



APRIL 2009

CFJ UPDATE

Californians for Justice Education Fund is a statewide, grassroots organization working for racial justice by building the power of communities that have been pushed to the margins of the political process. We organize youth, immigrants, low-income people and communities of color in order to improve their social, economic and political conditions.

CFJ Student Leaders Storm Sacramento

Cold and rainy weather could not deter thirty-eight student leaders as they gathered in Sacramento for Californians for Justice's annual Statewide Leadership Retreat (SLR), which took place from February 28 – March 2, 2009.

Student leaders trekked in from CFJ's four organizing regions—Long Beach, Fresno, San Jose, and Oakland—to learn more about the history of racial injustice in California schools, develop their organizing skills, and meet with legislators. They arrived Saturday afternoon and settled into the Sacramento Hostel, a stunning and amazingly restored 124-year old Victorian mansion located in downtown Sacramento.

"I was excited when we got there," said Keynon Davis, a junior from Long Beach Poly PAAL. "The house was huge and I couldn't wait to go in."

The opening session of the SLR allowed youth leaders to meet CFJ's new executive director, Jeremy Lahoud, and give input on CFJ's priority goals for 2009 which focus on the Campaign for a Quality Education, youth leadership development, fundraising, organizational development, and media and communications strategy.

Student leaders also performed skits by regions to update their fellow members on their local work and voted in new CFJ board members Reverend Floyd Harris and Maria Ortega (see feature on pg. 4)

The opening session also allowed student leaders to get to know CFJ as a collection of dedicated staff and student members. "It was great to see all the people and old friends from previous years," said Angélica Lemus, a senior at Fresno's Roosevelt High School. "It's exciting to see we're making a change statewide, and that there are other people going through the same things."

Following a night of movies, games, and



Photo by Scott Braley

CFJ student leaders and staff gather beneath the rotunda of the State Capitol Building in Sacramento, CA during the annual Statewide Leadership Retreat

homework, student leaders rose Sunday morning to a crash course itinerary designed to develop their organizing skills. "It's definitely something I've never done before," said Iva Hu, a freshman at Independence High School in San Jose. "I learned a lot of important things like base-building as a movement, grassroots fundraising through the community, and media and communications tools."

In the afternoon, student leaders were introduced to the Campaign for a Quality Education, CFJ's statewide alliance dedicated to ensuring that all students are 100 percent prepared for college and careers upon graduating from high school. CQE Statewide Alliance Coordinator Charles McDonald led a political education session on the current economic crisis and its roots in racially profiled, predatory lending that would make an economics professor proud. CQE Statewide Campaign Director Carmen Iñiguez updated student leaders on the recent efforts of the CQE, recent discussions with legislators, and

legislation language (see CQE update on pg. 3).

But it wasn't all business, as that night the CFJ staff and student leaders offered up their talents in the Annual SLR Talent Show, which featured an evening of poetry, song, magic, dance, and comedy. One of the standouts performances was an original song by CFJ board member Vanessa Bell, accompanied by Jeremy on guitar.

Monday morning, student leaders and staff quickly packed up and headed over to the state capitol. They were greeted with a special visit from Assemblywoman Julia Brownley (D-Santa Monica) who offered encouraging words and support for their upcoming legislative visits.

"I think the fact that we are not succeeding in educating all of our children is the

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The Current Crisis: Time to Promote Racial and Social Justice

From Executive Director Jeremy Lahoud

In her brilliant 2007 book on global economic disasters, *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein quotes Milton Friedman, the free-market economic ideologue: “Only a crisis—real or perceived—creates real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe is our basic function: to develop alternatives to the existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable.”

The policies that Friedman promoted to become “politically inevitable” were just the sort of right-wing economic policies that helped create our current economic crisis, especially the deregulation of corporations and banks. But as Klein argues, having ideas “lying around” is a strategy that progressive folks should take heed of.

The current economic and budget crisis in California and the United States represents a painful and unique opportunity to create “real

change.” The deep cuts to education, healthcare, and human services in order to balance the \$42 billion state deficit make it imperative that progressive-minded people who care about racial and social justice make sure our ideas are “lying around.”

“100 Percent Prepared for College and Career,” the current campaign of our statewide education alliance—the Campaign for Quality Education (CQE)—represents a great opportunity to promote racial and social justice ideas at the state level. Launched in May 2008, with a mobilization of more than 2,000 students, parents, and educators to the state capitol in Sacramento, *100 Percent Prepared* calls on the State of California to invest in an education that prepares all K-12 students for college, meaningful careers, and democratic participation, regardless of their race, income, immigration status, or where they live.

