

StudentsMatter

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Students Matter Sponsors Groundbreaking Lawsuit to Overturn CA Laws That Harm Students

Click here to view complaint: <http://studentsmatter.org/legal-filings/complaint-for-declaratory-and-injunctive-relief>

LOS ANGELES, CA – Yesterday afternoon, the nonprofit group Students Matter (www.studentsmatter.org) sponsored a groundbreaking lawsuit against the state of California and the California Department of Education to strike down outdated state laws that prevent the recruitment, support and retention of effective teachers. The lawsuit focuses on improving overall teacher effectiveness because of the critical role teachers play in their students' lifetime achievement.

The lawsuit asks the court to strike down state statutes related to the guarantee of permanent employment after only minimal and cursory reviews; bureaucratic procedures that make it prohibitively expensive and time-consuming to dismiss ineffective teachers; and Last-In First-Out (LIFO) seniority-based layoffs that ignore teacher effectiveness. Unlike many previous education lawsuits brought against the state, the lawsuit sponsored by Students Matter would impact all school districts throughout California.

Students Matter consulted with a range of education experts and organizations in the development of the lawsuit to determine how to best bring about improvement in student achievement, and has formed an Advisory Committee which includes Alliance for a Better Community, Students for Education Reform, Democrats for Education Reform, Parent Revolution, Students First, The Education Trust-West and New Schools Venture Fund (partial list).

Theodore J. Boutrous and Theodore B. Olson, two of the lead attorneys who are fighting to overturn Proposition 8 in federal court on behalf of the American Foundation for Equal Rights, head up the Students Matter legal team.

“These state laws create inequalities by depriving students taught by ineffective teachers of the fundamental right to education guaranteed by the state constitution, and they have a disproportionately negative effect on low-income and minority students,” said Mr. Boutrous. “The statutes prevent school administrators from prioritizing or even considering

the interests of their students when making employment and dismissal decisions. The number of grossly ineffective teachers is small, but their impact on students is enormous.”

Studies show that teachers have the greatest impact on students’ lifetime achievement. Students taught by effective teachers are more likely to attend college, attend higher-ranked colleges, earn higher salaries, reside in higher quality neighborhoods, and save for retirement. According to one of the nation’s foremost economists, teachers near the top of the quality distribution can get an entire year’s worth of additional learning out of their students compared to those near the bottom.

Students taught by grossly ineffective teachers suffer lifelong problems and fail to recover from this disadvantage. One recent study found that a student who is taught by a single ineffective teacher remains “stuck below grade level” for years to come. Another recent study found that replacing a grossly ineffective teacher with even an average teacher would increase students’ cumulative lifetime income by a total of \$1.4 million per classroom taught by that teacher. (See <http://studentsmatter.org/resources/>)

“The mission of Students Matter is to help improve student achievement in California by enhancing the overall teaching environment,” said Students Matter founder Dave Welch. “We are challenging a system that was fashioned by special interests and has burdened our schools with an inflexible environment for hiring and retaining the best teachers. This system is not designed to benefit students, and that’s unacceptable.”

The lawsuit also names the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and the Alum Rock Union School District as defendants in the claim. Recent reports estimate that in the Los Angeles Unified School District alone, there are approximately 1,000 or more teachers who are grossly ineffective; these teachers are responsible for teaching on average 30,000 or more students annually. In a recent survey, 68 percent of teachers reported that there are grossly ineffective tenured teachers currently working in their schools who should be dismissed for poor performance.

High poverty schools serving predominantly Latino and African-American students often have a disproportionate share of the least effective teachers. A recent study of the LAUSD found that a low-income student is more than twice as likely to have a low value-added English Language Arts teacher as a higher income peer, and 66 percent more likely to have a low-value added math teacher.

“Achievement gaps will persist unless we can reform an educational system that results in our highest need students often being taught by the least effective teachers,” said Arun Ramanathan, Executive Director of The Education Trust-West. “ETW strongly supports the efforts of the plaintiffs in this suit to challenge and fix the state laws that allow these inequities to persist.”

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Students Matter is committed to ensuring that all of California's children receive a quality education. Numerous studies show that teachers have the greatest impact on student achievement. Teacher effectiveness has more impact on student achievement than class size, education spending, teacher pay, or student demographics/background. Students Matter is filing a lawsuit to dismantle the outdated and unsuccessful laws that prevent the recruitment, support and retention of the most effective teachers, so that all our children can have access to a quality education. For more information, please go to studentsmatter.org.