



CFJ UPDATE

SEPTEMBER 2005

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.

Promise and Danger for Students

For California students who attend schools in low-income communities of color, this year has brought promise and danger. There is promise of tangible improvements in school conditions as a result of the settlement of the *Williams v. California* case last year. There is the threat for tens of thousands who face deplorable school conditions of being denied a diploma by a High School Exit Exam for which they have not received adequate preparation.

Our goals this year

CFJ entered 2005 with three main goals:

- 1) to ensure that the state was faithfully implementing the settlement of the *Williams* lawsuit,
- 2) to challenge the fairness of the California High School Exit Exam in the schools where students face the worst learning conditions, and
- 3) to improve the graduation requirement by expanding beyond a single test to a "comprehensive assessment" model that would be more rigorous and more accurate in measuring student knowledge.

Students in San Jose call on the Governor to improve schools and fix the Exit Exam.

CFJ kicked off the year with actions that pushed the state to keep its promises in the *Williams* settlement. CFJ members and allies have continued to request school improvements using the complaint system included in the lawsuit settlement.

To win important policy changes to the Exit Exam we helped to develop and supported two bills in the California legislature. The first (SB517) focuses on the poor educational conditions being provided students who were being asked to pass the Exit Exam. The sec-

ond (AB1531) would provide a fairer measure for deciding whether a student should receive a diploma.

Challenges and Setbacks

State politicians who support the Exit Exam have succeeded in pushing their storyline into many newspaper editorials this year. Their story is based on three myths:

Myth #1: The test promotes school accountability and motivates schools to improve. We know that

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Californians for Justice Education Fund www.caljustice.org

1611 Telegraph Ave., #317
Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 452-2728
Fax (510) 452-3552

1971 Las Plumas
San Jose, CA 95133
(408) 272-0236
Fax (408) 272-0315

755 Pine Avenue
Long Beach, CA 90813
(562) 951-1015
Fax (562) 951-9444

4265 Fairmount Dr., # 200
San Diego, CA 92105
(619) 641-7750
Fax (619) 516-1734

2014 Tulare Ave., #718
Fresno, CA 93721
(559) 443-1394
Fax (559) 443-1343

Promise and Danger

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the best motivation is not punishing students, but providing them with more textbooks, more highly qualified teachers, and more classroom space. They deserve the basic resources necessary for a quality education.

Myth #2: Students are lazy and the test motivates them to study harder. The student leaders of CFJ take school seriously, with or without the Exit Exam. The students they talk to in their schools do too. But the poor school conditions that they face every day convince them that the school and the state aren't very serious about providing a quality education to every student.

Myth #3: Schools are already providing an adequate opportunity to learn. Two years ago, the state Board of Education believed that too



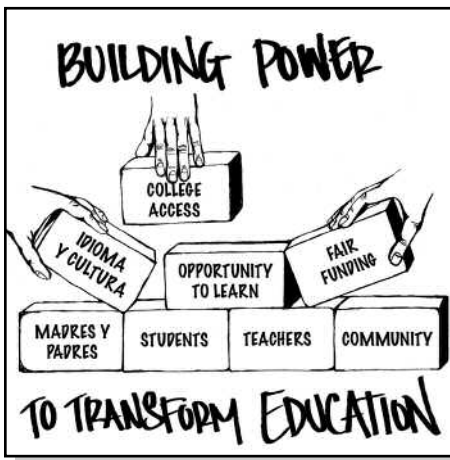
CFJ and allies rally in front of the Governor's office in Los Angeles.

many students across the state were not receiving an adequate education and delayed the Exit Exam. Last year, the governor settled the landmark *Williams* lawsuit and admitted that many California schools were not providing basic resources. Yet they expect us to believe that all of this has been fixed since then? It is not fair to punish students for the state's failure to provide them with a quality education.

Fighting back!

CFJ student and parent leaders don't buy into these education fairy tales. We have stayed focused on the real problems in our schools.

CFJ youth and parents organized rallies and protests throughout California to highlight poor school conditions. We supported legislation that challenges the high school Exit Exam in schools that have the worst conditions and changes the test to a comprehensive



CQE Education Summit

On March 12 of this year, 300 youth, parents, and education advocates from forty organizations came together for the Campaign for Quality Education (CQE) summit on the UCLA campus. The event, **Building Power to Transform Education**, was co-sponsored by the CQE, the Institute for Democracy, Education,

and Access at UCLA, and Public Advocates.

The goal of the day was to bring together people and organizations working for better schools to share ideas and to strategize to win real changes in public education. The summit was also a starting point for a long-term planning process for the CQE coalition.

