

Faculty, students and staff turn out for two major days of protests against state education cuts

March 22: Over 10,000 march to state capitol

by Lisa Suguitan Melnick, CSM, English & P.E.

The tone of the day was to reveal itself early on. The fourth of the four CSM buses (plus three from Skyline and two from Cañada), on which I happened to be a passenger, was zipping along Highway 80, when suddenly the driver exited at Emeryville. Bus #3 in our caravan had broken down and ours went into Rescue mode. Within minutes we were pointed westward toward the toll plaza, traversing eight lanes of the morning queue. We inched forward slowly, exactly perpendicular to the oncoming rush hour traffic. Finally, pulling up behind the other bus, we brought our stranded students aboard. For those few patient moments, cross traffic

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March 22nd march in Sacramento

AFT1493.org website wins award for best in the state!

See page 12.

March 4: Actions at all 3 colleges and big S.F. rally

Skyline students walk out!

by Masao Suzuki, Skyline, Economics

On Thursday, March 4th, hundreds of Skyline College students left class and gathered on the campus quad for their Day of Action protest against budget cuts. After a short

Cañada students walk out!

by Elizabeth Terzakis, AFT 1493 Cañada Chapter Co-Chair, English

Two hundred Cañada College students walked out of class on March 4th and gathered in the campus quad for a speakout against budget



Students join AFT 1493's contingent at the March 4th S.F. march against budget cuts
photo by Alan Benjamin

song, Skyline Against Cuts leader Michelle Araica led off the march. As student marshals held open doors, led chants, and stopped traffic, nearly 500 students and more than a dozen faculty and staff supporters marched through almost all the buildings on campus, chanting "Hey hey, Ho ho, Budget Cuts have got to go!".

After the march, there was an 11 a.m. rally that included faculty and

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cuts. The college's budget was cut by 10 percent in the last year, leading to the cancellation of more than 27 sections (out of a total of about 600) this semester, and reducing students services programs that help first generation, disadvantaged, and disabled students to access their right to education. Both counseling hours and book vouchers were cut in half, while disability testing was moved off campus.

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

California needs to decide the budget by a simple majority vote

by Monica Malamud, AFT 1493 President

I am sure you know that California is in a very difficult financial situation, with an unprecedented budget deficit. I am also



sure you know that education funding in our state does not meet the needs of our students, and districts all over California, including ours, are making cuts in order

to keep spending within their budgets.

Funding education must be a top priority

I, like many others, think that the inadequate funding for education stems from a combination of factors. On the one hand, there is the matter of priorities: should education be a higher priority and therefore receive more funding? On the other hand, everything comes pretty much to a standstill in Sacramento when dealing with spending or looking for more revenue. Why? Because in our state a simple majority is not enough to pass the budget (spending) nor to increase taxes (as a way to increase revenues). The fact that two-thirds of the votes

in each legislative house are required to pass the state budget and to increase taxes makes California unique in the nation. And, judging from the consequences that we are all experiencing, I don't find this a positive kind of uniqueness.

Of course there are other ways to deal with the inadequate funding for education. One solution would be simply to make those who want an education pay its full price. Personally, I don't agree with this idea. In fact, I believe that ALL levels of public education should be absolutely free. This is not a utopia: it is the reality in many countries.

Two initiatives that can help improve education funding

If you believe, like the CFT, that we could begin to address the issues of adequate revenues and funding of public services, including education, in California by requiring a simple majority in order to make these decisions, there are petitions to put two initiatives on the November 2010 ballot that you should consider signing:

- the *Majority Budget Act*, which changes the legislative vote requirement to pass a budget from two-thirds to a simple majority; and
- the *California Democracy Act*, also known as the Lakoff Initiative, which states that "All legislative actions on revenue and budget must be determined by a majority vote."

The Executive Council of the CFT endorsed the *Majority Budget Act* some time ago, and CFT members have been gathering signatures in order to qualify it as a ballot initiative. More recently, at the 2010 CFT Convention held in Los Angeles March 19-21, a resolution to support the *California Democracy Act* was adopted. According to this resolution, the CFT urges its members to sign

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The Advocate

The Advocate provides a forum for faculty to express their views, opinions and analyses on topics and issues related to faculty rights and working conditions, as well as education theory and practice, and the impact of contemporary political and social issues on higher education.

Some entries are written and submitted individually while others are collaborative efforts. All faculty are encouraged to contribute.

The Advocate's editorial staff, along with the entire AFT 1493 Executive Committee, works to ensure that statements of fact are accurate. We recognize, respect, and support the right of faculty to freely and openly share their views without the threat of censorship.

