

Good afternoon sisters and brothers and guests to our 72nd convention. I want to thank you again for taking time from your busy lives to help guide this great organization. I am confident that by the time you leave on Sunday, you will be better informed, reinvigorated and better prepared to engage the struggle for quality public education and to represent the thousands of women and men who dedicate their lives to educating California's students.

I also know that those of us, who are honored to represent you, will also better understand your concerns and how we can *more* effectively lead the CFT.

Whether you are new to the CFT family or have been active for years, your leadership is essential as we guide this organization during the coming year. Not only are you engaged in the day-to-day task of educating and supporting young people; you are also involved in the labor movement. This at a time when union membership in this country is *barely* over 11% and education unions have become the scapegoat for the so-called crisis of public education. **I applaud you!**

Under your leadership, the CFT has been a beacon of progressive, social justice unionism. Whether it's the Prop 25 Majority Budget Act, the Millionaires Tax, Prop 30, the 300 mile march through the central valley to restore the promise of public education and fair tax policies, the fight to reform the community college accrediting commission, the Campaign for Quality Public Education or the countless local electoral and organizing victories, you have been willing to take risks and engage the struggle.

That's why we have consistently supported single payer health care reform and progressive tax reform measures. We are currently part of a coalition with many of our Millionaires Tax and Prop 30 partners working on an effort to amend Prop 13 in the 2016 election so that home owners *and* small business owners are protected against escalating property taxes while *large businesses* are properly assessed based on the fair market value of their property.

The CFT is committed to the vision articulated by the civil rights movement and efforts to ensure class, race and gender equity and the just demands for comprehensive immigration reform.

The CFT has also worked to advance our own affirmative action efforts. As California changes, the CFT must continue to actively encourage diversity at every level. Since January of 2011, the CFT has hired

or promoted 17 individuals; nearly half of who are people of color and nearly 75% are women. In the future, Eduardo Arismendi Pardi, chair of the CFT Ethnic Minority Leadership Committee will participate on interviews for all new hires.

Of course more needs to be done but diversity can't simply be promoted from the top. We must continue to work with local leaders and staff to support, train, and develop new diverse leadership in our locals, and then bring those leaders into statewide positions.

As we look at the world around us, we see many glaring needs and our natural instinct is to take up all the issues we confront like objects flying at us in a video game. But if we are to build upon our successes and meet the challenges ahead of us, we must be strategic in prioritizing how to make the greatest difference.

We must continue to have a more targeted legislative agenda rather than a long list of bills that, while important, dilute our resources and make us less effective.

The CFT, working with our locals and the AFT have made important gains for public education and we have had some success in exposing the forces behind the so-called education reform movement. Unfortunately those forces have not been deterred.

The super wealthy and their swollen circle of reactionary think tanks and echo chamber conservative media are committed to eradicating what remains of the labor movement and giving corporations unlimited power over every aspect of American life. They have used the world economic crisis and globalization to create a narrative about the inevitability of market reforms.

The egalitarian mission of public education that was given new life by the social movements a half century ago now stands as an obstacle to a corporate world committed to keeping wealth and education in the hands of a few. Across the country, the largest corporate interests use the media and the politicians they help elect to create a narrative that attacks hard earned pensions, worker rights—including the right to unionize—and the right to vote.

We understand that central to the mission of public education is the need to **advocate** for a different kind of society, one that isn't driven by how much money you have, where you live or the color of your skin.

It has been said many times that public education is the great equalizer, the cornerstone of democracy. While we don't want to romanticize the past, many of us benefited from a public education system that made it possible for working and middle class families to send their children to college, become educators and achieve more than our parents.

The fight to keep City College of San Francisco open and accredited **is** part of that larger narrative that sees public higher education as an affordable opportunity for all Californians: students, workers, veterans and seniors to further their education and enjoy more productive and meaningful lives. This was laid out clearly more than 50 years ago in the California Master Plan for Education, but has fallen victim to budget cuts and efforts to implement market reforms.

In California's higher education system, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges apparently sees itself as a marine drill instructor, willing to use fear and intimidation to create compliant community colleges. This rogue agency has sanctioned far more of California's 112 community colleges and at a rate far beyond what other accrediting agencies have done around the country.

