



THEMES in the NEWS

IDEA's weekly commentary on education news

Week of March 21-24, 2011

César Chávez Reminds Us

By UCLA IDEA

"It is not enough to teach our young people to be successful...so they can realize their ambitions, so they can earn good livings... It is not enough to progress as individuals while our friends and neighbors are left behind."

-César Chávez

In observance of César Chávez Day, next Thursday, March 31, students across the state are building on the labor leader's legacy to give back to the community, by organizing rallies and educating their peers. Though Chávez is remembered for his tireless work to bring human rights to farm workers and for co-founding along with Dolores Huerta the National Farm Workers Association, which later became the United Farm Workers, he was broadly concerned about social justice and income gaps between all the state's rich and poor.

Over 60 years ago, Chávez dedicated himself to nonviolent, but aggressive, organizing and activism. In the early 1970s, the union that Chávez organized along with Dolores Huerta won passage of the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act, guaranteeing among other rights, farm workers' right to collective bargaining.

These many decades later, Chávez' words are still worth paying attention to. On Monday, UCLA IDEA released its annual California Educational Opportunity Report that showed a growing disparity among schools serving rich and poor communities.

Free Fall: Educational Opportunities in 2011 reported that while all schools face increasing challenges to provide a quality education, the disparity between high- and low-income communities keeps growing. Wealthy communities are able to preserve many services by appealing to families and communities. They are more apt to charge for music and arts, electives, field trips and sports. Poor schools cannot place similar burdens on families worried about keeping jobs, homes, and food on the table. According to the report, produced in collaboration with UC/ACCORD, wealthier schools raised \$20 for every one dollar raised by poorer schools.

"This report is a wake-up call for California and its leaders," said Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson. The majority of principals in the UCLA study reported cutting instructional time and less attention. Forty-nine percent have reduced their school year since 2008, and another 65 percent have cut back or eliminated summer school.

Almost all principals—88 percent—said that budget cuts have stalled their reform efforts and professional development with fewer teachers allotted time to collaborate and with key personnel laid off.

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"When you say, 'we're going to cut you, but yeah, we want you to do these five things for free now,' are there people who would do it? Yes. But do I feel like we should ask them? No. ... I mean, you can only squeeze the turnip so much," reported one Sacramento County principal about how furloughs and layoffs have affected her school.

Seventy-eight percent of principals in the survey blamed the economy for fewer graduates who move on to four-year colleges and universities. "We've cut as much as we can cut, quite frankly, without giving blood," Paula Hanzel, principal at Sacramento New Technology High School, said at a conference at the release of the report. "I wonder when people in the state of California will recognize you get what you pay for and that we are once again mortgaging our future."

César Chávez helped enormously to begin a long, slow climb for workers' well-being and dignity. California youth are organizing to continue that work with their particular focus on the unfair distribution of quality education across the state's many communities. *Free Fall: Educational Opportunities in 2011*, documents, in part, that California school-improvement hopes and equity goals have stalled and are tumbling backwards.

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