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Our Purpose

To secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children and youth.

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From the Director of Legislation

California State PTA supports Propositions 24 and 25 for the November 2, 2010 ballot

By Debbie Look
Director of Legislation

We're taking action on state budget reform, one of California State PTA's highest legislative priorities. Our members clearly spoke out by passing a resolution at our 2009 convention and directed PTA to advocate for a reduction in the vote requirement to pass a state budget and revenue measures. Proposition 25 changes the legislative vote requirement necessary to pass the state budget from the current two-thirds to a simple majority. It also contains a provision, whereby if the Legislature fails to pass a budget bill by June 15, all members of the Legislature will permanently forfeit any reimbursement for salary and expenses for every day until the budget bill is finally passed.

The California State PTA Board of Managers voted to **Support Proposition 25**. We believe that California's two-thirds vote requirement to pass both the state budget and revenue measures has resulted in a dysfunctional process that promotes political stalemates and long delays in the passage of the budget. This severely impacts the level and stability of funding for our schools, and impacts other critical services to children and families. We believe that Proposition 25 moves in the direction of real reform and gives the majority in the Legislature the ability to set priorities for spending revenue.

California State PTA has also taken a position of **Support on Proposition 24**, which will also appear on the November ballot. By repealing recent changes to business taxes, which have yet to take effect, up to \$1.3 billion in additional annual general fund revenue is forecast. Throughout the recent budget cycles, PTA has consistently stated that a balanced approach is necessary to address the significant deficits faced by the State of California.

We have spoken out strongly in favor of new revenues, stating that we cannot balance the budgets with cuts alone. Without additional revenues, further cuts to education and critical children's services will continue to impact the quality of our children's education and their general health, safety and well-being. According to the nonpartisan California Budget Project (CBP), "The massive, permanent tax cuts enacted as part of recent budget agreements will exacerbate California's persistent budget troubles, requiring deeper cuts in public services or potentially larger tax increases for California's families to make up for lost revenue." Further, CBP notes that, "A very small number of

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corporations will receive tens of millions of dollars per year in tax breaks as a result of changes made to California's corporate tax laws."

Finally, PTA took a **Neutral position on Proposition 19**, the legalization and regulation of marijuana. Our thorough analysis determined that we do not have any relevant PTA authority, as directed by our members at conventions, to take a position on this measure.

According to our legislative policy, while PTA units, councils and districts are not required to work actively for any position, they may not officially oppose a stand taken by the California State PTA Board of Managers. Equally important, PTA units, councils and districts are **not** required to take a vote in order to take action in support of the California State PTA position on any statewide ballot measure.

For questions on allowable PTA election-year activities, see Toolkit section 4.3.

Watch your mailbox for a Special Election issue of PTA in California, which you should receive in mid-September. This issue will include PTA analyses on Propositions 25, 24 & 19 and will also include answers to questions of interest to PTA members from the two top candidates for Superintendent of Public Instruction, as well as other relevant election information and activities. The information will also be available on our website.

Parent Involvement

Obtaining a driver's license: A rite of passage unavailable to many foster youth

By Michael Butler

Parent Involvement Advocate

Getting a driver's license is the beginning of independence for our youth. For most teens, obtaining one is a rite of passage into adulthood; for many foster youth, however, a driver's license may be well beyond their means.

To obtain a provisional driver's license, a parent or guardian must sign an application. For a teen in foster care, this can present a problem. The application may be signed by a grandparent, a sibling over the age of 18, an aunt or uncle, or a foster parent with whom the minor resides **only if** the foster youth files proof of financial responsibility. Many foster youth are unable to provide this proof.

Extended family members or foster parents may be reluctant to accept liability for a minor. If a foster parent signs for the youth, the foster parent would be responsible for any damages resulting from accident or injury caused by the teen while behind the wheel.

In 1992, Assembly Bill 2591 (Areias) was passed in the California legislature and broke down some of the many obstacles. The bill allows someone other than a teen's foster parent or guardian to sign the teen's application for a driver's license. Probation officers and social workers are now allowed to sign a driver's license application without liability for any accidents or tickets the teen may incur.