Participants shared information on school funding, the *Williams* lawsuit settlement, the Exit Exam, and more. A special "parent track" was woven in throughout the day's agenda.

The summit was a powerful gathering of youth and adult activists from across the state coming together to fight for justice.



CFJ Leaders get the conference participants energized.

assessment system.

Allies from UCLA and Stanford published editorials in The Los Angeles Times, The Sacramento Bee, and The San Jose Mercury News challenging the Exit Exam and the unequal conditions in California schools.

In August the Department of Education tried to paint a rosy picture when they released the latest results from the Exit Exam. CFJ challenged their misleading numbers, and news stories throughout the state highlighted the fact that the state was still not reporting the true number of students who are in danger of not receiving a diploma.

The class of 2006 starts their senior year this September. As the first to face the consequences of the Exit Exam, it will be a scary year for many. Yet CFJ leaders also have hope that they can improve their schools, for themselves and for students to come.

Changing the Exit Exam

CFJ is supporting two bills in the State Legislature this year.

AB1531, sponsored by Karen Bass, would allow school districts to develop a “multiple assessments” approach in deciding whether a student should receive a diploma. Using one test to decide whether a student should graduate is a bad idea.

A report released this year by the School Redesign Network at Stanford University reports that, “states that use test-only graduation systems have typically experienced decreasing graduation rates, while states that use multiple measure systems of assessment have tended to maintain higher and

steadier rates of graduation. These states have also shown student achievement levels above the national average.”

SB517, sponsored by Gloria Romero, would have delayed the implementation of the Exit Exam in schools that were not providing basic learning conditions, but the bill was substantially amended in the legislative process. Currently the bill will only require that the State Superintendent of Public Instruction certify whether low-performing schools are providing the “minimum conditions and resources students need to pass the test.”



Left: Who said you can't have fun while getting educated? CFJ staff member Emmanuelle Regis leads a workshop.



Right: Tania Garcia from CADRE speaks up at the summit.



Bottom Right: Ray Guardado, a CFJ parent leader from San Jose.

Bottom Left: Paulin Chitoya, a CFJ leader from San Diego, addresses the crowd.



The Next Ten Years...

New Executive Director

CFJ is excited to introduce Solomon Rivera as our new Executive Director.

He came to CFJ in January with a strong history of organizing, and ten



Van Horn Photography/Cause Communications

years of work with the Community Coalition, one of our close ally organizations in Los Angeles, which runs campaigns addressing critical issues of equality in jobs, healthcare, and education. There, he created an innovative youth organizing project, South Central Youth Empowered Thru Action (SCYEA), and was Associate Director for eight years.

Solomon also has experience in electoral organizing to defeat racist and right-wing initiatives, and in using that organizing to build power in communities of color. He worked as Field Director for Karen Bass' campaign for State Assembly in 2004. He also served as Deputy Political/Field Director for the California Democratic Party in the 2004 presidential elections.

We welcome Solomon to the CFJ family and are excited about the fresh energy, vision, and leadership that he will bring to our work for educational

and racial justice. Please join us in welcoming him.

Strategic Planning Process

As we celebrate ten years of fighting for justice, CFJ is also completing its fifth year of focusing on racial justice in California's public schools. Five years ago our members, board of directors, and staff came together to develop a

sharper focus and a plan to attack racial inequalities in our public school system. We are reviewing the accomplishments of those five years and are building for the future by undertaking a strategic planning process for the next few years. CFJ will wrap up this process in January, and will share our exciting plans for the future with you.

...The First Ten Years

What is "A Million Voices for Justice"?

If you answered, "CFJ's first outreach tool, a petition to gather one million signatures supporting affirmative action in 1995," then you are probably a real CFJ "old timer." Yes, CFJ got its start in 1995, and in the ten years since then we have grown from a dream of a multi-racial group fighting for social justice, to a solid, statewide organization with one thousand members, seventeen staff, and five offices around the state.

In our first ten years we fought to support affirmative action, to protect bilingual education programs, and against attacks on

gays and lesbians, immigrants, and labor unions. We fought for and won an increase to the state minimum wage. We took on the huge challenge of improving public education, coming together with students, parents, teachers, and education advo-

cates throughout California to form a statewide alliance that brought the issue of unequal education into the public eye. We won a two year delay of the Exit Exam, and pressured Governor

Schwarzenegger to settle the Williams lawsuit.

At the local level CFJ members have won fairer school discipline policies, cleaner bathrooms, official recognition for bilingual students, and educational basics like more textbooks and desks.

This work has been led by youth, people of color, and low-income people across California, people just like you!

Next year, we will celebrate our hard work with an exciting tenth anniversary event. Stay tuned, you will hear more about it soon.