According to the US Department of Education, The ACCJC violated 15 accrediting standards including conflicts of interest, unrepresentative site visiting teams, including the lack of classified staff and faculty, and unclear recommendations issued to City College.

This is an agency that shreds documents, insists on the subservience of locally *elected* community college board of trustee members and has, up until now, operated as though no individual or organization has the right to expose their actions to public scrutiny.

Their reckless behavior has forced community colleges to spend significant time and money scrambling to achieve accreditation, money that would be better spent creating more course offerings or improving vital school services. The decision to pull City College's accreditation, which was due to take affect in July of this year, caused a decline in enrollment and has punished the entire Bay area community.

Unfortunately, the community college chancellor, someone for whom we had high expectations, has failed to stand up to the ACCJC and in fact has consistently admonished AFT 2121 and the CFT for opposing the destructive behavior of the accrediting agency. The community college board of governors is

also complicit because they unilaterally removed City College's democratically elected Board of Trustees and installed their own unelected trustee to oversee the college, whose actions, likewise opaque and unaccountable, have been disastrous.

But our efforts to educate the public and build grass roots opposition to the behavior of the commission have dramatically changed the situation from a year ago. Our on going organizing, as well as our work in the media, have isolated the commission and raised questions about their behavior.

Because of our efforts, we now have congress members Pelosi, Speier and Eshoo joining the growing chorus of California legislators, Tom Ammiano, Rob Bonta, Paul Fong, Jim Beall, Mark Leno and Jim Nielsen among them, calling for reform of the commission.

The San Francisco Central Labor Council has also consistently stood by our members and City College, as well as Supervisor Campos and City Attorney Herrera.

We have also been working with the City of San Francisco on complementary lawsuits to invalidate the accrediting decision by the commission. The Superior Court has granted the City's request for a temporary injunction, keeping the college open until the court makes a final decision.

While the tide has turned, we must not get complacent. The decision by the ACCJC has not been rescinded and that agency continues to operate in an irresponsible manner.

However, the commitment to fight the ACCJC's destructive behavior on the part of the CFT, AFT Local 2121, the on-going and invaluable assistance of the AFT, the work of Marty Hittelman, attorney Bob Bezemek, the CFT staff and consultant Glen Rosselli and the courageous, untiring leadership of Local 2121 President Alisa Messer have helped to turn this around.

I also want to recognizing our Compton College sisters and brothers who saw their college lose its accreditation eight years ago and still have not had it restored. Could our Compton members please stand up and be recognized for your valiant efforts. It is time to restore accreditation to your college and return it to the community. It has been far too long!

The attack on our community colleges and higher education is just an extension of what we have seen in EC/K-12 with the goal of either imposing market reforms or privatization.

The constant refrain criticizing government programs and public sector workers also serves to create deep cynicism about the role of government and to cast public sector workers as privileged which in turn serves to create a race to the bottom scenario for salaries and benefits.

The latest attack on public education has been the Vergara lawsuit, backed by billionaires David Welch and Eli Broad and the corporate-friendly law firm of Gibson Dunn and Crutcher.

The attack on the rights of educators serves to shift the narrative away from the more systemic factors that influence learning and shape academic success. The constant drumbeat about bad teachers and the evil education unions have pushed to the background issues of funding, economic inequality and cuts to social services.

The Vergara lawsuit claims that tenure, or more accurately the right to due process, shields poor teachers at the expense of better, less senior faculty. It also contends that due process rights are cumbersome and make it difficult to dismiss poor teachers.

Of course, we know there are struggling teachers in our schools and we need more rigorous training, mentoring and apprenticeship programs for beginning teachers. We also need better-trained administrators who can work collaboratively with teachers and expanded peer assistance and review programs. As educators and parents, we want outstanding teachers in our schools and if there are adults who should not work with young people, they should be counseled into other work.

But let's be clear about this: eliminating the rights of educators won't help deal with inequality in our schools and will only make learning and teaching conditions worse.

We know that a quality public education for all students depends on funding schools properly and that's why we worked so hard to pass Proposition 30.