CFT Convention looks at political and economic means to restore the promise of public education

by Dan Kaplan,
AFT 1493 Executive Secretary

The 68th Convention of the California Federation of Teachers was held in Los Angeles from Friday, March 19 thru Sunday, March 21. Attending the Convention as delegates from AFT Local 1493 were Monica Malamud, Karen Olesen, Joaquin Rivera, Katharine Harer, Nina Floro, and Dan Kaplan.

One of the highlights of the Convention was a presentation by Michael Dembrow, an Oregon State Legislator, who was active in the recently successful campaign there to get a progressive tax measure passed. Also addressing the Convention were Art Pulaski, Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the California Labor Federation, John Perez, newly elected Speaker of the California Assembly, Barbara Boxer, U.S Senator from California, and Willie Pelote, California Political and Legislative Director of AFSCME.

Live feeds from the CFT's "March for California's Future"

Several times throughout the Convention live video feeds from the CFT-sponsored "March for California's Future" were broadcast to the Convention hall. This March, which began in Ba-

kersfield on March 6, is making its way through the Central Valley towards Sacramento with three themes-- restoring the promise of public education, a government and economy that works for all, and fair taxes to fund California's future. The March will culminate with a massive rally in Sacramento on April 21. (See page 8 for more on the March for California's Future.)



AFT 1493 delegates to the 2010 CFT Convention were (from left) Dan Kaplan, Katharine Harer, Monica Malamud, Nina Floro, and Joaquin Rivera. Karen Olesen (not pictured) took the photo.

The five General Sessions of the Convention were where the main work of the Convention took place in vigorous debate and voting on dozens of resolutions submitted by Locals from around the state. In addition, there were 25 workshops that were held on a variety of subjects over the course

of two days. One particularly alarming workshop was on "How Privatization is Stealing the Promise of Public Education." George Wright, Professor of History at Skyline College, was a presenter in this workshop.

Spirited floor debate

Perhaps the most spirited floor

debate was about the California Democracy Act, a proposed ballot measure that calls for majority vote on both taxes and budget in the State legislature. (AFT 1493's Executive Committee had voted to endorse the California Democracy Act a few days before the CFT Convention, at its meeting on March 17.) In the end, the delegates voted to support urging members to circulate the petition to get this initiative on the ballot, and to have CFT endorse the measure if it gets on the November ballot.

Majority Budget Act expected to be on November ballot

At the same time, the CFT has endorsed the Budget Majority Act, which is almost certain to be on the November ballot. This Act would restore democracy in the State legislature by reducing the two-thirds supermajority required to pass a budget to a simple majority vote. This would end the legislative gridlock in Sacramento by giving the majority the power to pass a state budget on time, without a minority of anti-education, anti-labor legislators holding up the process.

President's Letter

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the California Democracy Act petitions, and if and when this initiative gets on the ballot, the CFT will endorse the initiative. Our local, AFT 1493, also voted to endorse this initiative prior to

the CFT Convention.

If you are interested in signing petitions for these initiatives or can volunteer to circulate the petitions, please contact someone in the AFT 1493 Executive Committee NOW.

Students protest cuts on campuses, then mobilize in S.F. for large, spirited, youthful march and rally

by Katharine Harer, AFT 1493 Co-Vice President, Skyline, English

As soon as the train door slid open at the 24th & Mission BART station, I heard them. Their chants echoed in the subterranean tunnel and bounced off the windows of the departing train, filling the station with charged, young energy. I stood to the side to let a group of high school and college students pass, chanting: "Education is Our Right!" Sarah Figueroa, an active member of "Skyline Against the Cuts", shouted my name. She was waiting for the Skyline contingent that was on its way. They arrived with an enormous, colorful hand-painted banner that they'd made the night before, and we ran up the stairs to the street.

All four corners of 24th & Mission were crowded with students, teachers, parents and supporters of public education. It was almost impossible to walk. The Skyline group unfurled their banner next to the BART station and we stood around it, buzzing with the spirit of protest that had started earlier that day during the successful walk out and rally. Michelle Araica, the Skyline student leader who began organizing against the budget cuts last fall, was beaming. Michael Hoffman, a Skyline Math profes-

sor active in the campus protests, helped us locate the AFT contingent, and about fifteen of us snaked our way across the street to join Dan Kaplan, John Kirk, Eric Brenner, Kathleen Feinblum and Garry Nicol. Somehow in the tangle of all those protesting bodies, the Cañada student group found us, and we all marched together. We never found the CSM group, but we know they were there.