This year, the CQE is working with Julia Brownley (D-Santa Monica), Chair of the State Assembly Education Committee, to support Assembly Bill 8, legislation that



Jeremy Lahoud with his partner Maria Gaspar and their daughter Adila in the CFJ Long Beach office

would make California’s school funding system more transparent and efficient and target funding to the state’s most disadvantaged students.

This May, the CQE will return to the state capitol to demand that policymakers plan for the future and make a commitment to provide adequate resources to educate all of California’s students. This rally is a chance for us to promote the idea that a full investment in California’s education system is not

only the right thing to do, but—by helping students become lifelong learners and gain meaningful career skills—can help us get out of our current economic crisis.

We hope you will join our movement to ensure that a quality education be available for all students—especially low-income students, students of color, and immigrant students—and turn that ideal into a “politically inevitable” idea.

Campaign Updates

CFJ Fresno

CFJ Fresno’s new campaign is focused on preventing student dropouts, said Lead Organizer Gina Rodriguez. Students will be holding focus groups and conducting surveys to develop effective, youth-led strategies to reduce the drop-out rate in Fresno, currently one of the highest in California at 33%. On April 30, they will hold a rally and share their findings. At Edison High, Organizer Rhea Martin is working on linking that campus to the dropout campaign. The Roosevelt High chapter won a clean bathroom campaign that resulted in bathrooms being checked and cleaned three times a day, and weekly walkthroughs with a vice principal. Organizer Ernesto Saavedra recently launched an official chapter at his alma mater, Fresno High, where they are exploring interracial dynamics, teacher disinterest, and campus security.

CFJ Long Beach

Long Beach Organizers AyeNay Abye and Samantha Knox have been busy and productive. AyeNay has taken a lead with the Equitable College and Career Options (ECCO) Alliance, a coalition of regional youth-serving non-profits, which recently had a meeting with Superintendent Chris Steinhauer to discuss a planning grant from ConnectEd to support “multiple pathways”—an education that prepares students for college and career options. Samantha is developing a mentoring program for credit-deficient students at Poly PAAL called Next STEP (Student Teaching Empowerment Program). This April 30, CFJ Long Beach and ECCO will also be presenting *ECCO: Making the “Best Urban School District” Better*, a forum to discuss key findings and strategies with the Long Beach Unified School District.

CFJ Oakland

At Oakland High School, Organizer Rose De Leon and students are organizing the *OUSD 100% Prepared Survey*, a series of focus groups and surveys asking over 300 hundred students to identify critical needs regarding facilities, a relevant curriculum that fulfills the A-G requirements to attend California universities, and additional support programs for first generation college students. They will present their findings to the Oakland Unified school board at an April 22 board meeting. At Laney College and the Peralta Community College District level, Organizer Yvonne Tran continues to lead CFJ’s inter-generational organizing by hosting a series of People’s Parties; basebuilding with former CFJ high school students, community college students, and community allies; and linking the educational crisis at the high school level with the issues at the community colleges.

CFJ San Jose

CFJ San Jose has been leading the Eastside Education Alliance (ESEA), a coalition of students, parents, teachers, community organizations, and elected officials. At a series of events culminating at a Policy Roundtable on April 7, they will begin developing a strategic initiative to address parent and student support, the dropout rate, and preparation for college and careers and then present it to the Eastside Union High School District. At Silver Creek and Independence High Schools, Organizers Igdalia Rojas and Maura Villanueva are basebuilding around discussions about the California budget. At Overfelt and James Lick High Schools, Igdalia and Organizer Lucila Ortiz are discussing immigration issues as they pertain to students and youth as their basebuilding focus and preparing for May 1st immigrant rights rallies.

CQE Frequently Asked Questions

Who is the CQE?

The Campaign for Quality Education is a statewide coalition made up of over twenty-five grassroots, civil rights, policy and research organizations. Founded in 2002, the CQE is committed to educational equity for all communities in California's public schools and advancing the movement for racial, social and economic justice.

What has the CQE done in the past?

The CQE is a leading statewide force in working towards educational equity in California's public schools. In 2002, the CQE won a two-year delay of the implementation of the California High School Exit Exam. In 2004, the CQE was a part of the landmark *Williams v. California* settlement to provide nearly \$1 billion for textbooks, facility improvements, and qualified teachers at all schools.