We did that while one of the backers of the Vergara lawsuit, Eli Broad, put money into a failed secret Arizona PAC effort that pumped millions of dollars into California in the run-up to the 2012 election to try and defeat Prop 30 and try to pass prop 32, the anti-union initiative.

How Eli Broad has any standing at all to offer opinions about education issues when he spent millions to try to destabilize our state's education system is outrageous! It would be like asking New Jersey Governor Chris Christie to lead a seminar on traffic control or government ethics.

While the Vergara backers want to get rid of seniority, we know it is an objective criterion that helps shield educators from favoritism and arbitrary decisions by administrators. Due process also means that administrators or districts can't arbitrarily decide that Ms. Barnes makes too much money and should be replaced with a less costly beginning teacher. Or that because Ms. Sanchez is a union activist and the district wants her out of their hair they can do just that; or that because Mr. Freitas continues to teach evolutionary biology and climate change in his classroom even though the new school board opposes these ideas, he can be dismissed.

The CFT is working closely with the AFT to counter the well-financed efforts of the Vergara backers, and to educate the public about the real issues behind this lawsuit and the importance teacher protections play in allowing us to advocate for students, even in the face of administrative and political opposition. What does it mean not to have rights as an educator?

A few years back, a first year teacher lost her job in a Los Angeles high school when she used the Autobiography of Malcolm X in her classroom because the school site administrator considered it inappropriate.

On the other hand, when the late Sal Castro advocated for relevant ethnic studies for Chicano and Latino students in the 1960s even in the face of administrative and district opposition, he could do so because he had the right, called "tenure," to a hearing before dismissal.

When Casey Carlson openly defied a directive from an administrator *and* the assistant superintendent in Santa Cruz who directed her to violate the law in evaluating a special needs child, she was able to advocate for that child and uphold the law because she knew and exercised her rights. If she had been a first

year teacher she would have been forced into the untenable position of either advocating for her student or keeping her job. No educator should be put in that position.

At 28th street elementary school in central LA, teachers joined with parents and community activists to close down a metal plating plant that was spewing toxins in the air. Veteran teachers, who had rights, were able to openly advocate with parents and the community to eventually close that plant.

I am certain there are thousands of other examples of our members standing up in the face of intimidation to defend the rights of children, parents and their communities. We need those stories – your stories!

The hard cold reality though is that the Vergara suit underscores our challenge: to convincingly tell our story and build deep relationships with parents and community partners in the face of well funded effort by the opponents of public education to lie and twist reality and erode our influence.

That has begun to change in California and nationally. The AFT's Reclaim the Promise initiative is one of the most important developments in years and locals in Chicago, Philadelphia and St. Paul have led that effort. The AFT's work to develop relationships with families and community based organizations and actively enlist their resistance to school closings, budget cuts and test centric curriculum has the potential for building a powerful grass roots labor–community alliance around progressive education reform that can be a national force to stand against the corporate privatizers.

Last October, the AFT's Human and Civil Rights conference brought educators and community partners together from around the country which led to the adoption of the Principles That Unite Us, a clear set of progressive ideals. That in turn led to a national mobilization in December with more than one hundred actions across the country including key actions in California.

Community college students in Southern California joined one of our partners, ACCE, to highlight the property tax disparity of one of the largest commercial property developers. That action so embarrassed the Westfield Corporation that they agreed to pay millions in additional property taxes.

In San Francisco, hundreds of union members, tenant activists, social service providers and students held a candlelight vigil to shine a light on San Francisco's Tale of Two Cities of ultra wealth and extreme poverty.

The AFT is now looking to build on that action with a national mobilization in the month of May. We want to use that as an opportunity to highlight our issues, including the exorbitant cost of higher education and to reach into communities to tell the truth about Vergara and why the rights of educators don't hurt public education but give us the ability to advocate for our students and public education.

You know as well as I do, though, that this wave of union bashing can be demoralizing. That's why it is so important to reflect on the successes **we have had** over the last year.

I have already mentioned our work with City College of San Francisco to reform the ACCJC. At a time when the labor movement has been shrinking, unrepresented educators in California see the CFT as a progressive, fierce defender of their rights and they want to be part of our family.