The average age was probably 17

I kept telling anyone who would listen that it was the youngest march I'd ever been on. The average age was probably 17. There were elementary students there with

their homemade signs, high school students still lugging their heavy textbooks in their arms, and I saw a group of children and parents from a tutoring center in the Mission District, all wearing the same tee-shirt that read: "I am going to College!" A joyous, positive force propelled the 2-mile parade from 24th & Mission to Civic Center. We were taking a stand together -- students and teachers from Pre-Kinder-garten through graduate school.

We were amazed by the numbers of marchers

We streamed into the square and surrounding streets of Civic Center, amazed at the numbers of marchers. A few of us took the elevator to the sixth floor of the Main Library and looked down to see just how big we were. We could see the Skyline banner from the upstairs window! We rejoined our contingent and crossed the street to take a break from the formal rally. Groups of students with signs and banners filled every corner of the wide granite stairs of City Hall, chanting and shouting. The entrance to City Hall was jumping, non-

stop. I stayed for almost a half hour, hypnotized by the energy on the stairs. I found out later that this was the group that continued the march down Market Street after the rally ended, and that our students -- from Skyline, Cañada and CSM -- marched to the end.

March 4th was an historic day for our students. The movement that they are part of statewide, as well as the local campus organizing at Skyline, Cañada and CSM, are hopeful signs that the people of California who are most affected by the dismantling of our public education system are fighting back. March 4th was a proud day, and it won't be the last. Our students are in it for the long haul, and so are we.



Cañada Strikes Back & Skyline Against the Cuts contingents join forces at the March 4 rally in S.F. Civic Center (photo by Michael Hoffman)

Educating the Whole Student: March 4 at CSM

by Susan Petit, professor emeritus, CSM, English & French

CSM's stimulating March 4 activities, "A Call to Action: Educating the Whole Student," focused on advocacy, support services, and academic areas most heavily threatened by budget cuts. The CSM Theatre and adjoining area were the site of action from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

In the Fine Arts Courtyard, Lisa Melnick (ESL and PE), Rudy Ramirez (Ethnic Studies), and Freddie Navas (student) invited all to attend through their resonant creative drumming. CSM Associated Students, aided by Aaron Schaefer (Student Activities), provided materials for writing to legislators and information about the March 22 demonstration in Sacramento. The Teach-In Committee, which facilitated the events under the guidance of Kate Motoyama (Speech), sold "No Cuts to Education" t-shirts and provided computer stations maintained by Angela Skinner-Orr (Geography) so students could email legislators and the governor. A bedsheet on which faculty had posted comments was displayed in the windows.

Teach-In Committee members Dave Danielson (Philosophy), Dan Kaplan (AFT), Kate Motoyama, and I (English and French, retired) facilitated events. ASCSM presented a video of Chimamanda Adichie discussing "The Danger of a Single Story," and Alex Quintana (ASCSM V-P) followed up with a talk on the need for students to tell their stories. Angela Orr gave a vigorous analysis of the threats to education in California, "Shock and Awe: Privatizing Education." Half a dozen ASCSM students spoke passionately about their educational experiences and what one could do to become politically involved, and Sanda Everette (student) provided voter registration cards. Brayan Pelayo (student) got student athletes in the audience to tell how the budget cuts would affect them.

The student Jazz Combo performed under the guidance of Mike Galisatus (Music). Their elegant interpretation of "Misty" and other numbers made me forget I was not in a nightclub in the wee hours. Next, Mike Pre and Oshyn (students) performed "If We Could Change," which they

had written in response to the crisis. They would perform it again on stage that evening before the thousands at the San Francisco Civic Center. David Laderman (Film) spoke on "The Big Picture," an exhortation to stand up and be counted, and Teresa Morris (Library) explained the dismal state of the library's budget. Nick Dellaporta (Library) added his plea for action.

Five students receiving support services (access, learning disabilities, financial aid, counseling), responded movingly to questions by Danita Scott-Taylor (EOPS) about how

cuts to these programs would impair their ability to remain in college. Then the threat to international students was discussed by a panel of students from around the world. Students of Sarah Bolton (Dance) did improvisational exercises and performed choreography they had learned in her modern dance class, accompanied on drums by Lisa, Rudy, and Freddie. Sarah also showed footage of her dancers being interviewed by Emanuela Quaglia (multimedia student). The on-campus events concluded with a rousing performance of "Blowin' in the

Wind" and "We Shall Overcome" by Helen Souranoff (CSM Theatre manager), accompanied by Rudy Ramirez on guitar.

Students, faculty, and other staff were entertained, moved, and inspired by this wonderful display of talent and dedication.

