



## **Update on the PTA-supported *Our Children, Our Future* Statewide Education Initiative**

**February 3, 2012**

*Please note: PTAs should never distribute any campaign material on school or school district property.*

### **What does the *Our Children, Our Future* initiative do and why is PTA supporting it?**

California's public schools currently rank 47<sup>th</sup> in the nation in terms of per-student funding.

In our annual survey, nine out of every 10 local PTA leaders and members rated "adequate school funding" as extremely important – the highest response by far to any policy issue.

Parents and PTA members believe more funding is needed to restore the arts, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) and physical education; as well as to reduce class sizes and add back counselors, school libraries, and librarians.

Parents and all Californians see something really scary happening: The cuts to schools have been too deep. An entire generation of children is being denied the public education program they need to succeed in the workforce and in life.

As PTA members, we cannot let this happen.

This year, rather than sitting back and hoping someone would step up and do something about this urgent situation, the California State PTA chose to be that "someone."

We have taken a very unusual step. But these are unusual times.

The California State PTA has helped put forward the *Our Children, Our Future* for the November 2012 ballot.

When fully implemented, the *Our Children, Our Future* initiative will generate approximately \$1,100 to \$1,700 per student in additional funding per year, depending on the type of school (elementary, middle or high school), and an additional allocation for low-income students. Every school site in the state would receive funding. This new money can be used to help

restore and strengthen programs and services for students, including specific priority areas identified by PTA members, such as instruction in the arts, STEM and physical education; smaller class sizes; and more librarians, libraries and counselors.

All of this new money for K-12 schools must be spent at the school site, with local parent and school site input. The legislature and governor are prohibited from directing how the funds can be spent or to alter the amount of funding provided. In addition, the initiative provides significant funding for early childhood education programs, which are proven to mitigate the achievement gap.

The new revenue would be generated by a sliding-scale increase in the personal income tax. Those who can afford it would be asked to pay the most.

Polls show that Californians are willing to pay more in taxes when they know the funding supports public schools.

The latest version of the ballot measure also specifies that during the first four fiscal years the initiative is in effect, 30 percent of the new revenue – approximately \$3 billion annually – will go toward state education bond payments. This ensures that, in addition to transforming the state's educational system, the initiative will help free up general fund revenue to address the threat of continuing budget deficits and budget cuts that impact children, students and families.

### **Who is behind our initiative?**

The *Our Children, Our Future* initiative is sponsored by the Advancement Project, a nonprofit civil rights organization led by attorney and children's advocate Molly Munger.

Molly and the *Our Children, Our Future* campaign team have included California State PTA as full partners. We've provided input on the ballot measure language, and we've been involved in key planning and strategy decisions.

Recently, the campaign formed an official committee and hired a full-time campaign director to coordinate day-to-day activities. The campaign effort also includes a range of highly regarded specialists who are helping with media, research, social media, tax policy, and grassroots support. We are part of an exceptionally strong and talented team that is moving full speed ahead.

### **What happens next?**

The *Our Children, Our Future* ballot measure language was submitted to the State Attorney General for title and summary right before the end of the year. We expect to have petitions ready to circulate in communities for signatures sometime around February 17. We'll then have until approximately April 20 to submit enough valid signatures to qualify the measure for

the November 2012 statewide ballot. Given this short timeline, we are organizing right now so that we can make the most of February, March and April to get our volunteers trained and ready to collect signatures.

### **Aren't there other tax-related initiatives being proposed? How does ours fit in?**

The *Our Children, Our Future* initiative is not the only tax measure that will be circulated for signatures. For instance, Governor Brown has introduced a ballot measure that would temporarily raise the sales tax and the personal income tax to help address the state's budget crisis and prevent deeper cuts to public education.

Our plan, the Governor's, and another proposed by the California Federation of Teachers all emphasize the critical need for new revenues. The Governor's plan is complex and tied to his recent state budget proposal; we continue to study this plan to better understand the interplay with the budget proposal and the full implications for schools.

While it is premature to make any ballot predictions at this time, we do know that voters clearly want a transformative change in our schools. We feel confident that the *Our Children, Our Future* initiative would create this change; **ours is truly the education initiative.**

*Our Children, Our Future* would generate substantially more funding for public schools than any other measure – about twice that raised by the Governor's – and it is the only one that raises revenue specifically for early childhood education. It also requires that the funds be allocated on a per-student basis directly to school sites to improve academic performance, graduation rates and vocational, career, college and life readiness. *Our Children, Our Future* also takes Sacramento politicians out of the equation by prohibiting the Legislature from directing how the funding can be spent.

### **Will people be confused by more than one tax-related initiative on the ballot?**

It is much too early to know which measures will qualify for the ballot or what the impact will be. Our focus right now is on qualifying the best measure possible for children and schools, and that is the *Our Children, Our Future Act*.

*Our Children, Our Future* most closely reflects the goals and priorities of parents and PTA members throughout the state, as well as our PTA resolutions and position statements approved at past conventions. This measure presents a real opportunity to transform our schools in November 2012.

**We may have only one good opportunity to pass a significant revenue initiative in the next decade. The voters have indicated they would support a measure that raises revenues for their local schools. We want to make sure we get one that does as much as possible for children and schools.**

## **Next Steps: Grass-roots organizing and signature gathering**

PTA is working with a firm called GroundWorks that has been hired by the campaign to help support our grass-roots involvement.

One of the first steps in this work is to organize volunteers to collect signatures to qualify the ballot measure. The campaign will need to submit approximately 500,000 valid signatures by about April 20 to qualify the measure. PTA will be helping this effort through a “friends and family” campaign to reach out to our members and our communities to help support the signature gathering effort.

Our work is highly important not only to collect enough valid signatures, but because it helps to raise awareness about the initiative, creating a groundswell of support, and enhancing the local grass-roots networks that we will need to succeed in November.

In the upcoming weeks and months, meetings and events will be scheduled in local districts, councils and units to provide professional training and support for our volunteers. We also plan to have a significant social media component to the campaign. Through these and other techniques, we’ll be able to spread the word and spread the workload in order to make the best use of our volunteers’ time, and utilize PTA’s tremendous size and reach across the state.

**We encourage every PTA member, unit, council or district to get involved!** Just as every child counts, every signature we collect counts toward the bigger movement to transform our schools.

**You can join the effort to qualify and pass the *Our Children, Our Future* initiative now.**

Click [here](#) to indicate what types of volunteer actions you’d be willing to take. Also check with your PTA council and district to see what local grass-roots activities are being planned.

You can also stay informed about the initiative by visiting the PTA website or the campaign website at [www.ourchildrenourfuture2012.com](http://www.ourchildrenourfuture2012.com).

## **Is California State PTA contributing money to the campaign?**

No. California State PTA is not making any direct financial contribution to the campaign. Our main contribution to the campaign will be our time and volunteer strength. Our state association budget will cover certain modest expenses related to attending meetings and distributing materials to our own members.

Additionally, we believe PTA will benefit from the work of the many in-kind consultants like GroundWorks, which will help support our work throughout the state.

## **Resources and Materials**

We are finalizing a range of materials to help everyone talk about the initiative, and to help our volunteers in the field. These include a set of Frequently Asked Questions, comparison charts, and a campaign activity list of do's and don'ts. These materials will be available on the website and at local meetings soon.

## **Questions?**

Feel free to contact Patty Scripter, Director of Legislation, California State PTA, at [legislation@capta.org](mailto:legislation@capta.org).

**Thanks for all that you do on behalf of all children and families!**