



CFJ NEWSFLASH

Summer 2011



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Californians for Justice is a statewide grassroots organization working for racial justice by building the power of youth, communities of color, immigrants, low-income families, and LGBTQ communities. Led by students, we organize to advance educational justice and improve our social, economic, and political conditions.



Californians for Justice

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Pg. 2** 2011 Statewide Leadership Retreat
- Pg. 3** Janelle Ishida: Farewell and Good Luck
- Pg. 5** Statewide Update: May Day of Action
- Pg. 6** Campaign Updates

2011 Statewide Leadership Retreat

CFJ Got Talent

"The Statewide Leadership Retreat empowered me to make my voice heard in a strategic way and inspired me to keep fighting for educational justice," said Chloe Salazar, CFJ student leader.

From March 18-20, 46 student leaders, sixteen CFJ staff members, and eight board members from Californians for Justice four regions: Oakland, Fresno, San Jose, and Long Beach gathered outside San Luis Obispo to chart the course for CFJ's future, connect local campaigns to statewide policy efforts, and sharpen their skills in the tools of movement building.

▼ CFJ staff at the Statewide Leadership Retreat.



THE CFJ 2011 STATEWIDE LEADERSHIP RETREAT WAS FULL OF POSITIVE ENERGY, PASSION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND AN UNBROKEN SPIRIT TO LEAD THIS YEAR'S FIGHT FOR EDUCATIONAL AND RACIAL JUSTICE.

"Change happens from the bottom up, when students stand up and lead," said Crystal Valdez, a student leader from Long Beach.

In spite of the rain, winds, and mud in Cambria, the Californians for Justice 2011 Statewide Leadership Retreat was full of positive energy, passion for social justice, and an unbroken spirit to lead this year's fight for educational and racial justice.

CFJ's Got Talent!

CFJ's success in growing tomorrow's leaders today is fundamentally rooted in discovering and developing the hidden skills of youth and training them to take their talents to new levels. The now famous CFJ Talent Show drew the loudest screams and cheers when youth from across the state showcased their talents.

"It was inspiring to realize how much talent

and imagination we have at CFJ," said Elizabeth De Leon, San Jose student leader.

Long Beach Organizer Cesar Castrejon leads a morning Mexica ceremony to renew our spirits, bless the four directions, and celebrate children, family, and our ancestors.

Remembering our ancestors and "feeding our bodies is just as important as feeding our spirits" declared Sergio Cuellar, CFJ Statewide Campaign Director.

Dancing for Change

After a long day of strategizing, local campaign planning, and learning the secrets of the organizing trade the youth dance to rhythms from around the world.

"CFJ can not only shake up the halls of power, but we also shook our bodies" to the beats of the best CFJ DJ—Maura Villanueva—exclaimed Rosa De Leon, CFJ Organizer from San Jose.

▼ The everyday heroes in our communities, the movers and shakers of CFJ at the Statewide Leadership Retreat.



Janelle Ishida

Farewell and Good Luck to a CFJ Mentor & Friend

By Michelle Thai, CFJ Communications Intern and senior at Emerson College



Janelle is simply the best youth organizer in CFJ history.

One of my favorite memories of Janelle is the time she packed me and twelve other students into a 15-person van and drove us all the way to San Diego—stopping on the way down to tour UOP, Cal Poly SLO, UCLA, and UC Santa Barbara before we arrived at UC San Diego.

Those three days with Janelle and my CFJ peers ultimately influenced the rest of my life. The trip opened my eyes to what was beyond my bubble of East Side San Jose. After the trip all I wanted was to see more of the world. Three years later with that same hunger for new culture and places, with Janelle's encouragement and support, and after dozens of 1 AM email exchanges with Janelle, I moved to Boston for college in 2010.

If Janelle didn't sacrifice so much of her time to bring all thirteen of us to Southern California, or persistently mentor and guide me into transferring to Boston—if it

weren't for Janelle's commitment to students like me, I would never have had the bravery or desire to reach higher and go farther than my local college.