During the last year, we have brought in new members to either join existing locals or start locals of their own. These locals will be recognized later but I also want to acknowledge them and have these new members please stand up:

There is also growing interest among a number of independent community colleges about affiliating with the CFT and I am confident we will soon be bringing them into our family.

Over the last year, the CFT has also been part of the Refund California coalition led by ACCE to expose unfair lending practices by banks and we are now exploring an oil severance tax to generate additional revenue.

The CFT also participates in a coalition led by California Calls, a key partner in the 2012 election, to build a campaign for fair property tax reform and make corporations and large commercial owners pay their fair share.

Our work using the Strategic Campaign Initiative template to provide grants to locals to do organizing has been a great success and is a model for the AFT and has influenced the California State Labor Fed.

The SCI model allows us to identify and support promising local organizing efforts and then work with our political, legislative and organizing teams to develop campaigns to activate members, initiate new organizing projects and deepen ties with community partners.

We are now concentrating our efforts on the campaign for quality public education and there have been a number of impressive efforts.

In Daly City, the Jefferson Elementary Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 3267 led by Melinda Dart, began hosting parent workshops in the evenings at their schools. These consisted of topics important to parents, like "Homework without Tears". I think I need to take that workshop!

Using the Strategic Campaign Organizing Grant they received from the CFT, and partnering with the PTA and school site principals, the workshops expanded to all 15 schools in the district.

The local not only won a good contract with parent and community support, teachers have demanded the restoration of programs and services that had been cut. Two weekends ago a conference on the new Common Core standards was attended by hundreds of teachers, parents, children and community activists!

The Morgan Hill Federation of Teachers, Local 2022 led by Theresa Sage, has also been working with parents for months to keep schools in-district and successfully stopped a corporate charter operator from gaining a foothold in the district.

These are only a couple of the many examples of our locals building alliances with parents and community partners to move an education agenda dramatically different from the reform agenda promoted by the Rhees, Welches, Waltons and Broads of the world.

This work underscores the need to build the quality public education campaign that you adopted at last year's convention. These examples point to the kind of vision that we can collectively develop and implement with our parent and community allies. The schools our students and our members deserve. A quality education has to be about nurturing the whole child, not a number on a chart. Yet public schools continue to disregard the well-being of children as if the health of our students is disconnected to their success in schools.

We know that healthy children are also more likely to be successful in their studies. That's why the CFT is launching a campaign called **Healthy Kids, Healthy Minds**.

We are working with Assembly member Dr. Richard Pan, on AB 1955 that will couple federal and state dollars to put a nurse and mental health professional in every school and make sure that libraries are open before and after school.

Frankly it's a shame that we have come to this situation. A nurse in every school used to be the norm; but we know that it is no longer the case in many schools—except of course in schools for our most affluent families or in public schools where parents have the money to raise additional dollars to pay for these services.

If families in the affluent parts of town have this for their kids then every child should have this—it should be a right.

The numbers are staggering: while California is the 8th largest economy on the planet with the most vibrant economy in the country, we continue to treat our children like they are living in the poorest state in the nation.

Students lose more days to asthma related illnesses than anything else with approximately 2 million total lost school days. We rank 45th in the nation, with one nurse for every 2800 kids. Shameful!

Approximately a quarter million students need eye glasses but don't get screened at school so they are unable to do their work and are often labeled underachievers and uncooperative.

Two years ago, we fought with the legislature over the diastat bill because we argued, unsuccessfully,

that medically trained adults should be administering these and other drugs. I know from my own experience as a parent of a daughter with a severe peanut allergy who carries an epi pen what it means not to have a trained medical professional on campus. At my daughter's elementary school, the nurse was there one day every two weeks.

We also know about the problem of bullying on our campuses and an epidemic of teenage suicides.

Having a mental health professional available on our campuses will not magically solve these problems, but could be key in helping young people work through serious issues and getting additional help.

In the last couple of years, a movement of parents and community organizations has been growing to demand restorative justice in our schools—that is, finding alternatives to suspensions and expulsions. Kicking children out of school is not a solution and this has become a serious issue for African American and Latino communities who see this as part of the larger school to prison pipeline.

