

January 8, 2010

Glen Thomas, Secretary of Education
Jack O'Connell, State Superintendent of Public Instruction
Theodore Mitchell, President, State Board of Education
c/o State Working Group for Race to the Top
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SUPPORT FOR CALIFORNIA'S RACE TO THE TOP APPLICATION

Dear Secretary Thomas, Superintendent O'Connell, and Board President Mitchell:

On behalf of the California State PTA, representing nearly 1 million members throughout the state, we are pleased to offer our strong support to California's Race to the Top (RTTT) application. We have supported RTTT from the beginning as we believe it provides an opportunity to focus the dialogue on key education reforms that we have been advocating for many years. Improving educational outcomes for all students and closing the achievement gap are among our highest priorities.

We believe that the adoption of Common Core Standards has tremendous value, as long as it does not result in a decline in the rigor of our current standards. The provision that allows California to supplement up to 15 percent of the standards, if necessary to maintain rigor, appears to satisfy this concern. We fully support the notion of adopting internationally benchmarked standards to ensure that our students are prepared to compete in a global economy. Moves to increase the depth and possibly reduce the breadth of the current content standards are long overdue.

We have been particularly pleased about the emphasis on data systems to support instruction as this has been a longstanding legislative priority for us. We fully support a statewide, longitudinal data system that measures student achievement over time to guide state-level decisions on educational programs and resource allocations; as well as locally implemented data systems that provide formative assessments to guide classroom instruction on an ongoing basis. We need valid, reliable data at all levels to implement effective educational reform. We applaud the references to multiple measures of student achievement, as we agree that we must clearly measure the degree to which our students are gaining the high-level problem-solving, critical thinking and communication skills they will need to be successful in higher education and in the workplace.

We also wholeheartedly agree with the importance of every child in California having access to highly effective teachers and leaders. We have long supported the need for a stronger focus on the recruitment and retention of high-quality educators through strong pre-service programs, ongoing professional development, adequate remuneration, and continuous support and guidance. The inclusion of student achievement data is an entirely appropriate component in measuring the effectiveness of teachers and educational leaders. Parents want the best teachers possible for their children, and we support the clear

direction for schools and districts to use evaluations to remove ineffective teachers and principals after they have had ample opportunities to improve, while ensuring that such decisions are made using rigorous standards, and transparent and fair procedures.

California State PTA agrees with the need to focus serious attention on turning around the lowest-performing schools. We are encouraged by the recognition of the value of parent involvement in this regard. Educators cannot solve the multitude of deficits facing many of the students in these struggling schools, including poverty, hunger, abusive family situations, and physical or mental health conditions. Parent involvement must be a central component of any school turnaround strategy – as well as for success at all schools.

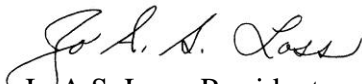
Turning around persistently underperforming schools will require a comprehensive and ongoing commitment to strengthen parent and family involvement. It is not a one-time activity for parents or for educators – and it is not something that can just be checked off a list. California State PTA is fully prepared to work with the State Department of Education as well as local education agencies to provide support, training and resources in implementing effective models of meaningful parent involvement and to assist in turning around low-performing schools and improving student achievement.

California needs a system where parent involvement is supported and integrated in everything that is accomplished in our schools. Administrators, teachers and classified staff must be trained on how to work with parents and with our many cultures. Parents must have consistent access to good, independent information, and open, inclusive processes that enable them to interact with school districts and make the best decisions possible on behalf of their children. Parents must feel welcome on school campuses from preschool through high school. Information provided to parents must be in the languages used in their homes. And parents must be provided with resources to help their students with homework, career-path selection and college readiness. As the largest and oldest children’s advocacy organization in the state, PTA has the resources, training programs, expertise and volunteer leadership to assist the state and local agencies in these efforts.

Race to the Top offers special opportunities for education reform – but none will succeed without parents, students and communities as full partners in the process. And none will succeed without an ongoing commitment by the state to invest appropriately in education.

In summary, we strongly support California’s application to the Race to the Top program. We look forward to working with our educational partners throughout the state in implementing valuable educational reforms to benefit the students of California.

Sincerely,



Jo A.S. Loss, President
California State PTA