View more extensive coverage at: aft1493.org



pictured from left to right: Freddie Navas, Rudy Ramirez, Lisa Melnick, Sue Matthews, Minu Mathur (photo by Adam Paramore)



student Jazz Combo: Jeanine Robertson (vocals), Paul Federighi (bass), Niko Larot (saxophone), Danny Bereket (trumpet), Frank Phipps (trombone) (photo by Adam Paramore)

MARCH 4 DAY OF ACTION**Cañada students walk out & speak out against cuts***continued from page 1*

The college is facing a second 10 percent cut to its budget in the next year, which will result in the cancellation of over 100 sections next semester. The English as a Second Language Program will be hit particularly hard; almost all the part-time faculty in the department did not get assigned any classes next semester. Since Cañada has historically served Redwood City and East Palo Alto's large immigrant communities, these cuts are likely to have a significant impact on the racial composition of the student population.

The walkout was called by Cañada Strikes Back! (CSB), a student group that also organized a teach-in earlier in the semester. CSB co-founder Katy Rose challenged campus administrators to take responsibility for the cuts or join in the fight against them. "The administrators say their hands are tied. Well, I got up the other morning, and the content of my bank account was negative \$1.75. My net worth was less than a half a tank of gas. But I'm still here. Because if there's one thing working class people are good at, it's finding a way out of no way. And that's what we need from our administration. No more cuts. No more excuses. The money is out there. It's their job to find it."

After the speakout, students presented a list of de-

*photo by Elizabeth Terzaklis**Cañada students gathered at March 4 speakout*

mands, signed by all present, to the college president and then marched to the campus entrance, which was being picketed by Carpenters Union Local 217. The carpenters were out because the San Mateo Community College District has hired non-union carpenters to do the finishing work on a faculty housing complex that is being built on Cañada's campus. Students stood beside picketing carpenters and chanted their support while calling for solidarity between students and workers.

After marching back to the center of campus, students formed carpools to join in the march and rally for public education in San Francisco.

Skyline students walk out & march against cuts*continued from page 1*

students speaking out against the budget cuts. Skyline History professor George Wright told the students that Skyline's action, along with those of other schools throughout the state and across the country, was an "historic protest". Cosmetology students led a chant of "Hair Cuts Not Budget Cuts!"

*photo by Eric Brenner**Hundreds of Skyline students marched through campus on March 4*

This protest was possibly the largest student action ever in Skyline's 40-year history. To build for March 4th, Skyline Against Cuts tabled in the cafeteria, spoke in classes, put up flyers, and reached out to other student groups. They also did a "flash mob" in the campus quad which got a front page photo in the school newspaper.

Academic Senate & Associated Students support Skyline's Day of Action

Skyline Against Cuts was also able to forge a broad united front in support of the March 4 Day of Action. Students along with Concerned Faculty members mobilized for a meeting of the faculty Academic Senate and got a strong resolution in support of the Day of Action passed. Skyline Against the Cuts also met with the student government to encourage them to pass a resolution in support of March 4 and to work together on a rally that day. The broad support for the Day Action led to a very positive statement from the College President to all the faculty and staff about the Day of Action. Some faculty members cancelled their classes, others cut their classes short so that their students could participate in the Day of Action.

I was able to speak with a number of students after the rally. Floyd Pitts, President of the Black Student Union and member of Skyline Against Cuts, was one of the main organizers of the Day of Action. He said that "I was glad to see such a big turnout. I hope that we can keep the energy going."

See pages 4 & 5 for more on March 4 events

“Somos el futuro”-- Voices from March 22nd

by Katharine Harer, AFT 1493 Co-Vice President, Skyline, English

Skyline students and faculty showed up in force for the March in March on Monday the 22nd. The *Skyline Against Cuts* group brought their huge homemade banner, carried proudly in the March 4th protest in San Francisco. Combina-



photo by David McLain

March 22nd demonstrators in Sacramento came with a purpose

March 22nd: Inching forward at the State Capitol

continued from page 1

stopped, and with all eyes looking in one direction, we made it to the other side. Later, Associated Students President, Steffi Santana commented, "It was Us saving Us."

In Sacramento, the calls to move forward within our own communities felt familiar to both my identity as a child of the sixties, and my middle-coming-of-age realization that Now is absolutely the time to find our voices again. Assembly member Warren Furutani reminded the 10,000-plus rally attendees that the answer to solving the attack on public education would not be found within the walls of the Capitol building before which we stood; furthermore, we have much more work to do. He urged students to mobilize and activate voters to support initiatives which grow student services and academic programs, specifically:

- AB 656 (Torrico), reverses the trend of declining public funds to higher education by placing a severance tax on big oil companies, and directs all the revenue to universities and community colleges.
- AB 2447 (Furutani), asks for a hand-up, not a hand-out, increases CAL grants to keep up with inflation.

