



CFJ UPDATE

DECEMBER 2004

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.

One Step Toward Better Schools

Williams lawsuit settlement provides limited school improvements

After more than four years of struggle by legal and grassroots organizations, including CFJ, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger agreed that all students in California schools deserve the basic resources for a quality education. On August 13, 2004, the governor settled *Williams v. State of California*, admitting that the state has failed to

provide all students with an equal opportunity to learn.

Filed on the anniversary of the historic 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling, the class action lawsuit charged that the state has failed to provide thousands of public school students—particularly those in low income communities of color—with the

basic resources necessary for an education. Evidence presented in support of the case showed that many schools lacked textbooks and materials, had fewer qualified teachers, and had facilities that ranged from unhealthy to hazardous.

Students and parents from around the state, including CFJ members, testified about appalling school conditions: locked or filthy bathrooms, rodent and cockroach infestations, cramped classes without enough desks for every student, high percentages of teachers without credentials, long term substitute teachers, and not enough textbooks and other instructional materials. The evidence showed that the state is not providing an equal education to all students. Students of color, immigrants, and low income students receive a lower quality education than their peers in more affluent communities.

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CFJ members in the halls of the State Capitol wait to meet with legislators to demand support for a settlement of the *Williams* lawsuit.

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Williams Settlement

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What the settlement means for our schools

The following bills were passed by the legislature and signed into law by the governor to begin implementation of the settlement.

SB6—Facilities repairs. Provides up to \$800 million, beginning with the 2005-06 fiscal year, for school districts to address emergency facility repair projects. But money may only be used to repair schools that fall in the lowest 3 deciles of the Academic Performance Index (API). Also provides \$25 million to assess the condition of schools facilities in poorest performing schools in the state.

SB550 and AB2727—Resources and monitoring system. Establishes minimum requirements for

school facilities, teacher quality, and instructional materials. Creates an accountability structure to assure that those minimums are met. By January 1, 2005 there must be posters in every classroom that inform students of their rights to clean and safe school facilities, and sufficient textbooks and materials for use in class and to take home for homework.

Provides \$138 million to purchase additional instructional materials. But these funds are limited to schools that fall in the bottom 2 deciles of the API Index.

Also establishes a uniform complaint process in every district. (See sidebar on the next page.)

AB1550—School overcrowding. Eliminates the “Concept 6” school calendar by the year 2012. These year-round schools were intended to relieve school overcrowding, but they shortchanged students, as

Concept 6 schools provide 17 fewer days of instruction compared to schools on a traditional calendar.

AB3001—Quality teachers.

Recommits the state to meeting the federal No Child Left Behind guidelines regarding high quality teachers. Ensures the placement of qualified teachers in low performing schools and improves existing oversight to ensure that teachers are qualified for the subject matter they are teaching.

These new laws will give us the chance to make concrete improvements to some schools. However, students and parents need to stay involved in the process. CFJ plans to do just that. Contact us to help monitor the implementation of the Williams settlement and to help ensure that all California children receive a quality education.



Fighting for quality education in 2004:

Students and parents made their voices heard in 2004. In April, for the “Take Down Sactown” event, we went to the state capitol to call for a settlement of the *Williams* lawsuit and to stop the governor from cutting college

access funding. On May 17 we marked the 50th anniversary of the *Brown v Board of Education* decision with mock trials in five cities, which highlighted ongoing school inequalities. Actions in late July and early August continued to pressure the governor to settle *Williams* and to support the Opportunity to Teach and Learn Index.

Top Left: Kevin Brown of Youth Together speaks out at the mock trial at Richmond High School on May 17.

Left: Campaign for Quality Education members in San Jose call on Governor Schwarzenegger to settle the *Williams* lawsuit.



Photos by Scott Braley

The complaint process:

A new tool to hold schools accountable

Not enough desks for everyone in your classroom? Rats and roaches in your school? Textbooks outdated and damaged beyond use? Well, don't just gripe to your friends. You now have the legal right to complain to your school administrators and they are *required* to respond within 30 days!

