents**

Phil Moore

This workshop was very timely. Given by the local union president and the Human Resources Director from the ABC school district (near LA); the local union president from Santa Cruz City Schools and the principal of Santa Cruz High School, it became immediately clear that these were two school districts which had good, collaborative working relationships. As part of those relationships, unions and management were able to work together to handle problematic teacher-parent interactions.

The presenters made a number of excellent points:

1. The Education Code guarantees parents the right to participate in the educational process as “mutually supportive and respectful partners”. In other words, the parent has the right to be involved, but the school has the right to set limits if the relationship with the parent becomes other than “respectful”. Teachers should not let parents interact with them in an abusive way, and the administrators should not permit it.
2. Start parent conferences non-defensively. Acknowledge to parents that there are things the parents know about their child that the teacher or school does not know. This helps diffuse parent anger and helps to create an atmosphere where the parent feels accepted and credible.
3. Parents have the right to meet and ask questions. Teachers have the right to say, “I don’t know”, or “I don’t want to answer the question”.
4. Teachers (and/or administrators) should set the tone of the meeting. Set up ground rules before-hand when meeting with a parent known to be hostile.
5. Advice for principals: If parents are making threats, invite them to meet with an administrator and write down their concerns. Take information from the parent, meet with the teacher separately, and get back to the parent if the situation seems hostile. And, no parent should go through to a classroom without going through the front office first.
6. Parents visiting a class in progress should be shown to a prearranged place to sit and observe.
7. If a teacher gets a call from an angry parent who wants to meet – **DO NOT MEET ALONE**. Involve another teacher, counselor and/or administrator.
8. If a teacher feels a conference will go sour, a union building representative should be involved. If the meeting gets nasty or abusive in any way, it should end. (Note: If a teacher is in a meeting with a parent and an administrator refused to end the meeting or involve a union representative, the teacher should end his or her participation in the meeting. Respond: “I don’t want to answer that question”.)
9. Teachers who receive frequent calls from a parent at home should tell the parent to make an appointment with them at school. When the parent refuses to end the conversation or keeps calling repeatedly, hang up. Report the situation to Human Resources.

10. Document student performance. Make it clear to parents when you have done everything that you are required to do, and that the ball is now in the student's court.

## STRS DEFINED BENEFIT SUPPLEMENTAL PROGRAM

Robert Wilde

Until July 2002, the only Cal/STRS retirement benefit was the Defined Benefit Program (DBP) which was based upon, 1) Age at retirement; 2) Years of service; 3) Highest compensation. That all changed in July 2002 when a new program was introduced to supplement the DBP. Conceptually it is very much like a regular savings account. The amount of the benefit is based on the amount contributed. There are two sources of contribution:

For service up to a full year, the member contributes two percent until the year 2011.

For service in excess of a full year, the member contributes eight percent and the employer contributes eight percent.

In regard to the way these supplemental benefits may be paid, there are several options. The benefit may be taken as a lump sum or if the account balance at time of retirement is \$3,500 or greater, the benefit may be taken as a monthly annuity or a combination of lump sum and monthly annuity.

## SPECIAL EDUCATION CAHSEE UPDATE

Helen Dalton

Jill Larson, Consultant CDE Special Education Department updated current information related to SPED students and the CAHSEE.

### New Statewide Assessment Terminology (clarification)

A. **Accommodation** is a change in how a test is presented, how a test is administered, or how a test taker responds that is necessary to allow the student to participate in the test, but does not fundamentally alter what the test measures, or affects the comparability of scores.

**Accommodations** are listed in two categories.

- 1) Category one accommodations are available to all students who regularly use them in the classroom, and may be described as flexibility in administration.
  - 2) Category two accommodations are allowed only for students with disabilities who have them documented in their IEP or 504 Plan. Category two accommodations require a more significant alteration in presentation; timing/scheduling, setting or response and, in most cases, require more preplanning in order to ensure the availability of needed resources.
- B. **Modification** is a change in how a test is presented, how a test is administered, or how the test taker is allowed to respond that fundamentally alters what the test measures or affects the comparability of scores.
- 3) Category three signals that the test adaptation is considered a modification, or that it alters what the test measures. Test modifications are available only to students with disabilities who have the modification documented in their IEP or 504 Plan. Modifications should only be used when other accommodations have been considered, and it is determined that the student does not have adequate access to the test without modification.