Students around me talked the talk of knowing. Lolisa Boxley Standifer, (Fresno CC) said, "You gotta fight for everything you want. And it *works*."

Inching forward, we will get to the other side.

It will be Us saving Us.

tions of Skyline students and faculty took turns carrying the colorful banner on the short march and into the rally grounds surrounding the Capitol. The spirit we've built working together to organize the February teach-in and the March 4 walkout and campus protest grew even stronger as we joined thousands of others from all over California.

I was curious about where we had all come from, so I started talking to students as they milled around us. The first cluster of students I approached came from the College of the Desert in Palm Desert, close to Palm Springs. They brought over 40 students and a few advisors on the eight-hour pilgrimage, sleeping overnight on the seats of the bus. They said more than 100 sections were cut this spring and that winter and summer sessions have been cancelled. Benjamin Pineda, 18, told me: "I can't afford any more cuts. I won't be able to go to school."

The next group of students I approached was from Humboldt State, almost as far from Palm Desert as you can



Demonstrators cross Sacramento's historic Tower Bridge
(photo by David McLain)

get. They'd brought ten students and a mom. Their classes are packed and every teacher is forced to take nine furlough days per semester. "It's really hurting our classes," said Holly Johnstone, an Environmental Science major. I spoke briefly to students from CSU Bakersfield who said they'd brought 45 students to Sacramento. The community college in Fresno brought 150.

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March for California's Future challenges state's commitment to schools, services and equity

California is at a crossroads, and the choices our elected leaders make will determine whether we restore California's promise or watch the American Dream slip away. Instead of making tough choices, our governor and a minority of legislators think the "solution" is deep and destructive cuts to essential services: our schools, parks, libraries, infrastructure, safety net services and other vital public institutions.

The consequences will haunt our state for a generation. Classrooms will be more crowded and less safe, neighborhoods less clean and more dangerous. College and university fees will skyrocket, turning our community colleges and public universities into distant dreams instead of bridges to the middle class. More families will go bankrupt because they cannot afford health care.

The California Federation of Teachers and a diverse coalition of labor, education, community, business and faith groups are sponsoring a 260-mile March for California's Future, which began in Bakersfield on March 5th and will culminate in a rally at the state capitol in Sacramento on April 21st.

The March has three goals:

- Reclaim the promise of quality public education and services
- Rebuild state government so it works for everyone
- Restore fair and equitable taxes to invest in California's future

We live in the richest state in the richest country in the world. Budget cuts are not inevitable, but the result of political choices. We cannot allow a minority of legislators to enact budgets that destroy rather than build. Rather than showering more tax breaks on the wealthiest millionaires and most profitable corporations, elected leaders should invest in our future.

Along the way the marchers are:

- Registering voters
- Collecting signatures to put the Majority

Budget measure on the ballot

- Holding teach-ins and town hall meetings
- Visiting legislators
- Holding rallies to enlist your support
- Blogging, tweeting and recording the action on the frontlines with live video feed

The March is just the beginning of an ongoing campaign: the Fight for California's Future.



Voices from March 22nd

continued from previous page

A group wearing t-shirts from Mendocino told me that they'd brought 100 students and faculty from their north coast community college. One student, enrolled in the Automotive Program, said that her classes don't have enough supplies. Tools are broken, and there's no money to replace them. She told me: "We're asked to bring our own supplies to class, but where's the money for that? I've already spent over \$600 on basic tools."

Students in tan uniforms from the California Maritime Academy, the CSU in Vallejo, said that lots of sections have been cut. Two-thirds of their grade is based on attending labs – which in their case means being out on the water. However, so many labs have been cut that, in one young woman's words: "We have less time behind the wheel of a boat." Many students talked about the high price of textbooks combined with increased fees and the difficulty of attending class when they are forced to work longer hours to pay for their educations. Others talked about how the cuts in sections would delay their graduations, taking three years instead of two.

It struck me how assertive and savvy these students are. Every person I spoke to was clear about why they were there and what the funding cuts mean to their college – and their futures. As one sign read in Spanish: *Somos El Futuro* – We Are The Future. A popular chant that day was: *If you throw us out, we'll vote you out*. These students know that education is their right, and they are determined to fight for it.



