

California State PTA Calls on Lawmakers to Be Accountable, Pass the State Budget

PTA SUPPORTS BUDGET ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

The California State PTA, along with other members of the Education Coalition, is part of an intense public relations campaign urging legislators to pass a state budget. The Coalition supports the May Revision of the Governor's 2003-04 State Budget released on May 14, which calls for a balanced approach to close the \$38 billion gap between revenue and expenditures. It proposes targeted program cuts and a half-cent increase in the sales tax.

State and local PTA leaders have written letters, made phone calls and participated in press conferences and editorial board meetings, but little or no progress has been made to resolve the impasse as this issue of *Sacramento Update* goes to press. Lawmakers refuse to make the tough choices, including overhauling the tax system and raising revenue needed to adequately fund schools and to provide essential services.

If unresolved, the impasse will have serious consequences for Californians. The state will run out of cash a few weeks into the 2003-2004 budget year. Further downgrades to its credit rating will increase the cost of borrowing. In a recent article, *Los Angeles Times* business writer James Flanigan asked, "Is there any hope of intelligent compromise at this late hour?" He answered, "Unfortunately, a long, hot summer of partisan quarreling is assured by the battle to recall Gov. Davis. Intransigence and ignorance seem the order of the day." In that same article

Stephen Levy, who heads the Center for the Continuing Study of the California Economy, said, "California is in danger of becoming the state that can't – or won't – govern itself."

Currently, elected officials are not accountable to pass a budget by the Constitutional deadlines. The 2/3 vote requirement to adopt a state budget also contributes to partisan gridlock. Only two other states – Arkansas and Rhode Island – have a two-thirds requirement. That is why the California State PTA has voted to support the Budget Accountability Act, an initiative measure proposed for the March 2004 statewide primary election ballot. It would hold the Governor and Legislature accountable if they do not pass a budget on time, reform the budget process by reducing the vote requirement from 2/3 to 55% and encourage fiscal responsibility by creating a reserve fund of at least 5% in good times. The Budget Accountability Act would hold elected officials accountable to taxpayers for producing more responsible and timely state budgets and offers a permanent solution for California's budget crisis.

PTA is participating in the signature gathering effort to qualify the Budget Accountability Act for the ballot. Petitions were available the week of June 24, and PTA members are helping to gather the signatures needed to meet the August 6 deadline for the volunteer signature gathering campaign.

Cecelia Mansfield, Director of Legislation

PTA Battles ETS, While the State Fair Goes Smoke Free

Environmental Tobacco Smoke is the phrase currently being used for the old bug-a-boo we used to call second hand smoke. California State PTA seeks and supports legislation to protect the rights of non-smokers. The consensus of the worldwide scientific community is that exposure to secondhand smoke poses a serious health risk, and there is no safe level of exposure. This includes the World Health Organization, U.S. Surgeon General, American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, American Medical Association, National Cancer Institute, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, California EPA and numerous other medical and scientific organizations from around the world. The California State PTA has adopted a position of SUPPORT on **AB 846** (Vargas). This bill would prohibit smoking inside a state owned or leased building and within 20 feet of a main exit, entrance, or operable window of a public building.

Friday, May 30, 2003, was an exciting day for tobacco-free advocates and for all Californians! The California Exposition and State Fair Board voted to make the Cal Expo fair grounds smoke-free, with designated areas for smoking, year-round! Advocacy activities for this policy were begun back in January when Gayle Mathe, Health Educator and Policy Development Specialist for the Dental Health Foundation and 3rd District's Legislation Chair, first approached members of the State Fair Board. This initial contact was followed by a letter writing campaign from key health advocates, including a letter signed by Cindy Wong, California State PTA Vice President for Health. Other organizations that joined together to form a coalition of support and sent letters to the fair board were: The Sacramento Tobacco Control Coalition; American Lung Association, American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, BREATH, The Sacramento County Alcohol and Drug Advisory Board, and the Alcohol and Drug Services Division of the Sacramento County Department Health and Human Services. Senator Deborah Ortiz and Assemblyman Darrell Steinberg also wrote letters in support for the policy.