But it's not just my life that Janelle had changed. A former youth organizer, board member, and staff member of CFJ from 2001 to 2011, Yvonne Tran recalls a significant event in her life. "When I was 17, I decided not to stay in

her position as the organizing Director of CFJ. As Yvonne mentioned, Janelle had always taught us to embrace who we are and put confidence in each of us. Inside of CFJ, Janelle continued to feed knowledge to the youth through community organizing workshops and everyday campaign work—empowering us to address issues in school system.

JANELLE HAD ALWAYS TAUGHT US TO EMBRACE WHO WE ARE AND PUT CONFIDENCE IN EACH OF US.

the military," she said. "A couple of months later, I received a letter from a friend who I enlisted with and had planned to go with to basic training together. She told me how disappointed she was in me that I quit and told me I'm not strong enough to be in it. I was very upset. It really hurt my self-confidence and made me question my decision to leave the military. I called Janelle and she talked me through it and provided me with lots of support to affirm that I have made the right decision. She reminded me that I am a strong person despite what the letter says. Her words and presence in a time of a need, especially at a tender age of 17, was much needed and left me feeling like I am making the right decisions to be true to myself."

Janelle worked way beyond

"Besides Janelle and I saving the world from the zombie apocalypse," Harrison Castro, a youth leader of CFJ from 2006-2007, jokes, she taught me about how the education system has its own brand of problems and how changes can move one step forward (i.e. Brown vs. Board of Education ruling) but five steps back (i.e. budget cuts affecting K-12, CSU, and UCs)...but there are people like us in CFJ who are willing to continue speaking out and fighting for positive changes in our schools."

The activism and leadership skills students learned also carried through to their present-day lives. Yvette Tran, a youth organizer from 2004 to 2008 said, "I did a lot of campaign work while I was at CFJ, including the Williams Settlement. Those experi-



▲ Janelle represented everything about CFJ: open-minded, motivated, and passionate about justice in our communities and education.



◀ Janelle is always right there alongside us, whether we're working hard at campaigns or goofing around!

"IF IT WASN'T FOR JANELLE'S DEDICATION AND COMPASSION TOWARDS HER STUDENTS I WOULDN'T BE DEDICATING MY LIFE TOWARDS ACTIVISM AND ORGANIZING TO BETTER MY COMMUNITY."
 - YVETTE TRAN

ences led me to continue organizing while I'm here at UCSC. I'm currently involved in helping educate and mentor youth of color about college access. If it wasn't for Janelle's dedication and compassion towards her students I wouldn't be dedicating my life towards activism and organizing to better my community."

Anh Tran, a youth organizer from 2005 to 2007, said, "It is hard for me to imagine where I would be had it not been for my experience with CFJ and Janelle. In addition to raising my awareness and participation in improving our community (through outreaching, campaigning, and leading workshops), Janelle has been a great influence to my very own education—encouraging me to apply to college, editing my personal statements, and giving me

academic advice."

Janelle wasn't just dedicated to her work as an organizer; she was dedicated to us as well, and it's easily seen through each of our lives. For those reasons and many more she will certainly be missed at CFJ.

Janelle said farewell to CFJ on April 10th after nearly a decade. She is now "taking time off to be a full-time parent to our rambunctious toddler, pick up cool project work, and find the next organization to dedicate the coming decade to." Her farewell party and CFJ's ten year SYLA reunion will be held on **June 18th at Cataldi Park in San Jose.**

You can RSVP for the event on the official CFJ Facebook page at [facebook.com/caljustice](https://www.facebook.com/caljustice)



▲ Whether she was gesturing wildly or deep in conversation, Janelle knew how to get each of us to think harder, dig deeper, and dream bigger.

▼ Janelle and the youth of CFJ at a workshop in Oakland, one of the many opportunities and trips she made possible for us.



Statewide Update: May Day of Action— EDUCATION 2.0: It's Time to Upgrade California's Education System.

On May 10, 2011 students and parents unveiled the new “OS 2011” in Sacramento, CA to urge our State lawmakers to “Upgrade Our Education System” to meet 21st century realities and demands.

