

Partnering on a Long-Term Vision for CTA

Focusing on the services CTA members need in the fight for the schools our students deserve

By Tom Pinkava, CSO Bargaining Chair

Next month, California Staff Organization (CSO), will begin negotiations with CTA for our successor contract. Many CTA members and State Council delegates are not aware that CTA is party to a collective bargaining agreement with CSO, your staff union. This agreement covers the salary, benefits and working conditions for all CTA staff employed as primary contact staff, attorneys and professional department staff in Communications, Governmental Relations, Human Rights, IPD, ISSD, Member Benefits, TID and C4OB. In total, we represent more than 200 people employed by CTA and local affiliates. We are the staff you interact with daily and we pride ourselves on being your colleagues and partners in advancing the work of your local associations, and advocating for educators and students across California with CTA.

Bargaining Update

At the time our current agreement took effect - Sept. 1, 2020 - the school year began in distance learning, vaccines were not yet available and we were juggling rapidly changing and sometimes contradicting guidance from the Governor, CDPH and CDE in a perpetual frenzy of COVID MOU negotiations.

Given the immediacy and uncertainty of the pandemic, apart from addressing the fiscal solvency of the CTA employee pension, discussions around compensation and forward-thinking organizational improvements erred on the side of caution and mostly resulted in maintaining status quo.

Fortunately, the current environment we are operating in is very different. As we enter negotiations, we intend to address topics that focus on a broader long-term vision for CTA, its employees, and its members. This will include discussions around how we can improve professional support, member training, and resources to build stronger schools for California educators and students; how we can invest in staff positions and organizing to support association leadership and build stronger locals; and how we can better partner to build a more just, equitable, and sustainable future. We look forward to engaging in these conversations with CTA.

The CTA Bargaining Team is: David Goldberg, Leslie Littman, Greg Abt, Greg Bonaccorsi, Robert Ellis, Denise Jennex, Erika Jones, Tom Kaiser, Dan Koen, Leslie Littman, Wei Pan and Norma Sanchez. The CSO Bargaining Team is: Aisha Blanchard-Young, Tamara Conry, Gabriella Landeros, Tomás Martínez, Tom Pinkava and Kei Swensen.

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.



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Developing a More Inclusive Vocabulary

As CSO and CTA commit to prioritizing racial and social justice, part of the work is becoming more conscious of the language we use in our interactions with others. Here is some guidance around developing a more inclusive vocabulary.

1. Use the language people use for themselves

The best way to know how to refer to someone is by mirroring how they introduce or identify themselves. It's perfectly okay to ask someone their pronouns, and if you don't know, use a gender neutral pronoun like they/them, or use the person's name. Some folks get caught up with they/them being plural pronouns, but remember, prioritizing grammar over a person's dignity isn't cool. In addition, if you don't know how to pronounce someone's name, ask. Avoid giving someone a nickname or a name that is not theirs because it's easier for you to pronounce.

2. Use people-first or person-centered language

Strive to use language that acknowledges the human first, instead of describing someone's situation, diagnosis, disability, etc. first. For example, instead of saying "wheelchair bound," say "a person who uses a wheelchair," which is more respectful of a person's dignity. Another example is describing "a person who is unsheltered or unhoused" rather than "a homeless person." This particular example is important because a person may indeed have a home within a community despite being without shelter. This concept also comes up when teaching truth in the classroom, where many history textbooks use the term "slaves" when referring to enslaved people. Humanizing the people we are talking about is an important step toward racial and social justice.

3. Do a Google search before using sayings or phrases - you may be surprised at what you find

Phrases or terms like "master bedroom," "peanut gallery," and "gypped" have racist origins. Master bedroom evokes a history of slavery (another option is to say "primary"), peanut gallery refers to the sections of theatres where Black people were forced to sit, and gypped refers to "gypsy" which is a derogatory name for the Romani people. Using the phrase "spirit animal" to refer to an animal, person, or thing you identify strongly with when you are not Indigenous and know nothing about the spiritual tradition is a form of cultural appropriation, and it cheapens its true meaning.

4. Use language that avoids making assumptions about identity

Sometimes you may think you can "just tell" how someone identifies based on their appearance or language, but this can lead to some embarrassing and offensive situations. Asking someone "where are you from?" may imply an assumption about a person's origin or identity. Another example would be assuming someone doesn't have a lot of experience because they appear young-looking, or that they do have a lot of experience because they appear older-looking.

5. Use gender neutral language whenever possible

Gender neutral language helps ensure you don't make assumptions about the gender identity or expression of people you're interacting with. Not only is it more inclusive for non-binary and gender-expansive folks, but it also prevents the reinforcing of stereotypical and outdated gender roles. Swapping out "ladies and gentlemen," "brothers and sisters" and "his and hers" with words like "everyone," "y'all," and "folks" is a good start.

6. Recognize the impact of mental health language and avoid stigmatizing terms

Using terms like "insane" or "crazy" contributes to the stigma of people with mental illness. Some alternatives are "silly," "strange," or "unusual." Describing everyday behaviors and/or personalities with mental health diagnosis terms like "bipolar," "OCD," "PTSD" or "ADHD" is also problematic. While the intention may not be to cause harm, doing so minimizes the very real and serious impact these conditions have on folks.