One of the outcomes of the Williams settlement is a concrete complaint process that will allow students and parents to request correction of dangerous or substandard school conditions. Complaints filed with school administrators

must be addressed—or forwarded to the district—within 10 days. Forwarded complaints must be resolved within 30 days.

The complaint process can be used to address issues such as shortage of textbooks or textbooks in unusable condition, teacher vacancies (long-term substitute teachers), misassigned teachers (teachers without credentials to teach the subject they are assigned to teach), and physical conditions (heating and cooling, pest or vermin infestation, and safety risks).

A notice will be posted in every

school in the state, summarizing the basic school conditions that all students are entitled to, and explaining how to file a complaint. The person filing the complaint may do so anonymously or may request a direct response from the school authorities. Best of all, the entire process becomes a public record, enabling community groups to track complaints and their resolution.

The complaint process provides us with one method to hold the state accountable for providing quality education to all students. It doesn't mean we can stop organizing and agitating for improvements. But, it is a new tool to help us reach our goals.



Left: Marisol Melendrez speaks out at the 50th anniversary of the historic Brown v. Board of Education decision.



Right: Ilce Meza from Long Beach takes time to snap a picture with the security guard while waiting to speak to the governor in the state capitol.



Below Left: Danna Guzman responds to the Williams settlement at a press conference in Long Beach.



Below Right: Members of Parents for Unity pose in front of the state capitol at the April "Take Down Sactown" event.

A Big Transition

After nine years with us, Executive Director Abdi Soltani left CFJ in July to become Director of the Campaign for College Opportunity, a new statewide effort to ensure college opportunity in the face of growing demand and diminishing state budgets.

Abdi came to CFJ in 1996 and worked with us as an organizer in both San Jose and Oakland, as Statewide Organizing Director, and Interim Co-Director, before becoming Executive Director. He served as Executive Director for four years, overseeing a period of tremendous growth. CFJ opened three new offices, increased its budget from \$300,000 to \$1 million, and more than doubled its staff.

We will miss Abdi's commitment to social justice, his creative and strategic thinking, and his thoughtful and caring staff management. We are happy to say that he has not gone far away. As Director of the Campaign for College Opportunity Abdi will continue to be involved with CFJ as an ally, supporter, and a member.

CFJ has tackled this transition period with our usual energy and focus. Yvonne Paul and Ed Lee are serving as interim co-directors and the staff is working together with the board of directors in the search for a new Executive Director. We are currently well into the process of interviewing candidates and will hire a new Director soon.

Save the Date!

Statewide Education
Summit
March 12, 2005



Location: UCLA Campus

Tim Sampson Fellowship

In 2003, Californians for Justice created the annual Tim Sampson Fellowship, to honor Tim Sampson's work and his memory. A founding member and long-time supporter of Californians for Justice (CFJ), Tim was deeply involved in many of the important progressive movements of his time, including farm worker struggles, welfare rights, racial justice, utility regulation, workers' rights, and environmental and social justice.

The legacy of Tim Sampson is one that will influence generations to come. For many of us the mention of his name brings back memories of working alongside Tim: the warmth of his heart and his commitment to labor

and social justice issues. He was an amazing man—a professor, an activist, an organizer, and a leader in a career that spanned 45 years.

The Tim Sampson Fellowship will serve to:

- Strengthen the values and commitment for equity that Tim personified, ensure that these values are cultivated and carried on to future generations of organizers,
- Recognize and pay tribute to the important contributions Tim made, and the many lives he touched and transformed in his work.

The first fellow to be honored—in 2003—was Marissa Bloom, a senior at the University of California, Santa

Cruz, majoring in Community Studies. She helped successfully organize students and adults of color to win a delay in implementing the California High School Exit Exam, and to defeat the racist Proposition 54 last year.

Rosa de Leon is this year's recipient of the fellowship. Rosa joined CFJ as a high school sophomore, shortly after immigrating from Mexico. She was hired as a youth organizer at Overfelt High School where she organized students to delay of the California High School Exit Exam, as well as to create a district-wide program to provide Bilingual Certification for students who are fluent in more than one language. Rosa is now a CFJ staff member and is organizing parents in San Jose to fight for educational equality. She is also a freshman at De Anza Community College.