California State PTA
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Talking Points on the State Budget and Flexibility

- Our overall position on the proposed budget cuts is exactly the same as all other statewide organizations in the Education Coalition, including school boards, administrators, teachers and classified workers. We are all saying that the legislature and governor must adopt a balanced approach to solving the budget deficit, one that includes new revenues to prevent deeper cuts to education. We all recognize that $3 billion in funding has already been cut in the current year, and additional cuts have been proposed by the Governor and both parties. Our primary focus must be to continue urging lawmakers to make as few of those cuts as possible, so that minimal harm is done to children.

- At a time when education budgets are being slashed, the Governor has proposed providing **permanent** flexibility for how local school districts can spend funds designated for specific purposes (called "categorical" funds). These programs include class size reduction, targeted instructional support, economic impact aid, the arts and music block grant, professional development, summer school, instructional materials and adult education – just to name a few. For a complete list of categorical programs and current funding amounts, please see EdSource's publication here.

- The Governor's budget proposal summary states:

  > "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 in and of itself is not a substitute for adequate funding. The best solution for our state and our children is to provide more new revenues in the budget. This is not an option some legislators want to hear about, but we must continue to stand up for our principles and deliver our message on this issue."

- Generally speaking, California State 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 vital 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. Yet, that is what is being proposed now.

- The State Legislative Analyst Office's recent analysis of the Governor's questions the administration's approach. The LAO states:

  "To give school districts and community colleges options for responding to the sizeable cuts included in his budget plan, the Governor has proposed to permanently suspend most requirements related to how schools and colleges use state funding. Although we believe additional flexibility would help districts and community colleges in accommodating cuts, **we have concerns with the Governor's approach of disregarding – rather than reforming – the state's categorical system. Specifically, we think his proposal leaves many components of a complicated and irrational system in place, while removing incentives designed to ensure schools and colleges provide effective instructional programs for all students."**

- 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. Thousands of our delegates throughout the state, representing our nearly 1 million volunteer members, have made class size reduction a priority. PTA's Class Size Reduction Flexibility resolution that was passed at the California State PTA Convention in 2005 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."

- We believe the principles on which this position is based are steadfast through good and challenging economic times. As a statewide membership association, our mission is to represent our members on behalf of all children and families. While the consensus process our association relies on to adopt resolutions and position statements may take longer than some other organizations, it is this inclusive, broad-based process that gives our positions strength and significance in the Capitol.

- We understand that many districts are not fully funded for the costs incurred in providing the class size reduction program. And local school districts face unprecedented cuts and daunting decisions unless the state increases revenues to protect children. The best solution is to provide more new revenues in the budget. This is a difficult option – an option many 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.