Actual adoption of the policy followed several meetings Gayle had with Cal Expo staff, and a presentation at the fair board meeting by Gayle and by Cassie Stagg of "Friday Night Live" of Sacramento County. In the audience that day were several stake-

holders, including Peggy Parker of the California State PTA Health Commission. Of course, some fair board members had questions, but by the time this meeting was held, most of the board members and the staff were very supportive. Along with the broad base of support from the community, policy adoption was ultimately unanimous! I asked Gayle to provide some personal observations about her success in achieving a designated smoking policy at the State Fairgrounds. Gayle writes:

"As 2001-2003 legislation chair for the 3rd District PTA, I have seen the PTA support many bills designed to improve or protect the health of California's children. As a health educator for the Dental Health Foundation, it was very special to be at the helm of a project that has such far-reaching positive health consequences. Not only does this policy protect the more than 1 million State Fair guests each year, but will protect all of the other guests at Cal Expo events year-round. What's more, this policy will lead the way for the many county fairs all over the state that have been considering outdoor secondhand smoke policies. These fair boards now have some validation that outdoor smoke-free entertainment at the fair is a sound decision."

Michael Butler, Health Advocate

PTA ARTS Bill: More Good News!

Thank you for all the letters in support of the PTA sponsored arts bill, **SB 469** (Scott)! The bill passed out of the Assembly Education Committee on June 18 with a vote of 9 to 0 and will now go to the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

PTA and the California Alliance for Arts Education are co-sponsoring SB 469, which authorizes a school district to use Instructional Materials funding to purchase adopted instructional materials for the visual and performing arts, foreign language, and health after the district has provided each pupil with standards-aligned instructional materials in reading/language arts, mathematics, history/social science, and science.

Carol Kocivar, Education Advocate



PTA Fights for Clean Restrooms

A safe and healthy school facility is a priority for parents of school age children, and PTA strongly supports adequate funding for school facilities, including restrooms. PTA members are increasingly concerned about the disrepair and lack of adequate restroom facilities on school campuses. Many restroom facilities are unusable due to broken toilets, sinks and fixtures, are not stocked with simple supplies such as toilet paper, paper towels, or are filthy because of the lack of custodial care. Many schools simply close campus bathrooms rather than maintain and monitor them. PTA is now fighting back with a strong SUPPORT position on **AB 1124** (Nunez). This bill would require, with certain exceptions for emergency safety concerns, the first priority for the use of school maintenance funds be to ensure that school restroom facilities for pupils are functional and meet the same state and local hygiene standards generally applicable to public restrooms. PTA testified in support of AB 1124 before the Senate Education Committee, which passed the bill out of committee on June 11. AB 1124 is now waiting for a vote on the Senate floor.

Meanwhile, **AB 356** (Hancock), the pupil assessment bill sponsored by the California Teachers Association, and strongly supported by PTA, awaits a July hearing by the Senate Education Committee. The bill is moving through the legislative process in part because it has been amended to meet the concerns of some special interests. AB 356 would now require the State Board of Education to examine alternatives to testing second graders, and would delay, rather than eliminate, the California High School Exit Exam as a condition of high school graduation.

Ann Desmond, Education Advocate

Master Plan Bills Slated to Return in January

No matter what you may hear, the Master Plan for Education is not dead. The Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education, Kindergarten through University intends to pass legislation to implement this major work which has involved so many in the education community, including parents. The bills were always intended to be two-year

bills, so many legislators have not felt an urgency to begin serious consideration. Thus the bills have been sent to the legislative parking lot, officially known as the Senate and Assembly Appropriations Suspense Files. Several of the omnibus bills, particularly **SB 6** (Alpert), which deals with governance and accountability, **AB 56** (Steinberg), which deals with school readiness, and **AB 242** (Liu), which deals with personnel, have run into barriers. The Master Plan staff is planning meetings with legislators and stakeholders to dialogue possible solutions.