If a category three modification is used, the student is still required to pass the exam with a 350 or better score (CAHSEE).

If none of the above applies, a waiver may be applied for via a letter to the principal. The principal will then verify that the student has otherwise met graduation requirements and further make application to the SPED office for a waiver. The SPED Director will bring all pertinent information before the local Board of Education. *This is a change from last year when waivers made through the State.*

There was also a brief discussion on the possibility that the CAHSEE might be postponed for Special Education students until 2007. This is just at the discussion level at the State Department of Education, I repeat, “**Nothing is decided yet!!!**” By the way, those court cases are still not decided.

If you need a copy of the chart for Accommodations and Modification, please contact me at Alisal High School.

Vici Sutton

High Stakes Testing is a reality everywhere, not just here in Salinas. In Chicago, they are closing schools, releasing teachers, and reassigning students. A lot of money is spent on education. It isn't unreasonable to want to know what the money is buying. The current off-the-shelf tests are not a fair evaluation of our schools, but the political establishments, including parents, want some kind of measure of how schools are performing.

This issue was discussed intensely at the American Federation of Teachers Convention in Las Vegas last summer. Teachers everywhere have the same concerns and the same differing opinions as we do. It was a lively and educational debate.

My understanding of the position of the American Federation of Teachers is as follows.

Fair and reasonable teacher-developed, high-standards driven testing is the path to equality in this nation. If all members of a society receive a standards-driven, demanding education, then they will be more likely to expect, indeed insist upon, a fair democratic society that respects worker's rights, and provides equal access to all of its institutions. In addition, schools that are held accountable for realistic goals, or face sanctions, will make sure their students succeed.

Given that the stakes are high, teachers must insist that testing be fair and obtainable. The standards need to be high but realistic. The sanctions need to be prescriptive not punitive. The development of testing systems needs to have meaningful teacher input. Failing students need professionally compensated intervention until they succeed. The public school system should expand to include mandatory pre-kindergarten education for all children so they will be ready to face the rigors of a K-12 education.

Any school receiving public monies, especially voucher schools, should be held accountable to the same standards as public schools. The state and federal governments need to commit the resources necessary to meet the standards they insist upon imposing.

The statistical reality is that many children in the United States and in Salinas as well, don't get an education that will allow them to participate in the "American Dream". As professionals, we must insist students have the resources needed to meet the standards. We must insist that site-based decision-making, including decisions on testing, curriculum, and budgets include teachers.

I support most of AFT's stance on testing. That is the reason I supported a resolution to set aside \$0.67 of every members monthly dues for political action on these and other issues.

## CFT RAOUL TEIHET SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Vici Sutton

One of the benefits of belonging to SVFT is the Raoul Teihet Scholarship Fund. The fund was established as a tribute to Mr. Teihet who is a past president of the California Federation of Teachers. You may remember him. His lifetime of work and dedication to support working teachers in California is the reason we now have legislation to protect our working conditions and bargaining rights. The scholarship fund in his name is to provide the children of working teachers' money for college.

Currently, locals from around the state have the option of contributing twenty cents per month per member. SVFT is a contributor. That contribution has paid off since SVFT has been a beneficiary of this fund. At least one member's child has received a scholarship from this fund.

Starting in September 2003, all locals will experience a dues increase of \$0.20 per member per month and that money will be earmarked for this Scholarship Fund. All locals will now be required to contribute increasing the availability of more funds for teachers' college bound children.

At the recent CFT convention, eligibility was expanded to include students already enrolled in two or four-year institutions for a one time award. In addition, the children of deceased members, who were in good standing at the time of death, may also apply. Only graduating high school seniors could apply in the past.

If your child is ready for college or already attending, don't forget to apply. You are entitled!!

## THANK YOU

Vici Sutton

Thank you for choosing me to be a delegate to the AFT Convention in Las Vegas. I am relieved to report our national union is strong and healthy, working hard for teachers in the trenches. It truly is a democratic institution bringing forth important issues to be discussed and debated. The organization direction is democratically decided.

But ~ lets be real clear here, the AFT is an extremely political entity with a diverse membership pushing specific agendas. At first, the process can seem predetermined and somewhat intimidating to the new delegate. However, by the end of the week, I came to understand tat if we pay attention, provide input, and know how to apply the rules of engagement when we disagree, there is equity and enlightenment in the structure of the organization. There is room for every voice. It is our responsibility to make our voices heard. I found the experience exhilarating and sound.