



CFJ UPDATE

WINTER 2003

Californians for Justice Education Fund is statewide grassroots organization bringing people of color, young people, and poor people together by leading large-scale community education efforts, training a new generation of grassroots civil rights leaders, and mobilizing public support for major public policy change in California.

CFJ Student Leaders Innovate to Improve Schools

In the first year of CFJ's work in public education, student leaders exposed the inequalities in their schools. In this second year they have won innovative changes that are improving education.

Fair School Discipline Policies

Communities of color across California are growing more concerned about the harsh "zero tolerance" discipline policies in schools. These policies are literally putting students on a track to prison. Many schools have higher rates of suspensions and expulsions for African American and Latino students than for their peers.

In San Diego, CFJ student leaders have responded by creating a set of proposals to improve the fairness of discipline and reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions. The students' proposals include guaranteeing that students are informed of their rights, that the district provide diversity training for all teachers, and that the schools create a grievance process for students to report mistreatment.

After district superintendent Alan Bersin repeatedly ignored requests to discuss the problems, the students held a rally and press conference on Thursday, November 21, in front of the

school district offices. With coverage from Fox, ABC, CBS, and KUSI-TV, the students were successful in bringing their concerns to the public. The Superintendent committed to meet with them to improve the discipline policies!

Promoting College Access

The recent battles to preserve affirmative action have reminded us that access to higher education is an important civil rights issue. However, the problem runs deeper than many know. Many students graduate from high school only to discover that they didn't take the classes necessary to attend a four year university. In San Jose, CFJ leaders found that students never knew about

the classes required to apply to college—known as the A-G requirements.

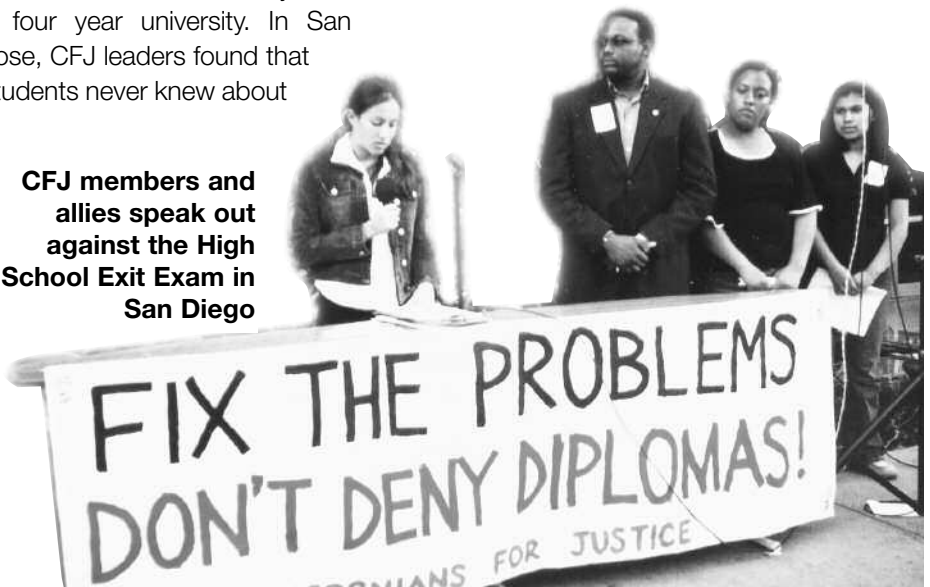
The student leaders presented plans for improving college access to Superintendent Joe Coto. The district responded by placing posters in every classroom that inform students about the A-G classes and about immigrant students' access to California universities. Students also called on the district to provide every student with their academic transcript, and the district agreed. The next step is to develop four-year plans for all students and provide more academic counselors.

Decent School Conditions

As highlighted by the current lawsuit against the state (Williams vs. The State

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CFJ members and allies speak out against the High School Exit Exam in San Diego



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Students and parents tell Gov. Davis: Don't Trash Our Futures!

On September 30, California released the results from the 2002 High School Exit Exam. The results showed a deeply divided school system. Students of color, poor students, immigrant students, and special education students are the most likely to receive a low quality education in California. It was no surprise to find that these same students failed the Exit Exam in overwhelming numbers.

Nevertheless, many state officials seemed

shocked by the results.

CFJ joined together with students, parents, educators and community supporters to tell Governor Davis and State Board of Education President Reed Hastings that their Exit Exam does nothing to fix the real problems in our schools. In San Diego, Los Angeles, San Jose, and San Francisco, CFJ led rallies and



Rosa De Leon is at the front of the protest in front of Hastings' offices in San Jose.

PROTEST BLASTS STATE EXIT TEST
 --San Jose Mercury News, October 9, 2002

Magda Castillo, a CFJ Leader from Long Beach, speaks at the Los Angeles press conference.



“Governor Davis is throwing away our future with his unfair High School Exit

Exam,” said Rosa De Leon, a student from Overfelt High School in San Jose. “He knows the state is not providing a quality education to all students, yet he is willing to deny us a diploma and future.”

press conferences calling on Davis and Hastings to stop denying diplomas to students and start fixing the real problems.

