

## **McKinley Elementary parents take on education special interests**

By David Hadley - Beach Cities Republicans

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### **One of the great civil rights issues of our time is playing out 12 miles from Torrance.**

You don't have to fly to Wisconsin or Egypt to participate. You can head to McKinley Elementary School in Compton and join the fight. Or, you can go to Los Angeles Superior Court downtown, where McKinley's parents are suing Compton Unified School District. What do the parents want? To change a school that is failing their children. There are a lot of complicated issues in the world; this is not one of them.

McKinley Elementary ranks in the bottom 10 percent of the state's schools in academic performance. Only half of its students graduate from high school, and only three percent of those graduates will be eligible for any California State universities. According to 2010 California standards tests, only 24 percent of McKinley fifth graders are proficient in reading and math.

On Dec. 7 of last year, a petition signed by 61 percent of McKinley parents was submitted to the Compton school district pursuant to California's "parent trigger" law. Per the law, a majority of a failing school's parents can petition for one of four actions: Replace the school's principal and staff; convert to a charter school; change the school's budget; or close the school. The school district has to accede to the parents' petition unless it can demonstrate why doing so is impossible.

The education special interests are fighting back with legalistic and thuggish tactics. The district rejected the parents' petition in February, saying they were unable to verify the signatures. But perhaps they had difficulty verifying the signatures because the district sent registered letters to all who had signed the petition requiring a personal interview on a single day and informing them that photo ID would be required.>

The two main teachers unions in California both oppose the parent trigger law. The California Federation of Teachers has called it a "lynch mob" provision. Translation: The union is panicked that parents might actually gain the right to decide what is best for their children. The California Teachers Association has pontificated against the "confusion" and "misinformation" that somehow led 61 percent of McKinley's parents to seek a better alternative for their kids.

Compton Unified School District thinks McKinley is doing great. On its website, the district says McKinley "has made good strides on academic improvement." However, many parents "may not have been aware of those recent improvements," so the "full story has not been told."

I'm sure the McKinley parents feel much better after hearing that. Or perhaps Compton Unified School District knows McKinley's students aren't doing so great, and just doesn't care. Ms. Mae Thomas, president of the district board, explained at a July 2010 board meeting that "all kids are not going to make it."

The McKinley parents are winning - so far. The parents sued the district Feb. 3, seeking not only an injunction to stop it from enforcing the ID verification procedures but also demanding that the district comply with the parent-trigger law and turn McKinley over to a charter operator. The court granted a temporary injunction against the district's intimidation, and has scheduled a hearing for Tuesday.

Where do the South Bay's elected officials stand on this issue? New state Sen. Ted Lieu voted against the parent trigger law in January 2010 when he was a member of the state Assembly, so he seems to think the education establishment is more important than students. To her credit, the late Sen. Jenny Oropeza, whom Lieu was elected to replace last month, voted for the reform.

My wife and I have four children in public schools; we are involved in our schools and have loved most of our kids' teachers. But we are troubled by the fact that the teachers whom we admire are dues-paying members of a union - the California Teachers Association - that is determined to deny McKinley's parents their right to save their children from a failing school.

The vast majority of public school teachers in the South Bay are members of unions that have publicly opposed the rights of the McKinley parents. Arne Duncan, President Barack Obama's secretary of education, has called education "the civil rights issue of our generation." I agree.

It is time for our citizens - and our teachers - to tell the defenders of the education special interests to make way for McKinley's parents.

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