

**Jon Wainwright:** Hi everyone. So, our conversation today with Tristan Brown ran a little longer than we were expecting and what we had to do was go ahead and cut our conversation into two. So what you're going to be listening to now is Part 1 of that conversation where Tristan and I are going to be discussing, more or less, the way public education is structured in California and some background on the bill we're going in depth on, which is AB 1217. Thank you so much for listening. Enjoy

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**JW:** And, hello. Welcome to California Lawmaking In Depth. We're talking here today with Tristan Brown. He's a Legislative Advocate for the California Federation of Teachers, based here in Sacramento. Tristan, thanks for joining us here today.

**Tristan Brown:** Thanks for having me.

**JW:** Alright, so, we're talking about AB 1217. Although, it's not the AB 1217 that was there at the beginning of session in January. So Tristan, you want to tell us a little bit about how we got the AB 1217 we're talking about?

**TB:** Certainly. So, in the beginning there was the bill that started out as AB 1217 that provided some incentives for training and helped teachers out. It was a great little bill that the Federation of Teachers were in support of and we were just kind of monitoring it. It wasn't our bill, per se, so we don't intervene too much. We just let folks know that we think it's a good idea and let it go along its course.

Sometime before the break - the large summer break that happens towards the second half of the first year of the legislative session - we were basically rewarded with this baby dropped on our doorstep of what we call a gut-and-amend. And a gut-and-amend is really all... It's just what it sounds like. You take a bill, you gut all the contents out of it, and then you amend in an entire new idea.

**JW:** That's a hell of an amendment.

**TB:** Yeah. It's just a complete do-over. Except, it should be in the same world as the first bill. So, because the first bill was about teaching and education, they were able to gut and amend more education language in to it. You can't just turn it in to something that says we're going to have a transportation bill put into an old education bill. For some reason, that is a line too far.

**JW:** That's pushing the envelope too far.

**TB:** Right, but instead of a teacher training bill, we had this brand new school system being introduced and, maybe I should lay off the land here a little bit.

**JW:** That would be great.

**TB:** What we're got right now is, I think what most people are familiar with, your traditional K-12 school system. You turn, what - 5, 5 1/2 - go to Kindergarten, and you're locked up until you get out in 12th grade, right? It's pretty much the common experience. You have your high schools, your elementary schools, your middle schools, etc.

We also for the last, oh, 15-20 years, have seen the proliferation of the charter school industry. And those are schools that receive public dollars but are managed by private corporations. In the beginning, they were supposed to be a little bit more tied in to the school district and you still have some charters that do that, and they're still run by the district. They operate like any other school but they have a different little flair. Maybe a dual-language immersion requirement or something like that. That's the state of the world as it is today.

**JW:** And just to be clear, we're talking about, just the two segments in public education, right? We're not touching private education in California too much here?

**TB:** Sure. You're got all your private schools, your religious schools, etc. But, in terms of what any person can walk in to, you've got your traditional schools and you charter schools.

This was a expansion of a little known third tier that exists today as well. And that's known as the state schools. We only have two state schools - it's the California School for the Deaf and the California School for the Blind. They are basically the evolution of very old schools from the 1800's where the state had to step up and think, "What do we do with these kids with severe special needs?"

The world in the late 1800's wasn't like what it is now. We didn't have cochlear implants. We didn't have the kind of support system we have for folks that are visually impaired. So these kids required, pretty much, their own separate school system to thrive. And that is where it ended. There are no other state schools, but any child with those needs across California can enroll in them and we can go out of our way to help them out to get to the schools. There's only about three campuses.

So 1217's great new amendment was there would be a new state school. And this state school would be a STEM school. And STEM is a popular term - an acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. And so, it's a technical focused school and it would serve a population - and this is the funny part about the bill. Some bills, you might just say, "In Los Angeles County," but this bill said: there will be a new STEM state school in a county with a population of at least 3.5 million people." Well, okay...

**JW:** There's only one county that fits that bill.

**TB:** I'm not sure why they wanted to be coy about there's going to be a school in LA, but, fine. Not a big problem.

**JW:** Well, and, it doesn't seem like a horrible idea, 'Hey, let's have a school that's, you know, for the population of the state that's focused on STEM."

That's been a real big focus in education policy for the past few years. It's been focusing on STEM training and the careers with that kind of education.

**TB:** And there are dozens and dozens of STEM schools in LA currently. Either its traditional K-12 schools, magnet schools - which I probably should've mentioned also are part of the traditional school system that have a unique focus - there are many charter schools that are STEM schools.

But one thing also I guess I should point out is, there's no certification of STEM school. The Principal and Superintendent have no one to ask and show their curriculum and say, "Please," say, "State Board of Ed, will you bless us with the STEM School certification and let everyone that we're a STEM school."

Basically, if you have enough science and math and whatnot classes, you just call yourself a STEM school, and that's fine. But this school now was saying we're going to do that in LA, to help that population that is underserved in this realm of education. So it's a common theme that we've seen with school choice where we are targeting folks that seem to have been historically disadvantaged and we want to give them a leg up. Which of course, is something that we all support.

The real kicker though is once we got to the governance of the school. It listed a small board and when we tallied up who gets to sit on this board it was very clear to us that this was going to be another privately managed board. You had the State Assembly able to appoint a member, the State Senate able to appoint a member, and then a member that is a representative of the University of California system - also located in a county of over 3.5 million people, so, UCLA got to pick a person on that board. And then we had at least four other members that had no characteristics, qualifications, identification, anything. It just said there will be at least a seven-person board. So, who knows who these people are and where they come from?

**JW:** We just know that of the seven, two are definitely publicly accountable; one is somewhat publicly accountable through the UC system and UCLA?

**TB:** Exactly. And when you look at your traditional school system and what we've done in this country since the Founding Fathers were founding schools in the colonies was: there needs to be a publicly elected board that is tied and accountable to the community because these are our children that are coming here to learn, to thrive, and to be members of our community. So of course we ought to have this say, and the schools have to be held accountable to the public.

In this scenario though, what chance does a parent have to appeal a question, or appeal an issue that comes up from the school when only three out of the seven have any tie to a public agency? I don't think UCLA... we don't elect anyone to UCLA. We don't elect hardly anyone to the UC Regent Board, maybe with the exception of the Lt. Governor. And let's go outside and ask some Californians, "Hey, do you know who we elect to the UC Regent Board?"

I will bake all the cookies for the winner for the rest of their life and I don't think I'm going to bake any cookies after that contest.

So, there's just a huge gap here between the parents, the students, and also those who would work at this school, and the accountability that comes with normal education. That was our huge problem. Not only are we expanding this awkward third tier of our education system, but there was no public accountability, for all intents and purposes, like we do see in the regular school system and in charters. So that, right there, full stop, we're all in opposed to this bill.