

LaborFamilyNEWS

PARTNERING WITH UNIONS TO PUT FAMILIES *first*

WINTER 2012

In this issue:



- **Unions Fight School Closures**
- **Obama Extends Minimum Wage to Homecare Workers**

UNIONS WIN IT!

PSC-CUNY Renews Paid Parental Leave

At a time when bargaining for new benefits may be hard, some unions are taking the lead to work with management and guarantee continuation of existing family-friendly programs. In December 2011, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC) that represents staff and faculty at the City University of New York (CUNY) signed a letter of agreement with CUNY management to ensure ongoing funding for a union-negotiated paid parental leave benefit that was going to run out.

In its 2007-2010 collective bargaining agreement with CUNY, PSC won paid parental leave for its members for the very first time. The new benefit was created with a fixed amount of cash and was originally slated to end when that money ran out. The new letter of agreement

MORE ON 2

CARING IN THE NEW ECONOMY

Harder Times Ahead for Family Caregivers

BY JENYA CASSIDY

Eventually most US families will be involved in some form of caregiving. According to *US News and World Report* the senior population is growing faster than any other group. By 2030, 1 in 5 Americans will be at least 65 years old. We are moving into uncharted territory where people live longer, caregiving needs are growing and many elders have no retirement funds let alone long term care plans. The increased need for caregiving combined with the changed economy means that more full- and part-time workers are also caregivers.

Dr. Donna Benton says as baby boomers become caregivers, they are often shocked at the costs. “They need respite services and most are not aware that Medicare does not pay for long term care and programs like Adult Day Care are under threat of being cut. The average person can’t pay \$10 - \$20 an hour out of pocket but the services just aren’t there for them.”

FINANCIAL IMPACT OF CAREGIVING

Caregiving has a negative impact on a family’s finances when the caregiver has to take unpaid time off work, go part-time or stop working altogether. In the US, only California and New Jersey have paid family leave laws for working caregivers. Workers who pay into Temporary Disability Insurance can take paid leave to care for a spouse, child or parent. But paid family leave doesn’t cover all family members. Trish Hughes Kreis cares for her brother who has a severe seizure disorder. She is an office manager for a law firm in Sacramento, California and would like to see paid leave extended to siblings and other family caregivers. “In our family, I am the primary caregiver. I’m sure I’m not alone – sometimes a brother or sister are the only ones who can be caregivers.”

According to a recent study, the economic downturn is forcing caregivers and care recipients to move in

stories we never heard before,” she said. “Caregivers are questioning their ability to continue providing care for a family member. For a while it’s been family members moving in together to cut costs. Lately, we hear from more people who lost their jobs and are facing homelessness.”

THE FUTURE

Working caregivers need flexibility on the job. And all caregivers need respite, money and a way to connect to others for information and support. Organizations like Caregiver Resource Centers provide key information and resources to caregivers who are overwhelmed with new responsibilities. Adult Day Care centers provide crucial respite and help caregivers and recipients feel less isolated. Yet, in many states these services are being cut. As a country, we will have to do better to support family caregivers. *For more information about family caregiving, go to the Family Caregiver Alliance website: www.caregiver.org.*

together to cut down on costs. Trish Hughes Kreis agrees that caregiving and the economy are changing family dynamics. “The empty nest didn’t happen for me,” she said explaining that with her kids out of the house, she and her husband are remodeling in order to have her brother move in. “We’re lucky we have the space and can do this,” she said.

For low income families, the need for caregiving can have a disastrous economic effect. Dr. Donna Benton, Director of the Los Angeles Caregiver Resource Center has seen huge changes in the last 5 years. “We are hearing



Seniors speak out against the closing of San Francisco’s Adult Day Health Care Centers. Adult day care provides needed respite to family caregivers.

UNIONS WIN IT!

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now makes paid parental leave a regular part of the contractual benefit package; a member of the bargaining unit is now eligible to take parental leave after one year of service. The PSC and CUNY will work out funding for the on-going benefit in the context of the next collective bargaining agreement.

PSC members can take eight consecutive weeks of paid time off immediately after the birth or adoption of a new child. For a child's birth mother, the period of paid leave begins immediately after the end of any approved temporary disability leave related to childbirth. Paid parental leave can also be prior to birth, if medically necessary, or prior to the estimated date of an adoption, if needed to fulfill an adoption's legal requirements, such as foreign travel.

For more information, go to the union's website:
www.psc-cuny.org



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INSIDE STORY

SAVE OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Unions fight to end school closures

BY VIBHUTI MEHRA

An endless recession and a partisan and pro-corporate political leadership are taking a heavy toll on the future of America's children. Nine in every 10 students in grades kindergarten through 12 (K-12) in the United States attend a public school. Yet, an epidemic of closures is plaguing public schools across the country, and it shows no sign of abatement. The rate of public school closures doubled in 2011 and is only expected to increase in 2012. School district administrators are throwing up their hands citing declining revenue and enrollment rates. Meanwhile, city leaders in places like New York and Chicago are aggressively pushing an anti-union, privatized education agenda under the pretext of closing underperforming schools en masse.