Behind-the-wheel training gives teens an opportunity to gain driving

experience. Statistics show that the more experience teen drivers have, the less likely they are to be involved in an accident. Once youth age out of the foster care system at age 18, they are far less likely to employ a professional driving instructor because they lack the financial resources to do so. Wouldn't it be great if recently emancipated foster youth could receive a grant or scholarship from a local service club or business partner in order to finance a six hour behind-the-wheel course from a professional driving instructor?

Foster youth face a dilemma. When they age out of the foster care system, they are expected to be responsible for their own support; this means getting a job. In California, providing your own transportation to and from a job is required. Yet, getting a driver's license is often well beyond their means. We expect foster youth to provide their own support, yet we fail to provide them with the tools they need to succeed.

Reminder: The deadline to register to vote for the upcoming November 2 election is October 18. You may register to vote if you are a U.S. citizen, a resident of California, and are 18 years of age, or will be by the date of the next election

Education

Common Core Standards: What are they and what will they mean to California schools?

By Patty Scriptor
Education Advocate

California may rank near the bottom in class size and in ratios of school librarians, nurses and support personnel to students, but the state has always been able to point to its academic standards with pride. A Fordham Institute report in 2006 gave only three states – California, Indiana and Massachusetts – a grade of "A" for academic standards for all subjects. Therefore, the recent discussion about and adoption of the Common Core Standards by the State Board of Education (SBE) has created considerable debate in the education community about what adoption means for California's students.

The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) is an effort led by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA), designed to improve educational outcomes for students by developing a set of common, voluntary, internationally benchmarked K-12 standards for college and career readiness in English language arts and mathematics. Most states signed on to consider adoption as part of the requirements for the Race to the Top competitive grant program. To date, 36 states have adopted the Common Core Standards developed by CCSSO and the NGA Center in consultation with teachers, parents, other experts and administrators.

One criticism that is frequently heard about California's standards is that they are "a mile wide and an inch deep." The Common Core Standards are said to address that criticism and to present a more coherent and developmentally appropriate progression for all students. According to a recent evaluation by Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell: "The Common Core Standards have been internationally benchmarked, are research based, and are unequivocally rigorous. They are designed to be relevant to the real

world, and reflect the knowledge and skills that students need for success in college and career in the competitive global economy of the 21st century. The improvement to our standards through adoption of the Common Core and the thoughtful implementation of aligned instructional materials and professional development programs for teachers are key components in our efforts to close the achievement gap.”

Last January, as part of the Race to the Top legislation, the State Legislature created a common core commission to study the proposed CCSSI standards. The commission, consisting primarily of classroom teachers, took advantage of the rules which allowed states the leeway to change or supplement up to 15 percent of the CCSSI standards. The state commission, which recommended adoption to the SBE, did propose changes to both the math and English language arts standards. The English language arts standards were changed to include oral presentations, poetry and handwriting. The more controversial changes in the math standards would allow multiple paths for eighth-graders, such as a one-year algebra course, a two-year course or an algebra-readiness curriculum, to prepare students to take algebra in ninth grade. The math standards were changed by shifting some grade-by-grade standards with the goal of better preparing students to succeed in algebra on their first try.

Of course, the biggest question in the process is, What will come next? In a state with huge fiscal issues, and limited and dwindling resources for schools, where will the political resolve come from to address the need to develop curriculum frameworks, instructional materials, teacher preparation and professional development? Each of these steps is critical to successful implementation of the Common Core Standards to ensure success for our students. In light of these future challenges, it seems adoption will be the easiest accomplishment.

Community Concerns

The high school dropout rate: Are we in crisis?

By Patty Christiansen
Community Concerns Advocate

In recent months, President Barack Obama has spoken repeatedly about one nationwide concern: high school dropouts. He said: “Dropping out of high school is no longer an option. It’s not just quitting on yourself, it’s quitting on your country – and this country needs and values the talents of every American.” In California, we are facing a “dropout crisis” that could have repercussions for our state for many years to come.

In the past, dropout rates have been hard to track. With the recent implementation of CALPADS (the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System), educators are able to track students – and dropouts – more accurately. In 2010, about 74 percent of California’s high school seniors graduated. These statistics include mainstream high school students, as well as alternative education students, juvenile hall students, students with special needs and others.