Californians for Justice spearheads the Campaign for Quality Education (CQE), which on May 10 brought together more than 125 parents and students from across California for a Day of Action in Sacramento.

In the face of the budget stalemate in Sacramento, dozens of student and parent leaders from across the state traveled to Sacramento to deliver an urgent but simple message to the State Legislature and the Governor: Now is the time to upgrade California's education system. The rally was part of the Campaign for Quality Education's Day of Action entitled “Education 2.0- It's Time to Upgrade California's Education System.” Speakers included CQE student and parent leaders, as well as Assemblywoman Julia Brownley, Chair of the Assembly Education Committee, and Assembly Appropriations Committee Chair Felipe Fuentes.

The CQE staged a creative press conference in

which student and parent speakers addressed **CQE's 2011 policy priorities:**

- (1) **creating an equitable school finance formula and fixing the school funding current system;**
- (2) **improving teacher effectiveness and evaluation;**
- (3) **ensuring students are 100% prepared for both college and career**
- (4) **developing revenue and budget solutions, including tax extensions and longer-term solutions.**

Following a “system upgrade” theme, the CQE unveiled a new

“OS (Our Schools) 2011 device” to bring a new perspective to the debate over education and budget cuts. Each speaker unveiled a different “app” corresponding to each of four policy priorities.

In alliance with our statewide partners, we took the voices of parents and students from the gritty grassroots to the marble halls of power in the State Capitol. After the rally, CQE representatives made more than twenty legislative visits including meetings with the Nick Schweizer, Governor Jerry Brown's Education Finance Manager, State Assembly Speaker John Perez, and Senator Alan Lowenthal, Chair of the Senate Education Committee. Students and parents also met with their own legislators from areas ranging from Long Beach to Oakland and Los Angeles to Fresno. What was most impressive about the legislative visits were that they were student- and parent-led. Our student leaders and parent allies spoke with passion, and education policy expertise, and challenged decision makers to step up to the challenge and support temporary tax extensions to offset billions of dollars in potential cuts to schools.

The avalanche of special



Children ask law makers “WTF,”
Where's The Funding?

interests in Sacramento—from the prison lobby to the corporate lobby—often drowns the voices of regular people. May 10 was an opportunity for parent and student leaders from across the State to tell their side of the story, which revolves around upgrading the archaic education system we currently have to an education system that reflects a 21st century global context and the interconnectedness of our lives.

The right wing, “free market” agenda has dominated the budget debate by promoting a “cuts only” budget and arguing that taxes hurt the economy. CQE seeks to turn the page on this tired, old dogma, and put forth a new vision for public education. A vibrant education system is the path to California's prosperity and to win the future.

California is at a crossroads. The economic future of California depends on the brainpower of the rising generation.

MEDIA COVERAGE FROM OUR SACRAMENTO ACTION

- 1) **Extensive coverage of the CQE press conference on the Sacramento-based Spanish-language Univision news, including great footage of CFJ Organizer Igdalia Rojas and PLAN parent leader Guadalupe Gomez**
- 2) **“California at a crossroads: my generation's future hangs in balance,” by CFJ Fresno student leader Miriam Hernandez**
- 3) **KTXL FOX-40 coverage of education budget cut protests highlighted the CQE rally and CFJ Long Beach student leader Jackie Hernandez**

CFJ in collaboration with the Campaign for Quality Education (CQE) rolls deep from the gritty grassroots to the marble halls of power in Sacramento.



Campaign Updates

We are fighting for change all across the state. In addition to CFJ's statewide platform, we are also waging educational justice campaigns in Long Beach, Fresno, San Jose, and Oakland.

Long Beach

The Long Beach campaign recently had its biggest victory of the year for the Food for Thought campaign! CFJ student leaders in Long Beach recently passed the "Healthy School Zones" Resolution with a 9-0 vote from the Long Beach City Council on May 3rd, 2011. The resolution ensures that the City of Long Beach will continue to work with student leaders, residents, and community groups to support the creation of community gardens around Long Beach Schools and to promote "Healthy School Zones" by encouraging businesses located within five blocks to provide healthy, high-nutrient food and beverage options. Also, the City voted to provide a copy of the resolution to the Long Beach Unified School District Board of Education to show their support for the Food for Thought Campaign and encourage the district's participation in making healthier changes. Congratulations Long Beach!