Cañada student at Capitol rally
(photo by Susan Petit)

AFT 1493 leaders decide to support District's parcel tax, despite inequitable impact on homeowners

by Katharine Harer, AFT 1493
Co-Vice President, Skyline College, English

At the March meeting of AFT 1493's Executive Committee we held a lengthy discussion of the parcel tax that the District is planning to place on the June ballot. The tax would raise 6 million dollars for a period of four years and would cost homeowners \$34 per parcel. These funds may be applied to any aspect of running the community college district, unlike the two bond measures passed in the last few years that could only be used for facilities projects. Recent polls have shown that the required 67% of San Mateo county residents would vote for a parcel tax to benefit SMCCD.

The Executive Committee ultimately voted to extend "critical support" to the parcel tax. We felt, as a body, that parcel taxes unfairly hit lower income property owners because they aren't based on the value of the property but are flat, across-the-board amounts. For example, a person who owns a \$3,000,000 home will pay the same amount as someone who owns a home worth \$400,000. In that regard, it is just one more example of poor and working people paying an inequitable share of the burden of running California. Corporations and the wealthy contribute much less than their fair share to the state coffers because of loopholes built into the tax system.

A number of EC members were vehemently against endorsing the parcel tax, arguing that homeowners are being tapped out by bonds and taxes assessed in their local areas. One faculty member stated that he is already paying almost \$1000 more each year and that his district is considering another \$250 tax to help a struggling local school district. It was also argued that while many faculty may support the idea of the parcel tax, they don't live in San Mateo County so it won't affect their personal finances. And yet another argument against the tax was that it privileges higher income counties who can afford to pay more in taxes to support and improve their schools while other counties suffer. Public education should be available to all at the same level of quality.

However, in the final analysis, the majority of the members of the EC felt that given the devastation that the state has created by de-funding education – and the prognosis for further funding cuts in the future – the parcel tax is one of the only methods the District has at their disposal to help ensure that we can continue to educate our students. Until the dysfunction in Sacramento changes and education becomes a priority, parcel taxes are one way for school districts to survive, and many districts are turning to them.

Consider becoming an AFT 1493 activist, run for union office

Nominations form coming soon

All AFT members will be receiving nomination forms for the next AFT election in their campus mailboxes in mid-April. Please submit names of any AFT member (your own included) for the ballot for election to office for the 2010-2012 school years.

Terms of office begin and end officially on June 1. We would like to take this opportunity to encourage all faculty members to seriously consider either running for office or nominating a colleague.

No previous experience is necessary and present office-holders are eligible for re-nomination. Job descriptions for each position are available upon request from the AFT office. All positions, with the exception of part-timer representative, are open to all full or part-time members, district-wide for the officers, and from the specific college for chapter positions.

AFT 1493 Calendar

Executive Committee/ General Membership Meeting:

Wednesday, April 14th, 2:15 pm
Cañada, room 3-142

March for California's Future Culminating Rally:

Wednesday, April 21st
State Capitol, Sacramento

Executive Committee/ General Membership Meeting:

Wednesday, May 12th, 2:15 pm
Skyline, room 5131

GASB, OPEB and RBOA: An introduction to retirement health care benefits alphabet soup

by Bruce Maule, AFT 1493 RBOA Rep., CSM, Accounting

On March 2, Kathy Blackwood, the chief financial officer of the District, sent an email to all faculty and retirees to introduce the Retirement Board of Authority (RBOA). In October, 2009, the Executive Committee of the AFT approved my selection to be the AFT representative on the RBOA. As the AFT representative I attend all meetings of the RBOA, vote as a Board member, and report to the AFT on the activities of the Board. This is my first of a series of reports on the Retirement Board of Authority.

I was interested in serving as the AFT representative to the RBOA because I am a CPA and I have been teaching accounting at CSM for twenty years. In my classes I teach students how to follow the rules issued by the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB), which apply to publicly traded companies. The District is required to follow the rules of the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB), which is the parallel organization to FASB. Serving on the RBOA gives me an opportunity to apply my professional skills and what I teach in the classroom in the service of the employees and retirees of the District.

The other members of the RBOA are Kathy Blackwood (District CFO), Ray Chow (District Controller), Harry Joel (District Vice Chancellor of Human Resources) and Stephanie Samuelson (CSEA).

The RBOA oversees the OPEB trust, which pays for retiree health benefits

Kathy Blackwood made the following points in her email:

- For over 15 years, the District has been setting aside funds in a Post-Retirement Reserve Fund for the purpose of funding future retiree medical benefits. These funds were invested in the county investment pool.
- In Fall 2009 the Board of Trustees established an Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) trust and appointed a Retirement Board of Authority (RBOA) to oversee the trust.
- The OPEB trust is an irrevocable trust whose sole purpose is to pay for retiree health benefits.
- In October 2009, the Board authorized the first transfer into the trust of \$5 million.
- The irrevocable trust will invest the funds in longer-term investments than were allowed when the funds were invested in the county investment pool.