In May 2008, the CQE rallied over 2,000 students, parents, activists, and community organizations from across California at the state capitol in Sacramento to protest against major education budget cuts and make over forty legislative visits. The CQE provided a statewide voice from students and parents to legislative decision-makers and helped restore \$1 billion in education funding to the final budget voted on in September.

What is the CQE working on now?

In 2008, the CQE launched a three-year campaign, "100 Percent Prepared for College and Career" to ensure rigorous preparation and meaningful post-secondary options for all California public school students. The CQE is proud to be working closely with Assemblywoman Julia Brownley

(D-Santa Monica), chair of the Assembly Education Committee, on a finance reform bill, AB 8, which will include CQE priorities and language around preparation for college and careers. AB 8 seeks to reform the current finance system to fund the actual cost of educating students with varying needs and environments and to make it transparent and accessible to local communities (see sidebar).

What are upcoming CQE events?

This May, the CQE will again gather members and supporters from across the state in Sacramento to support CQE priority legislation and weigh in on the Special Election ballot measures.

How can I get more info about the CQE?

To learn more about the CQE, please visit:
www.quality-education.org

CQE Legislation Language

"...all students are prepared at the end of their elementary and secondary education experience for college, careers and successful participation in our democratic institutions, no matter where they live or what their economic, racial or ethnic background is."

Assembly Bill 8 (Julia Brownley, D-Santa Monica)



CFJ Student Leaders Storm Sacramento

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civil rights issue of today. California must change its course and invest more," said Brownley, the chair of the Assembly Education Committee, "and make sure we are graduating all of our students, making sure that they all have opportunities to go on to careers and higher education and be

productive citizens in our state."

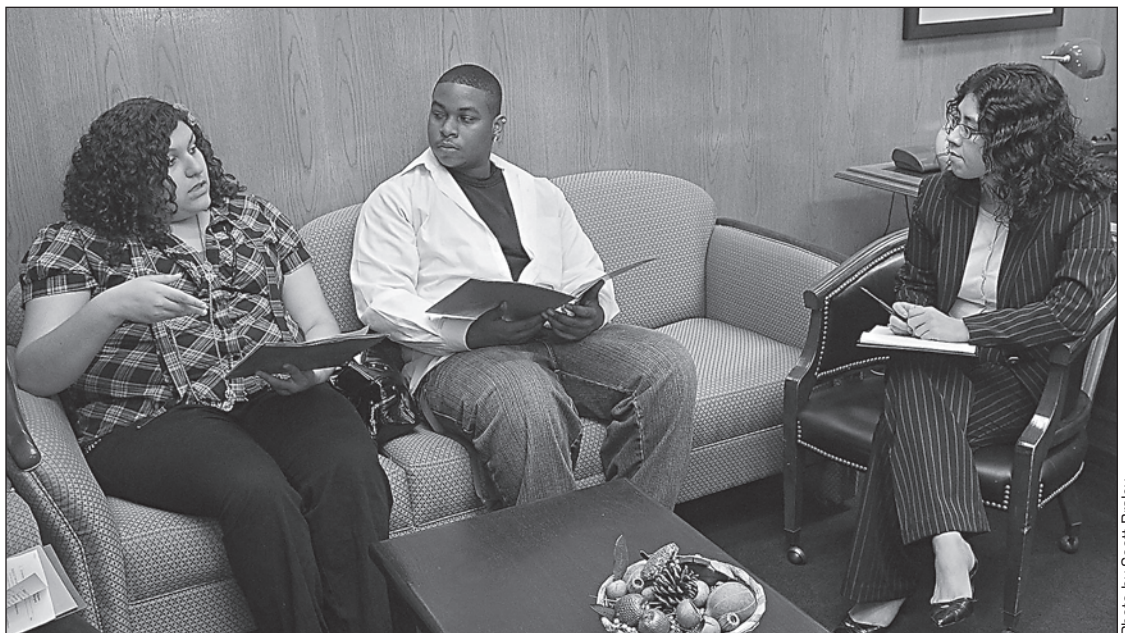
After Brownley's talk, student leaders fanned out across the state capitol building to talk to legislator's offices about the Campaign for Quality Education, racial justice in their schools, and Assembly Bill 8, sponsored by Brownley. Assembly Bill 8 includes language endorsed by the CQE to make college and career readiness a possibility for all students.