A FLAWED APPROACH

A December 2011 report from the Center on Education Policy documenting the "failure" of public schools has not helped. According to the report, nearly half of America's public schools didn't meet federal achievement standards as laid out by the decade-old and highly criticized "No Child Left Behind" law. "No Child Left Behind" requires states to have every student performing at grade level in math and reading by 2014 – a performance judged by standardized tests that do not take into account racial, ethnic, and socio-economic factors that impact the lives of the students who take the tests.

Christine Rowland, member of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and a teacher of English language learners at the Christopher Columbus High School in Bronx, New York remarks, "The whole approach is flawed. We are not putting the students first, we are putting data first – limited data that shows only a partial picture of a very complex reality of the student populations."

Michelle Harris, a middle school teacher from Chelsea, Alabama explains the problem with "No Child Left Behind": "In our school system, we are working feverishly to develop pacing guides to regulate what is taught every day. We are setting up our children and our teachers for failure. This law is being used as an excuse to not teach children from where they are; we are discouraged from meeting 'Johnny' on his second-grade level and bringing him forward. Let me show and document progress, and I will be happy to do so. But this law, with its dependency on standardized tests, doesn't accomplish what politicians tell you it does." (National Education Association (NEA) website)

WHEN SCHOOLS CLOSE

Whatever the reason may be, every public school closure has an impact on students, parents, teachers and the community it serves – the biggest impact being displacement. Yasmin Anwar, a parent fighting the closure of a neighborhood elementary school in Oakland, California said in a recent

Saving Our Schools: How Parents Can Get Involved

Organizations like Parents Across America are educating parents about issues in education reform like school testing, school closures, privatization and charter schools. They also provide a way for parents who are organizing against school closures and other negative policies to share information and work together. Go to parentsacrossamerica.org for updates and to find a chapter near you.

interview with CBS San Francisco: "It's like your house is being foreclosed on and you've got to find a new place to live; that's how this feels."

Neighborhoods predominantly inhabited by racial and ethnic minorities and low-income working families are witnessing a disproportionate number of public school closures. Moving to a different neighborhood or private education are hardly options for families that are struggling to pay the rent or purchase a week's groceries. Inner city public schools that largely serve black, Latino and immigrant student populations from indigent families are also more likely to be on the chopping block. For these students, a school closure may presage a lifetime of disenfranchisement and marginalization. In places like New York, high school students can travel up to 1.5 hours to get to a public school. They are often living with relatives or in a shelter and the public school may well be their only hope to a relatively stable future. Burdened with a history of academic challenges, many need that extra support to make the grade in math or reading.



Photo by Jenny D. Celander, Associate Editor of the Chicago Union Teacher – an official publication of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU).



NYC parents, teachers and students protest against Mayor Bloomberg's policy of mass school closures.

Photo courtesy of the United Federation of Teachers.

"Our ability to provide a world class education hinges on supporting the professionals that our children depend on and a carefully designed environment where people have access to learning. Good learning conditions are good teaching conditions. That's why unions have to be involved."

Jackson Potter, Chief of Staff, Chicago Teachers Union (CTU)

When schools close, these displaced students are often transferred from one low-performing school to another. A fortunate few may end up getting a diploma, a handful may get into college, and fewer may graduate from college. However, a large number of the students end up dropping out of education altogether either by choice or by circumstance.

Also displaced are the educators. No longer linked to a single school or a student population with whom they had diligently built a long-term relationship of trust and support, many teachers are left to serve as reserve/substitute staff at other schools. Some opt to retire, others wait for the next job-opening at another school even as they ward off relentless public attacks from city leaders who are only more than eager to replace unionized and highly-experienced but "costly" teachers with cheaper, non-unionized new teachers.

WHY UNIONS FIGHT BACK

While school district and city officials are touting education reform to justify the mass closures of public schools, labor unions are telling it like it is and fighting back. Unions are at the frontlines rallying with teachers, parents, students, and

advocacy groups to stop the seemingly endless closures of public schools in cities like Chicago and New York.

Christine Rowland's school is up for closure in June 2014. As a teacher and a union member, she sees a clear link between the health of public schools and the health of labor unions. "Both help build stronger communities and promote progress in the lives of community members. The attack on public schools can also be viewed as an attack on unions. It is an agenda for privatization," she says.

Jackson Potter, Chief of Staff at the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), sees school closures as a bait-and-switch tactic that blames the school system and educators while avoiding the root of the problem, including high levels of poverty and homelessness as well as the fact that neither the students nor the educators have been provided the necessary support that they need in order to succeed. "Our ability to provide a world class education hinges on supporting the professionals that our children depend on and a carefully designed environment where people have access to learning. Good learning conditions are good teaching conditions. That's why unions have to be involved."