- With the irrevocable trust we are anticipating earning a higher rate of return than the county pool, which means the District will need to invest less money in order to meet its employee and retiree benefit obligations.
- After the end of the fiscal year, the RBOA will report the earnings of the trust.
- The RBOA is developing a website that will contain a variety of information about this trust and the District's obligations.
- The District is committed to funding its retirement obligations and is actively working to make sure that the funds will be there when they are needed.

The purpose of the OPEB trust is to accumulate funds to pay for post-retirement health benefits. Section 10.1 of the AFT contract provides for retiree medical and dental benefits. The post-retirement benefits you will receive depend upon your hiring date. Please go to the AFT website (aft1493.org) and click on "Contract and Salaries" then "Complete Contract" and click on "Article 10: Retirement" to see the benefits to which you are entitled. (Article 10.1, Retiree Medical and Dental Benefits, is shown on the next page.)

GASB set the requirements for OPEB trusts

GASB set high standards and specific legal requirements for the creation and administration of an OPEB trust. During 2009 Dan Kaplan served as the AFT representative on the committee that created the RBOA, which is responsible for the OPEB trust. The committee completed a lengthy and thorough process to select highly qualified partners for our program. The committee selected three partners: Keenan Financial Services for program coordination and administration; Benefit Trust Company for trust services; and Morgan Stanley Smith Barney for asset investment management. These partners will help the RBOA meet its legal obligations and provide professional advice on how to administer the OPEB trust and how to invest the trust assets. Although I joined the RBOA after the partner selection process had been completed, I fully support the decisions made by Dan and the committee. We all owe Dan Kaplan thanks for the time he spent to help this important initiative get a successful start.

The background of this initiative is important. In 2004 GASB issued two pronouncements, GASB 43 and 45, which changed the requirements for calculating, disclosing and presenting the financial effects of post-retirement health benefits. Districts such as ours were given a time window to comply. The creation of the OPEB irrevocable trust and the

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RBOA are two important steps our District needed to make to be in compliance with the required timeline to implement GASB 43 and 45.

The OPEB irrevocable trust and the RBOA were both created by actions of the District Board of Trustees. However, once the OPEB trust and the RBOA came into existence they became separate legal entities, which are independent of the District Board of Trustees. GASB 43 and 45 require that the sole purpose of the OPEB trust and the RBOA be to provide post-retirement health care benefits to district employees. Once the district moves money out of the district budget and into the OPEB irrevocable trust, the money can

only be used to provide post-retirement health benefits to retirees. The Board of Trustees cannot control or reclaim any funds invested in the OPEB trust. Although the five members of the RBOA are all district employees, we are required to observe our status as RBOA board members and our actions must solely be to benefit district retirees.

The requirements of GASB 43 and 45, and the meaning of the dollar amounts, can be long and complex. I will use my reports in the *Advocate* to try to make the issues and the numbers clear and meaningful to my fellow AFT members. This report was my introduction. In future issues of the *Advocate* we will look at some of the important topics and some of the important dollar amounts in detail.

Article 10.1 of the AFT 1493 Contract: Retiree Medical and Dental Benefits

10.1 RETIREE MEDICAL AND DENTAL BENEFITS:

The following procedures shall apply to retiree medical and dental benefits.

10.1.1 Employed Prior to January 1, 1987: The District will pay lifetime medical and dental insurance premiums for retirees and eligible spouse/domestic partners who were employed by the District as Contract I employees prior to January 1, 1987 and met the eligibility criteria. The eligible retired member of the unit, and that member's spouse/domestic partner at the time of the member's retirement, shall be eligible for continuation of benefits during the life of the retired member of the unit, and, following the death of the retired member, during the life of the un-remarried surviving spouse/domestic partner. The surviving spouses/domestic partners of deceased retirees are continued on benefits without interruption as long as they remain unmarried. The domestic partner benefit portion applies only to those retirees who retired on January 1, 2000 or after.

10.1.2 Employed On 1/1/1987 through 9/7/1993: For those employed as Contract I employees on January 1, 1987 through September 7, 1993, the maximum amount paid by the District for retiree medical benefits would be the amount the District would have been required to pay had the retiree selected the appropriate Kaiser Health Plan. The eligible retired member of the unit, and that member's spouse/domestic partner at the time of the member's retirement, shall be eligible for continuation of benefits during the life of the retired member of the unit, and, following the death of the retired member, during the life of the un-remarried surviving spouse/domestic partner. The surviving spouses/domestic partners of deceased retirees are continued on benefits without interruption as long as they remain unmarried.