All total, student leaders met with over twenty offices, from San Diego to Eureka, and Bakersfield to Fresno.

"I felt like I was doing something on a larger scale, being in Sacramento and talking to the politicians," said Katia Lopez, a junior from James Lick High School in San Jose. "It was not just for me or my school, but for people all over California."

CFJ Justice League Monthly Donor Campaign

CFJ is funded by *you*—people who believe in the struggle for social justice in education led by young people of color. Their work would not be possible without partnership from adult allies. On April 13, we are kicking off the Justice League Monthly Donor Campaign with the goal of signing up fifty new people to CFJ's monthly giving program. Student leaders need your help to get to Sacramento to demand full funding for their schools. Join the Justice League today and invest in young people of color as movement leaders. Sign up online at www.caljustice.org or by returning the donation envelope with your newsletter. Together, we are powerful!



CJ Perez and Kevin Shelton, both from Fresno, speak with a staff member from Assemblyman Juan Arambula's office during the Statewide Leadership Retreat

CFJ Leader: Maria Ortega

The newest student board member of CFJ has big plans for herself.

Maria Ortega, a junior at Edison High School in Fresno, plans on graduating as her school's valedictorian (she currently has a 4.2 GPA), attending USC or Stanford, and studying social work and political science. She'd also like to join the Peace Corps, get a Master's degree or two, and become a social worker.

"My passion is helping kids, ending the suffering of kids," the 16-year old said.

Maria joined CFJ two years ago, recruited by her cousin Angélica Lemus and CFJ Fresno lead organizer Gina Rodriguez. "(CFJ) was different," she said. "It was like school, but it wasn't censored." She quickly stepped up to serve as the Edison chapter president last year, and now as Alliance Chair, where she builds connections with other school clubs, and as Campaign Chair for the Fresno region.

"Maria came in really quiet, but then something happened and she skyrocketed," said Rodriguez. "She gets the issues and can tie her opinions into her political education at CFJ. She's a great speaker now, and really owns her space when she talks to legislators and elected officials."



Photo by Scott Braley

Maria points out last year's "Your Future, Your Life, You Have the Power" college access campaign—in which students fought to have A-G college requirement posters placed in all classrooms and to reduce the student to counselor ratio from 800:1 to 450:1—as a highlight of her organizing work.

"It was a huge step for us. Our first victory," stated Maria, who likes hanging out with her friends at the mall or local pizza parlor. Later this year, they have plans to go prom dress shopping in Los Angeles.

Maria is inspired to make change and work hard by her mom, a single mother who works two jobs to make ends meet. "I had to grow up fast," said the oldest of four siblings who immigrated to the United States thirteen years ago. "My goal is to buy her a house and make sure she is provided for."

At the 2009 CFJ Student Leadership Retreat, Maria continued her dedication to CFJ by stepping up and being voted in as a board member. "It was a step further on the ladder," she said. "A great chance to learn."

As a board member, Maria wants "CFJ to grow, to be all about the community, to be in the community, to be funded by the community, and most of all, to keep leading the movement."

CFJ Upcoming Calendar 2009

APRIL

- April 7** **CFJ San Jose—Eastside Education Alliance Policy Roundtable**
4:30-6:30pm, National Hispanic University 14271 Story Road San Jose, CA 95127
- April 13** **CFJ Justice League Monthly Donor Campaign Kick-Off**
- April 22** **CFJ Oakland—OUSD 100% Prepared Survey presented at Oakland Unified School District board meeting**
5:00-9:00pm OUSD Board Room, 1025 2nd Avenue Oakland, CA 94606
- April 30** **CFJ Fresno —Dropout Campaign Kick-off Rally**
Time and place TBA
- April 30** **CFJ Long Beach—Education Forum, ECCO: Making the "Best Urban School District" Better**
6:00 - 9:00pm, Location TBA

MAY

- May** **CQE Action and Rally in Sacramento**
Exact time and date TBA

JUNE

- June 15** **Summer Youth Leadership Academy (SYLA) Opening**

Please contact paul@caljustice.org if you are interested in participating in any of the above events and actions.

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Thank you to our community supporters who support and motivate us to make change in our schools. The following people have donated since September 1, 2008.

* Designates Justice League members who make monthly donations to CFJ. Join them at www.caljustice.org or by calling 510-452-2728.

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