GOODNEWS

■ **THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION RECENTLY EXTENDED WAGE AND HOUR PROTECTIONS** to home care workers via executive order. This move impacts over two million workers previously exempted from minimum wage and overtime provisions. Twenty-nine states did not offer any wage and hour protections to home care workers. And, although many states, including California, Illinois and Maryland, have rules guaranteeing home-care workers minimum wage, overtime, or both, they will also benefit from federal enforcement. *David Dayen, www.firedoglake.com December 15, 2011*

■ **DISABLED AMERICANS, FACING EVEN HIGHER HURDLES THAN OTHERS FINDING JOBS**, will get a boost under an Obama administration plan to set new hiring procedures for government contractors. In December 2011, the Labor Department proposed a rule that would require most companies with federal contracts to set goals of having disabled workers make up 7 percent of their workforce. Labor officials hailed the plan as an economic game-changer at a time when a staggering eight of 10 working-age Americans with disabilities are out of the workforce entirely. *LA Times December 8, 2011*

UNBELIEVABLE

■ **ALL EUROPEAN UNION MEMBERS** must provide workers with a minimum of 20 days vacation or paid time off, not counting public holidays. There is no such law in the U.S. Of the world's 33 most prosperous economies, the U.S. is the only one with no legally-required paid vacation or holidays for its workers. *The Monterey County Herald, December 23, 2011*

News from the Labor Project National Initiative



Photo by Hallie Easley

Labor Project staff joined advocates, business owners and union leaders to strategize about paid sick days at the Family Values @Work meeting in New York city.

It was a great year for paid sick days!

In January 2012, **Connecticut** becomes the first state with a paid sick days law in effect. **Seattle** also had a major victory in passing a city ordinance that established a minimum paid sick days standard for a large segment of Seattle's workers. In **Philadelphia**, after the Mayor vetoed a paid sick days ordinance, the city council successfully passed a Minimum Wage and Benefits Ordinance that requires most contractors operating in the city to provide their full-time employees a minimum amount of paid sick days each year.

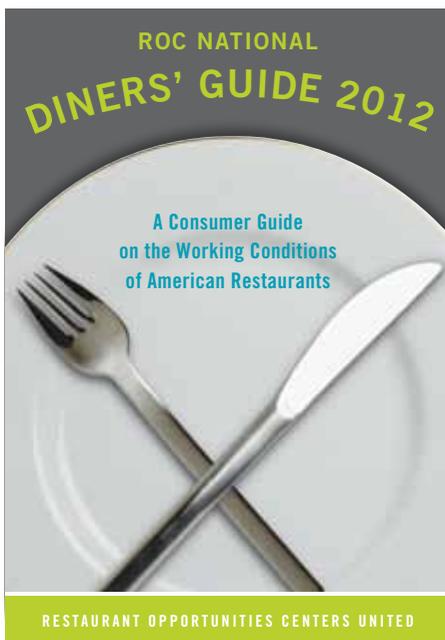
In 2010, the Labor Project launched a special National Initiative to expand the scope and reach of our work by instilling labor's voice and increasing labor's engagement in local, statewide and national efforts on work family policy-making.

For more information about the National Initiative, please contact Carol Joyner: carol@working-families.org



In this Issue:

The National Movement to Stop School Closures



Eat Ethically with the ROC National Diners' Guide 2012

We all enjoy eating out. Unfortunately, the workers who cook, prepare and serve our food suffer from poverty wages, no paid sick days and little or no chance to move up to better positions. The Restaurant Opportunities Centers (ROC) 2012 Diners' Guide provides information on wages, benefits and promotion practices of the 150 most popular restaurants in America. Download the Diners' Guide at www.rocunited.org

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NETSYNOTE

For 3 months this fall, I had a "practitioner's fellowship" at the Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor at Georgetown University to study the issue of providing paid family and medical leave to workers who need to take time off for bonding with a new child or to care for a seriously ill family member. My conclusion? This is unfinished business for the women's movement and workers' rights. Workers and their families pay a heavy price when they lose income for a new baby, their own temporary illness/disability or to become a family caregiver. It's about time to remedy this with a national insurance system.



Our neighbors in Canada have "employment insurance" for all workers – temporary income when you are sick, have a new baby or have to care for a seriously ill family member. In the U.S., we have the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) – unpaid, job protected leave for those who qualify. In the past, the U.S. has created social policies that provided financial assistance to citizens: pensions for Civil War veterans and their dependents, social security to seniors, disabled and survivors. And the GI bill of 1944 which provided disability services, employment benefits, education loans, family allowances and subsidized loans to 16 million vets. Some key elements of these programs were that they were universal – for everyone and not needs based; they rewarded work or service to the country; and they were supported by civic organizations. If we've done it before, we can do it again. We can't give up no matter how many setbacks we face.

As Frederick Douglas said: **"Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."**

Netty Freestier

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International Association of Machinists
*Los Angeles County Federation of Labor
*Newport-Mesa Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 1794
*Orange County Labor Federation
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SEIU Local 721
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Teamsters Local 70
Teamsters Local 237 Retirees Benefit Fund
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