Why is it considered a crisis? We are seeing an ever-increasing gap in achievement. For example, 84 percent of Asian students and 77 percent of white students will graduate from high school. But, only 57 percent of African-American and 60 percent of Latino students will graduate. We know

that, statistically, high school dropouts are more likely to be poor, male and students of color. Do you see the gap?

Why should your community be concerned about dropouts? The greatest concern is the loss of opportunity and potential for dropouts. Additionally, compared to high school graduates, dropouts earn lower wages, pay fewer taxes, are more likely to commit crimes, are less likely to be employed, are more likely to receive welfare assistance, and are less healthy. The probability of incarceration for an African- American male dropout is 60 percent! What does this mean to California? It means that the dropout crisis threatens California's future economy. If present trends continue, by 2020 California will have twice as many workers without a high school diploma as there will be jobs to support them. No job means no taxes paid to the state, and a greater reliance on state services such as welfare, medical care, and unemployment benefits.

According to the California Dropout Research Project, allocating more money to the problem without implementing change is not the solution. School reform that utilizes data to identify truancy in the elementary grades is a necessary first step. Assigning adults – advocates and teachers – to struggling students, and providing extra academic support and enrichment is also a recommendation. Holding our legislators, as well as our school districts, accountable is required.

No one solution is going to solve the problem. But, keeping this crisis in the forefront, asking the hard questions, and being willing to support systemic reform are all steps in the right direction. California State PTA believes that all children should have the opportunity to develop their abilities to their fullest potential. California's future depends on it!

Education

PTA-supported special education bills provide opportunities for PTA action

By Nancy Vandell
Education Advocate

Advocating for children and youth with special needs is a priority for the California State PTA. This year, we have taken positions on more than 10 bills addressing educational disabilities; many of them have already been signed into law. Three of these bills can be easily implemented by your PTA.

Special education teachers and specialists are truly selfless educators. Not only do they take additional coursework to know how to provide specialized services, they also work long hours in the classroom with students with a wide variety of individual needs. Additionally, these teachers need to spend time and effort on the administrative requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and often work evenings and weekends on the required paperwork. Working with parents to coordinate activities and help them provide support at home takes even more time. Sometimes, it is a thankless job, and many special education teachers leave the profession because of the stress. **ACR 99 (Buchanan)** recognizes the efforts of these caring specialists by declaring December 3, 2010 to be the Day of the Special Educator, urging Californians to recognize the dedication and hard work of special educators in teaching pupils with unique needs. We encourage PTA

units, councils and districts to plan activities to honor special education staff on December 3.

Surprisingly, support for disabilities is a relatively recent occurrence, with laws originating in the 1970s. Even with much progress over the past decades, misperceptions about people with disabilities abound. Children with special needs are more frequently bullied, and their parents often feel isolated. **ACR 162 (Beall)** works to change attitudes and honor the strides already made by declaring Disability History Week on the second week of every October, beginning this year. Schools, associations (like PTA) and businesses are encouraged to coordinate activities and devote classroom time to educating students and the public about people with disabilities and the progress they have made in contemporary American society. PTAs are encouraged to support this effort in their local areas.

As you have probably read, the number of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) has exploded over the past decade. Parents, educators and doctors are struggling to understand the causes, as well as improve educational and medical treatments for this variety of neurological disorders. **SCR 91 (Steinberg)** designates April as Autism Awareness Month. The measure seeks to affirm the Legislature's commitment to the important issues related to ASD, including the need to identify children with ASDs and to begin early intervention services immediately after a child has been diagnosed.

Advocating for children with special needs is one of the most important ways that California State PTA speaks for every child with one voice.

State Budget

California's state budget stalls

By Cecelia Mansfield

Education Finance and Budget Advocate

On August 3, Senate Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg and Assembly Speaker John Perez announced a new Democratic budget proposal that was adopted later that week, along party lines, by the Budget Conference Committee. Republican legislators and the Governor have reacted negatively to the proposal, and there appears to be no progress in reaching a deal anytime soon. The Constitutional deadline for a state budget to be in place was June 30, and the 2010-11 state budget is now over two months late!