The domestic partner benefit portion applies only to those retirees who retired on January 1, 2000 or after.

10.1.3 Employed On or After 9/8/1993: For unit members whose first day of paid service commences on or after September 8, 1993, the maximum amount paid by the District for retiree health benefits (medical and dental) shall be \$450/month until the employee becomes eligible for Medicare Part B. At that time, the District will then pay, for the employee only, the lowest cost medical plan available within the agreement between the parties.

10.1.4 10 Years of Service Required – Employed Prior to 9/8/1993: For those hired prior to September 8, 1993, to be eligible for District-paid retiree medical and dental benefits, the retiree must have ten (10) full years of service with the District, be at least 55 years of age, and the age at retirement of the retiree (in full years) when added to the number of completed full years of service must total 75 or more. For a year of service to be counted, the assignment must have been such that the employee was eligible for medical insurance benefits if such benefits were available to employees.

10.1.5 20 Years of Service Required – Employed On or After 9/8/1993: For unit members whose first day of paid service commences on or after September 8, 1993, to be eligible for District-paid retiree medical and dental benefits, the retiree must have twenty (20) full years of service within the District, must be at least 55 years of age, must be currently employed by the District at the time of retirement, and the age at the time of retirement of the retiree (in full years), when added to the full years of service, must total 75 or more. For a year of service to be counted, the assignment must have been such that the employee was eligible for medical insurance benefits if such benefits were available to employees.

AFT 1493.org named best website in State!

AFT 1493 members win three other awards

At the 68th Convention of the California Federation of Teachers, held in Los Angeles on March 19-21, AFT Local 1493 won four CFT Communications Awards, including first place in the category of **Best Web Site**.

AFT 1493's newly redesigned web site, aft1493.org, maintained by webmaster **Eric Brenner**, won the top prize in the state for locals with more than 500 members. The judges' comments on our new website: "Very well organized down to the level of the subpages. Current news easily accessible on front page. Eye-pleasing graphic design. Good use of categories to group items on subpages for ease of use." The AFT 1493 website was completely redesigned and upgraded over the summer and fall of 2009 and the new site was launched at the beginning of the Spring 2010 semester. It is updated very often with the latest information related to our District faculty.

Nina Floro, AFT 1493 Grievance Officer and Skyline College Chapter Co-Chair, won Second Place in the category of **Best Feature Writing**, for her *Advocate* article titled "Know your rights in evaluation procedures."



Nina Floro shows her award as Katharine Harer looks on
photo by Karen Olesen

In the category of **Best News Writing**, **John Kirk**, former AFT 1493 Chief Grievance Officer, won a Second Place award for his *Advocate* article, "Board overrules arbitrator's decision."

In the category of **Best Email Newsletter**, AFT 1493 won Second Place for its production of the AFT 1493 E-News, occasional union updates sent to all faculty on various topics of importance, a collaborative effort of various AFT 1493 leaders coordinated by **Eric Brenner**.

Why you should sign the petition to support binding arbitration

Last month, AFT 1493 announced a petition to support the negotiation of a change in our faculty contract from "advisory" arbitration (which allows our Board of Trustees to decide whether or not to accept a decision of a professional arbitrator) to "binding" arbitration, which requires that arbitrators' decisions are actually implemented by the District administration. Although we appreciate the many faculty members who have already signed the petition, many other faculty have not responded yet. This article is addressed to those of you who have not signed the petition yet.

If you haven't signed the petition yet, which of the following is your reason for not signing?

1. I'm worried my Dean or someone else in District management might hold it against me if I signed.
2. Binding arbitration is not my concern because I always follow all of the rules and all administrators always like me so I'll never have to have an arbitration, plus anyone who ever has an arbitration must have done something wrong so why should I care.
3. Union issues are for somebody else to deal with.
4. I just don't want to get involved.
5. I'm just too lazy.
6. I believe the Board of Trustees *should* have the unilateral right to overrule the decision of a professional arbitrator who has been mutually approved by District management and AFT 1493 and who has come to the decision after spending hours (often days) hearing and considering arguments and evidence from both sides.

If you actually think for a moment about each of these ~~excuses~~ reasons, we hope you will see why it is so important for all faculty members to sign the binding arbitration petition: It will help ensure that our District is a truly democratic workplace that fully protects the rights of all faculty. Please take a few moments and sign the petition now. Go to: aft1493.org. Thank you.

Check out AFT 1493's award-winning website:

aft1493.org

News you can use!