

## State Budget FAQs February 2009

### Q. What's at stake in these state budget negotiations?

- A. We are not only in an economic crisis in California, we're at a crossroads. In his budget proposal, the Governor has called for unprecedented cuts to schools – nearly \$14 billion when you take into account what has already been cut in the current year. Cuts of this magnitude threaten all students and our future workforce. The well-being of an entire generation of California's children – and, by extension, our state's future – is at risk if we move backward in our commitment to funding education. We must invest more in our children now if we care about what California will look like in the future. We cannot expect a high quality of life if we do not have healthy, well-educated children.

### Q. How will these proposed cuts affect students?

- A. Our students are already feeling the impact of the \$3 billion in cuts approved by the Legislature and Governor last September. An additional \$11 billion in cuts as proposed by the Governor will negatively impact every aspect of education. Local school districts will be forced to make untenable choices like shortening the school year, increasing class sizes, laying off teachers and support staff, providing students even less access to qualified counselors and school nurses, cutting academic and enrichment programs, and relying on instructional materials and technology that are already woefully outdated. California already spends less than 46 other states in terms of what we invest in each student. These cuts will make us dead last in the nation.

### Q. Given California's economy, aren't some cuts to education and children's programs inevitable? Don't we all need to sacrifice?

- A. Our students – who did nothing to create this budget crisis – have already sacrificed. While further cuts to education and other programs have been proposed in Sacramento, those cuts would be devastating to children. Our continued opposition and resistance to further cuts is essential to mitigate the harm that any cuts will cause.

The question now is one of priorities. **We believe education and children's futures should be the top priority of legislators and the Governor. Our state's leaders should take all steps necessary to prevent deeper cuts in those areas.** We understand the magnitude of the fiscal crisis. But we also feel strongly that our commitment to California's future cannot be compromised in tough financial times. The state has other options, including raising sufficient revenues to protect our students and our future.

**Q. Doesn't PTA need to be part of the budget solution?**

A. Absolutely. We have been and will continue to be. First and foremost, we believe that legislators must think about children first in the budget. The real issue is investment in the future.

And it's important to remember recent history: PTA and all other statewide education groups supported a proposal last summer that called for a balanced approach to solving the state's crisis. That approach included new revenues and some very dramatic cuts. PTA did not like those cuts one bit – but we understood the state's crisis, and we took seriously the call for working together to achieve a compromise. Unfortunately, the legislature did not adopt that compromise package. The budget that was adopted was unstable before the ink of the Governor's signature dried. Sufficient sources of additional revenues were not approved. And now the state finds itself in an even deeper hole.

**Q. In addition to proposing deep cuts, is it true the Governor has called for giving school districts complete and permanent flexibility in how they spend funds in this budget?**

A. Here is what the Governor proposes for how schools spend funds that currently must be spent on specific programs called “categoricals.”

*In recognition of the current fiscal constraints that schools face and to assist them absorb the reductions in state aid that are necessary due to the current economic downturn, the Administration also proposes to allow schools **complete** and **permanent** flexibility with respect to categorical funding.*

**First and foremost, we believe flexibility is no substitute for sufficient funding.**

Generally speaking, PTA has supported efforts that would provide local schools and school districts with more decision-making authority. We believe reform to school funding and categorical programs is important and must be addressed, but decisions to permanently do away with important programs – programs that were created to address specific needs that were previously unmet – should not be made in the midst of an economic crisis. Local school districts face unprecedented cuts and daunting decisions unless the state increases revenues to protect children.

**Q. School districts have to do something to prepare for these cuts, don't they?**

A. Definitely. We understand the need for school administrators and school boards to plan responsibly to protect the financial health of our school districts, but complete and permanent flexibility as proposed so far in the Capitol means programs that parents, educators and communities care deeply about could be permanently eliminated. PTA supports adequate funding for these programs and services, such as smaller class sizes, arts and physical education, science, counselors, nurses, librarians, as well as for health and social services for children. PTA's mission is to represent our members and advocate on behalf of all children and families. Our role is to remind our elected officials

what is important for children. Our role is to point out that there are other options, such as including sufficient new revenues to protect children from harm.

**Q. What is PTA's position on class size reduction?**

- A. California State PTA has long advocated for smaller class sizes in all public schools, with a special emphasis on small class sizes in the early grades when children learn critical skills such as reading. Parents want their children in smaller classes. Teachers have a greater ability to provide instruction in smaller classes. Thousands of our delegates throughout the state, representing our nearly 1 million volunteer members, have made class size reduction a priority. In 2005, PTA's Class Size Reduction flexibility resolution that was passed at the California State PTA Convention calls for:

*An average of no more than twenty students and a qualified certificated teacher in each kindergarten through third grade classroom **within a school** while allowing individual classroom maximums of up to twenty-two students without penalty. Recognizing that class sizes at all grade levels in California are increasing, this resolution also seeks to reaffirm the California State PTA's commitment to reducing class sizes to no more than 25 students per teacher in grades 4-12 academic classes.*

The principles on which this position is based are steadfast through good and challenging economic times. According to the analysis of the independent California Budget Project, the Governor's proposal would "allow schools to shift earmarked funds, such those for class size reduction and instructional materials, to a district's General Fund." We understand that many districts are not fully funded for the costs incurred in providing the class size reduction program. Yet, the state's commitment to small class sizes and other programs that are good for our children may disappear if we don't find a solution. And the best solution is to provide more new revenues in the budget. This is a difficult option – an option some of our legislators do not want to face up to – but small class sizes can be preserved if the state approves sufficient revenues to do so.

**Q. Is PTA running TV ads about class size reduction?**

- A. No. We have been communicating our position to members in support of additional revenues, and in support of key programs such as class size reduction, arts, librarians, counselors and others in a wide range of ways. We are not part of the TV ad campaign that the California Teachers Association has launched related to class size reduction. We contributed no money and had no input to the content of the ads.

**Q. My local legislator says he/she has taken a "no new taxes" pledge. He/she says we need to cut spending, not raise revenues. How can I respond in a constructive way?**

- A. First of all, ask your legislator specifically where he/she thinks the public education budget could be cut without causing tremendous damage to children, especially when California is already near the bottom in per-student spending. What is frivolous, over-funded or unneeded in our schools? Legislators need to be specific about what they think

can be cut, or else face the reality of the severe damage any additional cuts will cause. We deserve a state dialogue that is detailed and fact-based.

Next, offer a reminder to your legislator of the oath of office, which included a pledge to *all* constituents and to *all Californians* that legislators would “well and faithfully discharge” their duties. One of their most important duties is to pass a responsible budget, one that does not harm children.

PTA has said all along, a *balanced* approach must be taken to solve the budget crisis. We believe our advocacy efforts have increased awareness that any solution must include sufficient new revenues – and there is more work to be done.

Lastly, ask your legislator to consider this: If you were responsible for a family with additional children to feed and educate and keep healthy and you actually had a way to increase your income to do so, wouldn't that be the most responsible course to take? If there were expenses you could cut without harming your kids, wouldn't you cut those first? That's what we're asking our legislators to do.

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