

Published April 14th, 2010

CTA President Visits Lamorinda Teachers

By Sophie Braccini



David Sanchez interacts with kindergartners in Mrs. McClellan's class at Camino Pablo Elementary Picture Marc Sternberger

elementary schools," said Sanchez, "and I saw a lot of interaction between teachers and students. The class was noisy because students were engaged." Sanchez recounted how, in too many schools he visits, he witnesses 'scripted learning.' "I go into a classroom and hear a lesson being given, I move to the next classroom and the exact same lesson is taught, so much that I can follow the script moving from class to class." Sanchez says this is the result of an obligation that is placed on too many teachers to teach only to the test. "All we end up teaching our youth is filling bubbles," he added.

"In our communities the real estate values and test results are meshed, and parents demand that the test scores stay high," said Alice Noyes, a 5th grade teacher at Rheem Elementary, "even if we do not want to teach to the test, it is all we end up talking about." Sanchez did not have a ready solution for Noyes. The teacher wondered if at least the testing could take place later in the year so she would not feel pressured to fit all the required knowledge into a limited period of time.

Moraga's Superintendent of Schools Richard Schafer, who attended the meeting, said later that in his district test scores are only one of the elements that are taken into consideration in evaluating the quality of teaching and achievement in the classroom.

The ray of hope that Sanchez was able to deliver to the audience was that school teachers remain one of most trusted professional groups in the population with a 65% rate of approval, the only group scoring higher being judges. "We need to get our parents and school staff behind us to get through this terrible time," he said.

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David Sanchez has the warm demeanor of an old fashion school teacher, but the President of the California Teacher Association can turn into an angry man. When he visited the Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda school districts the week before spring break, he loved what he saw, but as he addressed faculty and staff assembled at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate at the end of his visit on March 31, he explained that the time for being nice was over.

"More than \$17 billion has been cut from California's public schools and colleges in the last two years, the single largest cut to public education since the Great Depression," he said, "K-12 education has suffered 60% of the State's cuts. Since March 16, over 23,000 pink slips have been issued to California educators, a number similar to last year. However, unlike last year, there will be no stimulus money to reduce this number. We must keep contacting our Sacramento legislators to hold them accountable to funding education."

But the budget was not Sanchez's only concern - according to him, two factors are threatening the future of California schools: standardized testing and the rise of charter schools, with a growing number of them becoming "for profit" private entities.

"I was blown away to see a music class today in one of your