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2327 L Street, Sacramento, CA 95816-5014

916.440.1985 • FAX 916.440.1986 • E-mail [info@capta.org](mailto:info@capta.org) • [www.capta.org](http://www.capta.org)

**Comments to:  
Senate Committee on Education &  
Subcommittee #1 of the Budget and Fiscal Review Committee  
Informational Hearing  
August 26, 2009**

**Race to the Top Fund**

California State PTA includes nearly 1 million members statewide and more than 3,700 local PTA associations with 55 percent of our PTAs located in Title I schools. As such, our organization is uniquely positioned to offer policy recommendations based on the experience and perspectives of local parents, educators and volunteers whose children, grandchildren and communities are served by the public school system.

**Base Reform on Student Needs**

Although California State PTA welcomes the current focus on school reform, we believe the emphasis must be on student needs rather than being compliance-driven or based on an application deadline. Dating back to our analysis and input relating to the Getting Down to Facts Study, and the recommendations of the Governor's Commission on Education Excellence and of the P-16 Council, we believe that reform must be research-based, measurable and sustainable. We acknowledge the sense of urgency created by the short timeline for the Race to the Top funds application. However, we want to be sure that the proposed reforms accomplish what is best for students. This one-time money, while substantial in total, when measured out to the states that qualify, will represent only a small portion of the drastic cuts that schools have faced. The federal government has in the past mandated programs such as IDEA and NCLB without providing the promised ongoing funding commitment required to sustain the programs. Education reform must not be just one or two sprints, but a marathon of ongoing commitment to give our students the education needed to compete in the global economy.

**Equal Opportunity for All**

PTA believes that all children and youth are entitled to a high-quality, comprehensive and diversified education that includes equal opportunity for all. California has some of the highest and most comprehensive content standards in the nation, and any adoption of national standards and assessments must not lower our state standards or negatively impact the progress already made toward aligning content standards, curriculum, assessment and professional development for teachers and administrators. Transparency in the development and adoption of any national standards or assessments is critical. Content standards should be developed with input from educators, parents and the community.

## **Effective Use of Data**

We continue to support the development of a robust, longitudinal data system that does more than just meet the compliance requirements of No Child Left Behind, but also would make key data available to help inform instructional practices in the classroom, to guide more effective school resource allocations, and make student performance information available and understandable to parents and the community. Any statewide assessment program should measure individual student achievement over time as well as the effectiveness of instructional delivery and curriculum support. We must protect student privacy and make data available in a timely manner back to school sites to help guide and evaluate reform efforts.

We fully support efforts to effectively link data from preschool through higher education. Linkages from K-12 to higher education will facilitate collaboration between secondary schools and higher education institutions to improve student outcomes and increase opportunities for student success. Similarly, linking K-12 data to preschool data will provide valuable information on the value of early learning opportunities and assist in developing successful strategies for young children as they transition into the K-12 academic learning environment.

## **Equity and Access**

California State PTA believes that equity and access are paramount and we support parental choice within the public school system based on the educational needs of individual students. Any system of choice must:

- admit students based on a fair, equitable and timely process at all schools;
- maintain the racial/ethnic/socioeconomic/learning-differences diversity of the receiving or sending schools/school districts; and
- provide opportunities for meaningful involvement for parents.

PTA believes charter schools have a valid place in our public school system, as they provide K-12 students and parents with expanded choices in educational opportunities and may serve as laboratories for programs that can be replicated in other public schools. Public charter schools are most successful when proposed, developed and evaluated in the communities they serve. Charter schools must be held both fiscally and academically accountable to the parents and communities they serve. Additionally, charter schools must be willing to accept all students, regardless of their special needs or status as English language learners.

## **Local Control**

In regard to school governance, we believe that decision-making authority must be moved closer to the district and/or school site whenever it is in the best interests of children and families. Local schools and locally elected school boards are accountable to the communities that elect them and must have maximum ability to set policies and make decisions to ensure that all students meet the standards.

The California State PTA is pleased that major education reform is being proposed. Thoughtful and responsible governance requires that the necessary time is taken to fully discuss and consider significant reform. We must carefully consider these substantive and lasting reforms to ensure that they will provide positive outcomes for children and avoid unintended consequences.

California State PTA. August 2009