STATEWIDE RESULTS 2002 Exit Exam	Failed English	Failed Math
ALL STUDENTS STATEWIDE	46%	68%
African American	54%	80%
Asian	40%	46%
Filipino	30%	55%
Latino	58%	78%
Pacific Islander	45%	70%
Native American	47%	71%
white	26%	51%
English Learner	72%	82%
Low-Income	60%	78%
Special Education	75%	89%

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The media coverage of the Exit Exam results and protests was a big win for the movement for quality education in California. Newspaper, television and radio coverage throughout the state reported on the disparities between racial and economic groups and highlighted the low quality education that many students receive. Spokespersons from CFJ and ally organizations were quoted in numerous articles challenging the state to fix the real problems of educational inequality.

CFJ will be keeping the pressure on in 2003. One of the primary goals for next year is to pressure the State Board of Education to not deny diplomas to the Class of 2004. The Board must decide whether or not to postpone the punitive aspects of the Exit Exam by its August 1, 2003 meeting. CFJ has been collecting postcards addressed to Board President Reed Hastings, asking him to stop the Exit Exam and not punish students for the failures of the state. So far 2300 postcards have been sent to Hastings.

The goal of the campaign is not only to stop the Exit Exam, but also



San Francisco School Board member Eric Mar calls for an end to the Exit Exam.

to make real improvements to education. Next year we will look towards statewide efforts to improve teacher quality, improve access to college, and develop an Opportunity to Learn Index to monitor the conditions that students face in California schools.

Quotes

from State Policymakers:

"We don't want to eliminate this important tool, but we have to be reasonable. [It's not] going to be acceptable if half the kids don't pass."

—Marion Joseph, a member of the State Board of Education
(Los Angeles Times, October 1, 2002)

Reed Hastings, the state board president, said it is too early to decide whether to delay the exam's consequences. He acknowledged that the low pass rate was because "many children, particularly children of color, were not getting the education they deserved."

(San Francisco Chronicle, Oct. 1, 2002)

Exit Exam Media Coverage:

The dramatic results from the 2002 Exit Exam testing received extensive coverage throughout the state. CFJ and other members of the statewide alliance for quality education succeeded in focusing many of the news stories on the inequalities in California schools.

Articles that focused on the unfair conditions in schools:

- Associated Press
- San Francisco Chronicle
- Los Angeles Times
- San Diego Union Tribune
- Long Beach Press Telegram
- San Jose Mercury News
- Contra Costa Times
- The Fresno Bee
- The Modesto Bee

Op-Ed by Jeannie Oakes and John Rogers of UCLA's IDEA:

- "Diploma Penalty Misplaces Blame," Los Angeles Times, Sunday, October 6, 2002

News Coverage of the CFJ-led Protests and the Coalition:

- The Sacramento Bee
- Free Lance newspaper (Hollister)
- KGO-TV ABC (San Francisco)
- KRON-TV Ch. 4 (San Francisco)
- KNTV-TV Ch. 11 NBC (San Jose)
- Telemundo Ch.48 (San Jose)
- Univision Ch.14 (San Jose)
- KGO-TV Ch.7 ABC (San Jose)
- San Jose Mercury News
- KTLA-TV Ch.5 WB (Los Angeles)
- KFWB AM980 (Los Angeles)
- XETV-TV Ch.6 FOX (San Diego)
- KPBS FM89.5 (San Diego)
- Univision TV (San Diego)
- San Diego Union Tribune
- San Bernardino Sun

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Innovative Solutions

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of California), too many students attend schools with unacceptable conditions. In low-income communities of color throughout California many students face rats and roaches, crumbling buildings, a lack of textbooks and few quality teachers.

In Long Beach, one of the primary concerns for students has been the dismal condition of the bathrooms in their schools. Many of the bathrooms are broken or so poorly maintained that they can not be used. Students are too often left with no bathrooms to use, leading the Long Beach Medical Association to express concern about the danger of urinary tract infections in students who were waiting until after school to relieve themselves.

CFJ leaders in Long Beach met with principals, the health department, and the district superintendent to try to get improvements. Finally, after a press conference with television coverage

throughout Los Angeles and a presentation to the school board, the district addressed the problem by hiring 20 new janitors. CFJ students continue to monitor the situation to ensure that the bathrooms have improved.

Recognition and Respect for Bilingual Students

Immigrant students face numerous challenges in the current "English Only" school climate. For most, there is little support for transition to English and they are also often required to take assessment tests in English whether or not they have acquired fluency in the language. Jaime Castro, a CFJ member, reported one of his teachers told him, "If you want to speak Spanish, go back to Mexico."

Given such a discriminatory situation, students in San Jose felt that providing positive recognition of bilingual skills would send a strong message: that our schools and our community value our languages and cultures.

CFJ leaders in San Jose are working together with the district and our ally organization California Tomorrow to develop a plan to certify students as bilingual. The certification would give students official recognition of their language skills and could help them in applying to college or for a job. The next step is to ensure that *all students* have the opportunity to develop their abilities in more than one language.

CFJ Opens New Office in the Central Valley!

CFJ is very excited to announce the opening of our new office in Fresno, which is strategically located across the street from Fresno High School.

Here's the contact info for the new CFJ office in Fresno:

1922 North Echo Avenue

Fresno, CA 93704

(559) 443-1394 phone and fax