

October 28, 2009

The Honorable Gloria Romero
The Honorable Bob Huff
The Honorable Mark Wyland
The Honorable Elaine Alquist
California State Senate
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

SBX5 1
SUPPORT IF AMENDED

Dear Senators,

The California State PTA has taken a SUPPORT IF AMENDED position on SBX5 1 which makes statutory changes in the Education Code, some of which may be necessary for California to qualify for specific one-time federal funding.

PTA supports many of the provisions of the bill, including the removal of the firewall between teacher and student data systems and increasing parental choice in the public school system based on the educational needs of their children. And although we support many of the concepts in the bill, the impact of these changes and the possibility of unintended consequences for students raises concerns for our organization and our almost one million members.

This bill would enact the Open Enrollment Act to enable pupils to attend public schools in school districts other than their school district of residence. PTA questions whether this would be a successful strategy as parents of students in underperforming schools may not have access to information about the program, about higher performing schools, or about its options for their child. In addition, the bill is silent on transportation and this may limit access for students whose parents may not have the means to transport their students to these schools. Would open enrollment really accomplish its intent or would it result in a reduction in diversity and a widening achievement gap for the students left behind?

PTA believes that charter schools can provide K-12 students and parents with expanded choices in educational opportunities. However, the lack of specified increased academic and fiscal accountability for charter schools in conjunction with the removal of the cap on the number of charter schools that may operate in California is another area of concern. The bill only calls for

a hearing within 90 days to consider revocation of a charter if the school is one of the identified low performing schools. PTA believes that charter schools should be held to the same standards of academic accountability and fiscal transparency as all other public schools.

Additionally, we are concerned about the limited number of options available for turning around historically underperforming schools. One size does not fit all and this prescriptive approach does not seem to take into consideration the need for input from the parents and communities these schools serve. PTA believes in local control of educational decisions when it is in the best interests of students.

And while we support the linkage of teacher and student data, we believe that there should be clarity about how that data may be used. We support multiple measures for student assessment and we would support multiple measures of assessment for teachers and administrators.

PTA acknowledges the sense of urgency created by the short timeline for the Race to the Top Funds application but our sense of urgency is based on providing all students, especially the historically underserved, opportunities for a high quality education.

PTA would be happy to speak with the appropriate member of your staffs to further discuss our concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patty Scripster". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patty Scripster, Legislative Advocate
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E-mail: pscripster@capta.org

Cc: Senate Education Committee