Fresno

Earlier this year, CFJ student leaders met with Fresno Unified School District (FUSD) officials to review and revise the district's discipline policies. One of our recommendations is for the complete removal or revision of the "Gang Involvement" section located in the 2010-2011 Student/Parent-Handbook that unjustly profiles and criminalizes our youth, especially low income youth and youth of color. On May 11th, over 40 CFJ youth, parents and allies marched to end the School To Prison Pipeline and for the implementation of Ethnic Studies in all Fresno Unified high schools. Fresno's 'Educacion Sin Barreras/Education Without Barriers' campaign to reduce the drop out rates is making moves!

Oakland

In Oakland, you get two for one. We are taking on two different campaigns: one with the Peralta Student Alliance and another one with Oakland High School students.

The Peralta Student Alliance (PSA) has attained some key victories with our "Stop the Drops" campaigns. For years Peralta College had a policy of pushing out low income and students of color by dropping them out of classes unjustly. CFJ's campaign on campus resulted in the collection of more



CFJ students get creative with an "Ice Cream for Justice" event to recruit new student to their Oakland High School "No Knowledge No College" campaign.

than 1,000 signatures in support of the Stop the Drops campaigns. PSA leaders also met with the college's Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor, both of whom agreed to the students campaign demands. CFJ is now working on implementation of those demands, aided by Board trustee Nicky Gonzalez and other regional allies.

Seven months ago, CFJ student leaders at Oakland High School began a journey to explore the systemic failures of why their friends were dropping out of school and not going to college. Students have conducted over 500 student surveys, peer-to-peer interviews, and one-on-one interviews with parents, teachers, and administration. At the end of April students released their findings in a report entitled "[NO KNOWLEDGE NO COLLEGE: Oakland Students Rising to the Challenge.](#)" To make their voice heard in the next coming weeks students plan to kick it up a notch to exert pressure on the school to adopt their campaign demands. Stay tuned. Also [click here to download the student led action research and report.](#)

San Jose

After last November's victory to adopt "A-G" university entrance requirements as default curriculum for all ninth and tenth graders in the ESUHSD, San Jose CFJ leaders have been working on the implementation of this resolution. Since March, they have brought together many stakeholders including parents from the Vietnamese, Latino and African American organizations in the district, students, principals, district representatives, City officials such as Dave Cortese and George Shirakawa, allied organiza-

tions and foundations like the Silicon Valley Education Foundation, Cal-Soap and Alum Rock Union School District Board Member Darcie Green. The stakeholders' group has identified key recommendations to be presented to the district as first steps for implementation of A-G. CFJ leaders also know how to celebrate! On May 20th, over 45 student leaders gathered to celebrate 2010-2011 school year victories and honor the legacy of former Organizing Director Janelle Ishida.

2011 Summer Youth Leadership Academy (SYLA). It's SYLA's 10 year Anniversary!

For the 10th consecutive year, CFJ is thrilled to kick off our 2011 Summer Youth Leadership Academy, an intense seven week organizing training boot camp across our four regions: Long Beach, Fresno, San Jose and Oakland. Starting at the end of June and culminating in mid-August SYLA runs three times a week for seven weeks to train and empower youth leaders across the state with the tools to win real changes in their school and education policy statewide.

For the past ten year CFJ's Summer Youth Leadership Academy has graduated over 350 young grassroots leaders. We invite you to celebrate with us our ten-year SYLA graduation by making a generous donation here.

DONATE Now

If like us you believe that changing our education system in California begins with young people organizing in their schools, communities, and on-line we invite you to make a donation to build our grassroots capacity.



CFJ Long Beach turns out at city council meeting to testify in support the "Food for Thought" Campaign. In May students had a big victory by winning the passage of a city resolution to promote healthier food options at local schools and build "Healthy School Zones".