

## CSO & CTA: An Unbreakable Bond

Partnership powers us through unprecedented challenges

by Bruce Saathoff, CSO President

While so much has been uncertain over the last two years, the strength of CTA & CSO fighting together for the safe schools and resources our communities need is a reassuring constant.



This has been evident in school districts across the state, as educators rose united to defend the health of their school communities and protect the safety of their students, families and each other from COVID-19. Amid shelter-in-place and distance-learning, masks and social distancing, vaccinations and boosters, the bond shared by CSO and CTA members powered us through the most difficult of times.

The emergence and spiking of the Omicron variant have shown us that the pandemic is still far from over. We were all excited for the first in-person CTA State Council meeting in two years and the chance to be together again, but sadly it just isn't safe to do so. With the highest COVID case rates yet, the risk is too high for our families, schools and communities.

This is how we enter 2022, trying to remain flexible as we continue the work to protect our schools and communities from an invisible enemy. It's been an exhausting couple years, but our unity has powered us through.

In school districts up and down the state and on videoconference calls with elected officials, our solidarity fueled our fight for safe teaching and learning conditions, historic funding for California schools, and the resources and services all students deserve. All while you transitioned from in-person to distance-learning and back again, meeting students where they were to help them through the challenging time and being the caring adults they need.

As we continue to weather the pandemic and work to protect our families, students and schools, we're gearing up for major fights at the ballot box against familiar foes who are peddling school voucher scams and working to dismantle public education. But two years of crisis has only strengthened the bond shared by CTA and CSO members, and while we are all certainly tired, together we are unstoppable.

I want to thank State Council, CTA member-leaders and every educator in your local associations for working tirelessly to support and help students through these trying times. Your efforts have been nothing short of heroic and we are honored to be your partners in advocacy and share your fight every single day.

These are unprecedented times, but together we will overcome all challenges – and we must: your students and our schools and communities are counting on us.



### We've Moved

Time to update your bookmarks! The digital home of California Staff Organization has moved to **WeAreCSO.org**

#### Who We Are:

CSO Organizer is produced by the California Staff Organization (CSO), the union for professional, departmental and Regional UniServ staff who work for the 310,000 members of California Teachers Association. CSO affirms that Black Lives Matter and is committed to working to remedy the trauma of racism, white supremacy and police brutality within public education, CTA, CSO and society.

Comments/inquiries? Email [WeAreCSOCommunications@gmail.com](mailto:WeAreCSOCommunications@gmail.com)



# 'We can build power with educators anywhere'

## A Chat with Organizing Powerhouse *Caroline Gonzales*

by Rachel Warino

An unprecedented effort to organize a union of educators in California's Central Valley is underway. Learn more about one of our CSO colleagues at the heart of the organizing drive and the historic movement to build ACE- the Association of Clovis Educators!

### **How long have you been organizing? And when you were an educator, what made you want to join your union and then get more involved?**

I was in my third year of teaching, knew *nothing* about unions and had a vice principal who couldn't design a master bell schedule if his house was on fire and that was the only way to put it out. By the end of the first month we were on our second or third set of class lists. One of the site reps went to union leadership, asked if we could get some release time to form a subcommittee to solve the problem

and then got the principal to agree beforehand that he would adopt one of our solutions. That was in 1999 or so, and in the process, I got hooked on organizing! The next several years (during the Bush era and No Child Left Behind) my union (Portland Association of Teachers, 2,300 members strong!) was VERY involved and active on curriculum and instructional issues - as a MS science teacher, I was determined not to be boxed into a bunch of standardized testing crap. By 2002 I was on the organizing team (during a really tough bargain -- we ended up voting to authorize a strike and then reached a TA same week) and by 2008 got my first staff job in Fresno.



*Caroline Gonzales*

### **Educators deciding to organize in Clovis is a historic movement for a community that has been deeply anti-union for decades. Can you share a recent victory from Clovis that has brought you hope?**

Clovis organizing has been a wild and amazing ride with a truly amazing group of educators determined to overcome decades worth of anti-union brainwashing. One recent victory of the issue organizing variety (which is how I got involved in my union so I'm a fan lol) -- was won by a group of educators at a SPED program called Adult Transition Program. Several years ago they were told that their program had been audited by the state and was short on minutes -- and they had to give up their prep period to work with students. A teacher there, Nancy Welch, is on our District-Wide Organizing Committee and in conversations with other educators, she realized that at EVERY traditional high school, if a teacher worked during their prep, they got paid. She pulled all her colleagues together to discuss it and they met with their supervisor and now they are each getting over \$8,000 a year for this. What was really cool and about this was watching Nancy overcome her initial fear and isolation and help her co-workers do the same. Helping these folks build the union has been (and continues to be) an honor -- and it tells me that we can build power with educators anywhere.

### **How can your colleagues, CTA members, and the broader labor movement community support the drive in Clovis?**

Honestly, one easy way to help is to follow/engage with ACE on social media and our webpage: [cloviseducators.org](http://cloviseducators.org)! The ACE leaders are working so hard and facing anti-union headwinds on the regular -- it's exhausting and they LOVE to be reminded how excited CTA folks are around the state -- seriously, it's a big boost! ACE is on all the social media platforms at @cloviseducators and using the hashtag #WeAreACE. Please like/comment/share and ask your leaders to do the same! And for all you podcast nerds out there -- check out the ACEPod - linked to on our website. This is a podcast created by ACE educators at the heart of our effort to build ACE. It's a fascinating look at the inner workings of how to build a union. And I would be remiss if I didn't mention and appreciate the many, many folks who have already helped out (and continue to do so on this campaign). There are too many to list but you know who you are! I'm sort of amazed that people keep taking my calls!

## Sharing Passion for CTA Member Benefits

by Mindy Bartlett

By the time I arrived in San Mateo County to pick up my keys and meet the movers at 9 a.m., I'd already been on the road overnight for nearly 13 hours with very little sleep. What an adventure I was about to begin. I was excited to start my new role at CTA Member Benefits and get to know educators all around the state. Brand new to California, I was looking forward to seeing all the towns, connecting with all the people and exploring all the things.

Before my first year was complete, COVID-19 hit and I was carting my beloved Elephant Ear plant from my desk to the safety of home where I would, like many others, spend months working remotely -- but in these fresh surroundings more than 600 miles from friends and family.

Easily, my best experiences at CTA have been engaging with members and being invited by chapters to come and talk about benefits. Though retirement is still down the road for me, healthy finances have always been a passion that I want to share. Years ago, when I had a minor medical procedure and was waking up in

recovery, my mom told me that before the sedation wore off, I asked all the health professionals "are you saving for retirement?"

I'm lucky to get to share the same passion for the quality and advocacy of CTA's union programs, and the care put in the design and ongoing enhancements makes them easy to talk about. The experience of hearing about members' lives and of teaching something helpful is such a thrill and why I love it.

Back when we could meet in person, I met so many neat people and got to see so much of what makes California beautiful. When I look at an old calendar, I can still visualize the people and the conversations; the school libraries and back rooms of pizza parlors; the new hire orientations and organizing drives; the bustling suburbs and the long, scenic drives to remote gems. I really look forward to meeting the rest of you and seeing old faces again soon.

For more information about CTA Member Benefits, visit [CTAMemberBenefits.org](http://CTAMemberBenefits.org) or email us at [MemberBenefits@cta.org](mailto:MemberBenefits@cta.org).