The staff plans to hold these meetings during the rest of this legislation session. The amended bills will be ready for consideration in the house of origin when the 2004 legislative session begins in January. The bill PTA has spent the most time studying is SB 6, the governance and accountability omnibus bill for K-16. The Community College governance reforms have provoked the loudest opposition, but staff is hopeful this issue will be resolved. The K-12 reforms will require specific definitions that would "give teeth" to the policy and fiscal roles of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

The California State PTA Legislation Team will spend time working with the Master Plan staff to voice PTA positions on each of these major bills in order to create meaningful reforms that will enhance education for the children of California.

Harriet Borson, Consultant

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SAVE THE DATE!
California State PTA Annual Legislation
Conference – February 17-19, 2004
Sacramento

Rights of Pupils Questioned by Police

AB 1012 (Steinberg) was amended twice in the Assembly before it passed the Assembly and went to the Senate side. It was amended June 11, 2003 and has been doubled referred to Senate Education Committee and Senate Public Safety Committee. Two significant changes have been added to the bill: (1) instead of allowing high school students to have a parent or an "adult" present, it now has narrowed the "adult" to family members or people listed on the emergency contact list to address concerns that a student might choose an "adult" gang member and (2) adds substantial risk of immediate property damage as a ground for a peace officer to question a student. AB 1012 defines "questioning" as communication with a minor pupil during school hours or during any school related activity or school sponsored activity by a peace officer, where the pupil is made available to the peace officer at the request of a peace officer or at the request of a school employee for questioning as a victim, suspect, or person with information concerning a suspected violation of school rules that constitute grounds for expulsion or a suspected commission of a crime.

School pupils are often questioned by peace officers at school without the knowledge of parents. Contrary to what many parents believe, they possess neither statutory nor constitutional right to be present with their child during peace officer questioning at school. Elementary school pupils are too young to understand what their rights and responsibilities may be in regard to an investigation and secondary school pupils may not be aware of their rights. There is no law enforcement support for AB 1012 at the present time. PTA strongly supports AB 1012.

PTA also supports **AB 24** (Negrette-McLeod), which would require the Emergency Medical Services authority to produce an informative brochure or booklet, for consumer use, explaining the child drowning hazards of, possible safety measures for, and appropriate drowning hazard prevention measures for home swimming pools and spas. It would also provide that if an informative brochure or booklet is delivered to a transferee in connection with the transfer of real property or manufactured housing, a seller or broker is not required to provide additional information concerning child drowning hazards.

Peggy Dial
2001-03 Community Concerns Advocate

DC Corner

Work on IDEA Reauthorization Continues

U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige has released a set of principles that highlight four areas that the Department of Education believes to be crucial in the reauthorization of IDEA: strengthen school accountability for results; simplify paperwork for states and communities, and increase flexibility for all; target federal education dollars to implement research-based practices that have been proven to help students with disabilities learn; and increase school choice options for parents.

National PTA supports these overall principles. National PTA will also seek mandatory full funding for IDEA and will work to assure that: barriers that limit the possibilities for children with disabilities to perform at higher standards of performance are eliminated; parent involvement in the education of children with disabilities, parent rights, and due process protections are preserved; quality professional development opportunities are provided to all personnel who are involved in educating children with disabilities, and policies to recruit, hire, and train additional special education teachers are created; and school choice programs are not presented as alternatives to an appropriate public education.

PTA Member Action Counts!

Participants in the Member-to-Member Network received an alert from National PTA that asked them to contact their elected officials in the House and Senate and ask for an increase in funding for education. In the weeks prior to adoption of the federal FY 2003 budget bill, PTA members across the country sent nearly 1000 electronic letters to their representatives on Capitol Hill. Many of these came from California. National PTA's attention will now shift to the FY 2004 budget process. PTA's goal in 2004 will be to continue to build upon the increases to education so that states and schools have adequate funding to provide high-quality education opportunities for all children. Stay tuned!

Betty DeFea, 2001-03 Federal Advocate

<p>Celebrate Our Nation's Independence July 4th</p>