7. Avoid using the terms "minority" or "at-risk"

Although the term "ethnic minority" is seen in various places in CTA, it's actually incorrect and offensive to some. People of color will comprise the majority of the nation's population very soon, and children from Black, Latine, Asian and multiracial families now account for more than half of the births in the U.S. It is more accurate to refer to people of color as "the global majority." Some folks also prefer the term "BIPOC" (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) which is intended to center the experiences of Black and Indigenous people and demonstrate solidarity between communities of color. Using the term "at-risk" is deficit-based language frequently used to describe young people, particularly young people of color. Alternatives may include "placed at risk," or "historically or systematically marginalized," but it is probably better to share which "risks" you're actually referring to. Every student has a combination of risk and protective factors in their homes, schools and neighborhoods, so being mindful about how you're describing someone can stop perpetuating harmful stereotypes and discrimination.

Language changes often and depends on the person! Being authentically curious and taking time to get to know your colleagues is a great way to become a more inclusive union member. As folks get more comfortable with each other, it will be easier to share parts of ourselves and care enough to hold each other accountable. If you mess up and someone shares that with you, focus less on your intention and more on the impact your language has caused, and then actively practice adjusting your vocabulary.

Sam DeMuro is a CSO member and Human Rights Consultant for CTA. Do you have anything you would add or change from this list? Thoughts to share? Email srdemuro@gmail.com

Building Local Power Together

CSO and CTA members fight for safety

When Lynwood was declared the epicenter of a Los Angeles County COVID wave in the summer of 2020, it was clear the Lynwood Teachers Association (LTA) was ready to confront the challenge and keep students and educators safe, despite the school district. And if you ask its leaders today, they will tell you that plenty of work went into reinvigorating their union, re-engaging their members, and building a union that inspired credibility, trust and could also exert power.

This work led LTA to become the union that so effectively protected its members and students from runaway COVID cases and kept the worst hybrid teaching ideas (like “Telepresence” robots) out of their classrooms. Not only did they resist pedagogically flawed practices like students “zooming” into a live class, but they ensured students and staff remained remote for the entirety of the 2020-21 academic year, total screen time for synchronous learning was limited to age-appropriate levels, and all district benchmark exams were suspended during the quarantine. LTA led with safety first for members, and compassion for students and community, as many faced COVID illness and deaths.

Now, largely on the other side of the worst of this crisis, LTA leaders reflect on the work they did to keep their community safe and how indispensable the support of CSO staff was, not only during this crisis, but also in building LTA into a union that could take on these challenges and win. Debbie Diaz, president during the pandemic and the leader that built the LTA of today, credits CSO member Tom Pinkava for being “an incredible mentor and guide. He was key in helping to resolve the endless, deeply entrenched inequities in the district. His deep knowledge of labor practices and policies, coupled with a quiet and respectful demeanor, slowly won over our divided, rebellious, and somewhat traumatized membership.”



Pinkava’s work and support for LTA not only organized their chapter to be member facing and member oriented but supported its leaders to build their capacity to do the work for themselves. Debbie remembers that “Tom introduced and encouraged regular site visits and together we held scheduled meetings at each of our 20-plus sites. On many days we’d schedule a before-school site meeting, a lunch meeting, and an after-school meeting. These visits were critical in gaining member trust and engagement.”

The work of CSO and CTA members helped build an LTA that is responsive to members and wins results, whether it was “bringing the number of teachers on administrative leave down from the high twenties to less than five” as Debbie recalls, to the incredible strength and protections their COVID MOUs won for the students and teachers of Lynwood. LTA’s current President Glenda Arellano also relays how indispensable CSO staff have been in their everyday work as local leaders; “I know I have someone I can count on to provide daily support and guidance, whether it’s with member concerns, organizing, bargaining or the daily operations of our Local.” Today, the respect LTA garners from the district and their members is the indelible mark of CSO and CTA members building power together.

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Election 2022: CSO Members Run for School Board

CTA staff look to be voices for students, educators & public education

It takes a special combination of dedication and heart to run for elected office, and five CSO members are showing just that – running for seats on their local school boards this election, to help lead the fight for the resources for students and educators in our public schools.

Meet these five CTA staff rising to the call of public service for our students and schools:

Sean Ferguson

Regional UniServ Staff, Chico RRC

Running for: Shasta Union High School Board

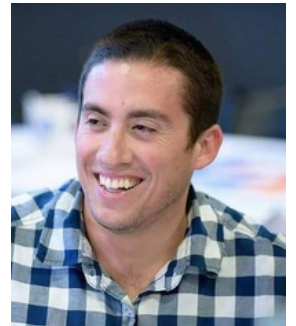


Why: As a former teacher and local union leader I think I'm uniquely qualified to do this job well.

Demetrio Gonzalez-Hoy

Regional Uniserv Staff, San Jose RRC

Running for: West Contra Costa Unified School Board



Why: Supporting educators is supporting our students and schools. We must give them the tools they need to be able to truly educate, support and nurture every student.

Brian Guerrero

Regional UniServ Staff, IPD

Running for: Culver City Unified School Board



Why: I hope to create spaces for educators, students and families to work with the district to solve problems and create schools that meet the needs of all students and staff members' needs

Kathy Rallings

Regional UniServ Staff, Murrieta RRC

Running for: Carlsbad Unified School Board



Why: Public education is under attack and this election is predicted to have low turnout. I encourage CTA members to lift each other up and help defend our schools.

Dr. Stacy Begin

**Regional Uniserv Staff,
San Diego RRC**

Running for: Oceanside Unified School Board

Stacy is the current president of the Oceanside School Board and is running unopposed for another four-year term. She formerly worked as a special education teacher.

