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CLOVIS SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS WIN HISTORIC VOTE TO UNIONIZE #WeAreACE

Organized during pandemic, union will be first in district's history for certificated educators

CLOVIS – In the last large school district in the state where educators are not part of a union, school psychologists and mental health support providers (MHSPs) have just made history by voting to join the Association of Clovis Educators/CTA/NEA, the first ever for certificated educators in the district.

The Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) announced the vote count at PERB headquarters in Sacramento today. Forty-nine of the 71 voters, or 69 percent, voted for ACE/CTA/NEA, while 16 voters, or 23 percent, voted for a competing union. Only six voters, or seven percent, voted for no union. Eighty-one school psychologists were eligible to vote.

This overwhelming victory by Clovis psychologists was the result of organizing efforts that took place during the pandemic. Clovis psychologists and MHSPs used Zoom meetings, phone calls, Facebook, Instagram and texting, emails, and podcasts and good old-fashioned conversations to build support and participation in their union.

“Clovis school psychologists are an incredibly capable and dedicated group of educators. Our Clovis school community and students need our strong voices at the table,” said Tamara Soemali, a school psychologist with deep roots in Clovis who has been with the Clovis Unified School District for 25 years. “With today’s vote, my colleagues and I are finally in a position to negotiate for positive and meaningful change that takes into account the expertise of educators and puts students first. We are eager to get to work on our first contract to ensure that all of our students have the resources and support they need to succeed.”

A union of psychologists is a first step toward a larger organizing effort by all Clovis educators. In April 2021, spurred by district decision-making that marginalized educators’ voice in classroom decisions affecting students, Clovis teachers, psychologists, itinerant specialists, school counselors and other educators announced the formation of the Association of Clovis Educators (ACE), to build a union so that educators could have a meaningful, independent voice in decisions that impact students and schools.

ACE organizing efforts have been all the more challenging in a district that has, at times, openly prided itself on not having educator unions and has been accused of multiple violations of state labor laws.

Clovis school psychologists and mental health support professionals look forward to negotiating a strong union contract that helps with recruitment and retention, improves transparency and ensures a strong voice in decisions that impact their students and professions. The school psychologists have already elected a bargaining team and conducted a comprehensive survey of psychologists and MHSPs.

Negotiations with the district for a first contract are expected to begin soon.

“Today, we can say what we’ve long known: that Clovis can still be Clovis while also being a union district. We are thrilled with today’s vote. This is a victory for ACE, for our school psychologists and mental health support professionals, and for students. It is also a building block for our ongoing organizing efforts of more than 2,100 educators, which will continue,” said Kristin Heimerdinger, a Buchanan High School teacher and ACE spokesperson.

“Strong educators and strong schools mean success for our students,” said Jonathan Terry, a parent and psychiatrist. “As a parent, I have been watching and cheering ACE’s successes from afar. I believe this union victory, and others to come, will only benefit our students and schools.”

Last year, Clovis educators filed multiple unfair labor practice charges with the Public Employment Relations Board, including a request for immediate injunctive relief over Clovis Unified’s continued financial support and control of its Faculty Senate, which ACE argued violates state labor law. That labor complaint is still pending, with a hearing scheduled for February 10.

For more information about ACE, go to cloviseducators.org.

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