I believe that we need to begin a difficult but needed dialogue in our schools with our members, students and parents about alternatives to expulsion that don't trivialize or condone disruptive or bad behavior but offers a whole-school approach for young people to reflect on their behavior and encourages them to act more responsibly.

But we also know that in overcrowded classrooms with often no place to turn for help, sending disruptive kids to the dean's office may seem to be the only alternative. My own experience as a teacher at Manual Arts High School, in a working class community of Los Angeles, gave me a sense of what schools with resources can accomplish.

Because Manual received various grants, something most schools don't have, we had three full time mental health professionals on campus, a school psychologist and two psychiatric social workers. When I had a student who was in need of help, I could send that student to a professional who could help that young person. I didn't have to send him to the dean as punishment. Most schools don't have these essential professionals.

And finally open school libraries have become as rare as a congressional republican with something good to say about the affordable care act. It is both unfortunate and scandalous that in this era of making test scores the be all and end all of education, many schools have no place where kids can go to study.

The numbers are dramatic. California ranks 51st in the nation with one librarian for every 8,100 kids. Libraries, which provide a safe and secure place for students, are no longer open.

Our community partners—ACCE, California Calls, Courage Campaign, Mobilize the Immigrant Vote, PICO, Public Advocates and others--are excited by this campaign and I believe we can build a powerful statewide grass roots coalition that can help push this legislation.

This legislative effort can be a template for our broader quality education campaign by giving us a project to organize around **now** while we continue to build relationships with parents and community members and broaden our vision of a quality education.

Many of you here today also face other serious challenges. Our early childhood members are not treated with the respect they deserve and face the loss of jobs due in part to cuts at the federal level. Our classified sisters and brothers are often the first to be laid off and then struggle to be included in the decision making process at their workplace.

Our substitute teachers and adjunct faculty members continue to fight for pay equity and many are forced to drive from district to district to make a living. And our adult education members are now fighting to be included in the consortia that will determine how adult education programs are coordinated between K-12 and community college districts.

Further, we know that the billionaires and anti-union forces are not going to give up on their effort to make public education a commodity—there is too much money involved for them to walk away. They can and will continue to outspend us and they will run destructive initiatives, peddle their influence with elected officials and try and tie us up in court. They will also continue to block progressive tax policies that can fund education and social services properly.

But we can win these battles by doing what we do best, by organizing. First we must organize our members by holding regular meetings at the worksite, and getting them actively involved in the local and in campaigns. The foundation of our power is at the workplace.

Our work on elections, contract campaigns, organizing against the ACCJC and Vergara, advocating for Healthy Kids, Healthy Minds, and all of this under the banner of our Campaign for Quality Public Education can all be opportunities for engaging and activating our members.

We also have a power that **they can't touch**. We are in every neighborhood, in every city, in every county, and in every region of the state. We are early childhood and K-12 teachers, classified employees, community college instructors, adult educators, and UC lecturers and librarians. To paraphrase Ma Joad in the Grapes of Wrath, **we are the people** who make public education work.

But getting our own members organized won't be enough. We must reach out to our students, their parents and our community members and organizations. It is this **organic** connection to our communities that, if we are organized, makes us the most powerful force anywhere.

Many of you are already doing just that and we are seeing **inspiring** examples of that kind of work. School site and town hall meetings with hundreds and hundreds of people. Coalition work with labor, with parents, with immigrant rights organizations, with all the elements of a progressive community. We must now learn from one another and do this more systematically, and then deepen and broaden our work.

This will take time and patience because the relationships we want to build cannot be rushed overnight. But we are learning and gaining valuable lessons.

Sisters and brothers, we don't have a choice. In state after state, anti-union forces have turned back the clock one hundred years and we know that relying on politicians or the courts is a fool's errand. It is only our power—our power because we are organized—that stands between public education and the forces that would privatize and destroy it.

We **can fight back** and we **must** fight back. The future of our members, our students, our families depend on our winning.

I ask you, can we win this?

Will we win this?

Thank you.