The new Democratic budget plan contains a package of solutions totaling \$18.5 billion. Highlights of the plan relating to K-12 education include restoration of \$1.5 billion for revenue limits, \$1.4 billion for state-funded child care, and \$300 million for class size reduction. However, it suspends the Proposition 98 guarantee for schools. Targeted cuts of \$8.3 billion are also part of the plan, but the plan rejects the Governor's proposed elimination of CalWORKs and other health and human services programs. It also recognizes the need for additional revenue. It would delay the start of the new corporate tax breaks that were part of last year's budget deal and calls for a new oil severance tax and additional revenue generated from tax reform.

Stay tuned!

Federal

California and the Education Jobs Fund

By Kayla Plourde
Federal Advocate

Passed by Congress and signed into law by President Obama this month, the Education Jobs Fund is designed to keep teachers in the classroom. California anticipates approximately \$1.2 billion – representing the cost of an estimated 13,500 jobs.

Except for 2 percent for administrative costs, the money can only be spent to create or retain education jobs for 2010-11. None of the funds can be used for a rainy-day fund, to service or reduce a state's debt, for school district general administrative expenses, or other support services.

For this grant, as well as other stimulus grants, states must show Maintenance of Effort (MOE) for elementary, secondary, and higher education. In previous grants (i.e., State Fiscal Stabilization Fund and Race to the Top), a waiver process was available for Maintenance of Effort. There is NO waiver for this grant. Officials at the California Department of Education believe that California will be able to meet the MOE requirement.

In the absence of a state budget, the California Department of Education requires legislative authority to disburse the \$1.2 billion to school districts. PTA and our fellow members of the Education Coalition are working with Senate Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg and Speaker of the Assembly John Perez to fast-track a bill, **SB 847**, through the Legislature before the end of the session on August 31. In visits to legislative offices in the Capitol, we have urged Senators and Assemblymembers to support this bill to facilitate the funds flowing to the school districts where they are urgently needed.

Education Budget

School Facilities bond measure misses deadline for November ballot

By Cecelia Mansfield
Education Finance and Budget Advocate

AB 220 (Brownley), an urgency measure sponsored by Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell, would have put a \$6.1 billion education facilities construction and modernization bond on the November 2010 ballot. The California State PTA has been closely monitoring **AB 220** all year, but it failed to move out of the Senate Appropriations Committee by the August 14 deadline and is now dead. Proposition 1D, the last statewide school bond, was approved by voters in November 2006. Proposition 1D funds are anticipated to be depleted by the end of 2010. Once those funds are used up, there will be no matching funds for local school bonds. Fifteen local bonds were approved throughout the state in June 2010. The next statewide election will not be held until February 2012, and that is the earliest a school facilities bond could appear on a statewide ballot.

The only school finance bill still alive is **SB 1193 (Lowenthal)**, which would increase the amount of the modernization and new construction high performance incentive grants for school districts to promote energy efficient designs and materials. **SB 1193** is on the way to Assembly floor and to the Governor's desk.

The important issues of school finance and mandate reform addressed in bills that did not survive in this legislative session will continue to be priorities when the new legislature convenes in January 2011.

Health

Harmful pesticides: Are they being used on your school campus?

*By Shayne Silva
Health Advocate*

How safe are your children at school? Senator Mark DeSaulnier is carrying a bill, **SB 1157**, to promote the safe use of pesticides in schools. California State PTA has taken a support position on this bill. According to the bill language and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, children between 6 and 11 years of age have higher levels of commonly used pesticides in their bodies than any other age group, with an average of six pesticides per child. According to further research, children's diseases and conditions linked to pesticide exposure – including learning disabilities, brain cancer, leukemia, birth defects, and asthma – have increased dramatically over the past 30 years. Because children's bodies and brains are still developing, exposure to pesticides can have irreversible detrimental effects.

SB 1157 requires public schools to adopt an integrated pest management program (IPMP) to limit the use of the riskiest pesticides and to promote pest control practices that are the least hazardous. Presently, many public schools have not adopted an integrated pest management policy. In addition, many of these schools cite concerns with cost. As a result, some of the most dangerous pesticides are still being applied at school sites, despite the existence of effective, less toxic alternatives. Under the provisions of this bill, a fee would be charged to pesticide manufacturers to offset increased costs to school districts, encouraging development of an integrated pest management policy and less use of toxic chemicals to eradicate weeds.

There is strong opposition to this bill from the manufacturers of these toxic chemicals. We are working with the author's office to ensure its passage before the end of the session.

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