



CFJ UPDATE

JANUARY 2006

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.

Governor's Agenda Terminated



The Terminator found out that those pesky humans are a lot tougher than he thought. Governor Schwarzenegger, who has used the fame of his acting role in the "Terminator" movie series while campaigning for office, was defeated in his attempt to pass a series of right-wing initiatives through a special election in November.

CFJ joined teachers, nurses, health care workers, unions, and other progressive activists in opposing the governor's initiatives, and produced a historic victory. All four of the initiatives the governor supported were defeated!

Arnold's Agenda

The Governor sought to implement his agenda by passing four initiatives:

Proposition 76 would have cut school funding by \$4 billion a year and



allowed the governor to ignore the minimum funding level for schools approved by California voters in 1988.

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CFJ members in Fresno get out the vote against Governor Schwarzenegger's agenda.

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Election continued

The governor also sought the power to cut funding for schools, health care, police, fire, and other vital services without the consent of the Legislature.

Proposition 75 was an attempt by large corporations to limit the ability of unions to fight for decent wages, fair overtime pay, adequate health care, and increased funding for schools.

Proposition 74 tried to scapegoat teachers for the problems in California schools. It offered nothing to improve basic educational resources, such as books, desks, and safe school facilities. Instead it sought to punish teachers by eliminating their job security.

Proposition 73 would have created a barrier to reproductive health by requiring that minors inform their parents before getting an abortion. It also included deliberate—and little-publicized—language to undermine abortion rights for all women.

The Resistance Wins

The “Governator” thought he was going to steamroll his way to a big victory. But

the special election was unpopular with the voters and the opponents of his initiatives were able to educate voters about the proposed laws and mobilize an effective opposition.

Because it wasn't practical for CFJ to work against all four initiatives in each of our areas, leaders from each region concentrated on two or three of the initiatives.

While education issues were important for all of us, so was Prop. 73's attack on teen health and rights. CFJ's outreach to voters, through door-to-door contact and phonebanking, helped to inform voters about the initiatives and turned voters against the governor's proposals.

All our hard work paid off. Our outreach contributed to a "No" vote on all four of Arnold's initiatives! This was an



Photo by Jan Adams

A youth member of an ally organization joins CFJ in getting out the vote in Oakland.

historic defeat for business and right-wing interests who have pushed their initiatives over the past two decades.

Our victory has had some tangible results. Governor Schwarzenegger rescinded some of his earlier cuts to education funding as well as fee increases for UC and CSU students.

We will continue to work to hold the Governor accountable, but for now, CFJ members who worked on the election should be proud.

Tough Choices for Class of '06

On January 7, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell announced that he was firmly against reforming the California High School Exit Exam to allow for alternative assessments. His announcement ended hope that he might support changes to the Exit Exam that would help the 100,000 seniors who have yet to pass the exam. Although O'Connell said that he was, “not giving up on students who have not passed the exam,” his actions spoke louder than his words.

Superintendent O'Connell's proposed help for students who finish high school without passing the exam included adult education programs, summer school classes

focused on passing the exam, an extra year of high school enrollment, independent study classes, and an extra administration of the test in the summer of 2006.

The proposals offer little hope to students who already attend schools without adequate facilities and instruction. They do nothing to address the learning conditions in the state's worst-performing schools and ignore the unequal playing field faced by students of color and low income students who are attempting to get an education.

A last hope for these students may be the class action lawsuit currently being filed against the state by Morrison & Foerster law firm. The

suit will challenge the state on the unfair impact of the Exit Exam on students who attend poor quality schools. Arturo Gonzalez, a partner at the firm, has stated that the goal of the suit is to prevent the state from denying diplomas to the class of 2006.

CFJ members will continue to fight for better school conditions. But, for those who have not been able to pass the Exit Exam, there are limited options. We will create an informational training to help students determine the best option for themselves, given the limited choices offered by the educational establishment.