

# Fourth District Legislative Advocacy Communicator



FOURTH DISTRICT ADVOCACY TEAM

APRIL 2010

## California State PTA launches new action plan to fight education crisis

*CAPTA combines direct advocacy efforts with a ballot action and a lawsuit against the state*

California State PTA announced a three-pronged plan for action this month in response to the Governor's proposal to cut another \$2.5 billion from education funding and chronic underfunding of California's public schools, according to Debbie Look, CAPTA's Director of Legislation. Efforts will include a new direct advocacy campaign by members, a petition drive for a ballot measure to facilitate local school funding, and a lawsuit against the state of California to challenge the constitutionality of its education funding system.

First, the "9 Million Reasons To Speak Up" advocacy campaign calls on PTA members to speak up on behalf of California's more than 9 million children by writing letters, calling, and visiting their state representatives to let them know that further cuts to education and children's services are unacceptable. PTA will build public support through letters to the editor, local rallies, and e-mail campaigns towards reforming



### 9 Million Reasons To Speak Up

the state budget process, and will emphasize the need to adequately fund education. Members are also invited to join a rally on the steps of the Capitol on Thursday, April 29, during the annual PTA convention.



CAPTA is also leading a petition drive to qualify the *Local Control of Local Classrooms Funding Act* for the November 2010 ballot. This would reduce the voter approval threshold needed to pass local school funding measures from the current two-thirds vote to a 55% vote, if certain conditions are met.

Third, CAPTA plans to file a **lawsuit against the state of California** this spring, joining with the California School Boards Association (CSBA) and the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) as principal plaintiffs in a claim that the current system of funding education in the state of California is unconstitutional. ▶

## Calendar of Events

### Advocacy Roundtables:

Fridays, 9:30-11:00 a.m., OC Department of Education, Costa Mesa (200 Kalmus Drive, Bldg. D)

- April 16 – Ron Bennett, President and CEO, School Services of California, discusses the state's economic forecast and what it means to local school districts, plus the latest from Sacramento as it impacts schools and children across the state
- ~~May 28~~ – *Cancelled due to scheduling conflict*

### California State PTA Convention, April 29-May 2

Rally at the Capitol on Thursday, Apr. 29 at 2 p.m.

CAPTA urges members to speak up for *every child* in California with *one voice* by supporting these efforts.

Go to [www.capta.org](http://www.capta.org) for more information and details on what your PTA members can do to help.

## Sacramento Safari Wrap-up

Fourth District PTA sent a delegation of over 80 members to Sacramento on March 22-23 to meet with legislators in an effort to protect the well-being of California's children and advocate for their education.

Delegates spent time both in advance of the trip and during initial meetings to become fully informed about the history and current state of California's education systems and relevant legislation, with a heavy emphasis on funding issues. Conference participants included California State PTA President Jo Loss and other CAPTA speakers; California Secretary of State Debra Bowen; California State Assembly Member and Education Committee Chairman Julia Brownley; *Sacramento Bee* columnist Dan Walters; California Budget Project Director Jean Ross; high-level representatives from the Department of Education, the Legislative Analyst's Office, the California State Senate, the Speaker of the Assembly, and Governor Schwarzenegger's office; and more.

### Want to join us next year?



If you would like to join us on next year's Sacramento Safari, be sure to include a line item for advocacy in your unit or council budget. Plan on about \$250 for single occupancy or \$350 for double occupancy, plus transportation (around \$500 total).

## Is your PTA being asked to take a stand on school staffing or contract issues? Read this first!

PTA is often asked to help support faculty or staff when job or salary cuts are on the line. But before you jump in to offer your assistance, be sure you are following the rules set by California State PTA. (*For full policy details, please refer to the PTA Toolkit, section 4.5.54, available online at [www.capta.org](http://www.capta.org)*).

The California State PTA recognizes that public school employer-employee collective bargaining is mandated by law and that negotiations greatly influence education. **The bargaining parties are required to make their positions public** and provide details to the public at the beginning of the process.

PTA has the responsibility to become knowledgeable and to inform the public about proposed contracts and contract changes through the negotiations. The reason for this is that PTA has, as part of its primary mission, an interest in **matters that affect students and programs** in the district, and a duty to inform all parties if any issue being negotiated is either consistent with or differs from established state PTA positions.

It is especially important for PTA to help ensure that classrooms and **students are not used for propaganda** purposes (asking children to march in protest or carry signs on behalf of one side, for example).

As PTA is an organization whose membership is composed of parents, teachers, students, school district employees, school board members and concerned community members, **PTA must remain neutral** in a dispute arising from school employer-employee negotiations. Council PTA leaders should explain PTA's neutrality policy to its units, members, school administration, and school site bargaining leadership. PTA is expected to continue its normal activities in the event of a dispute.



### How to go about studying the issues

PTAs should monitor their respective school boards' compliance with public notice requirements so that they can make meaningful and timely comments about the initial and subsequent proposals under discussion. (*The CAPTA Toolkit* details requirements for public meetings and records on page 148.)

To become knowledgeable and inform the public about proposed contracts, PTA should form a study committee including representation from all affected units within the school district; if more than one unit is affected, the committee should be formed by your Council. Remember, the primary focus of the study will be to help answer this question: **WHAT WILL BE THE EFFECT ON ALL CHILDREN?**

### Ask the Advocacy Team

If you have any questions concerning advocacy issues, please contact us at: [advocacy@fourthdistrictpta.org](mailto:advocacy@fourthdistrictpta.org).

### Key PTA Links

[www.fourthdistrictpta.org](http://www.fourthdistrictpta.org) – Click on Advocacy

[www.capta.org](http://www.capta.org) – Select from menu: **Programs and Services: Advocacy** and **Children's Issues: Legislation**

[www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org) – Click on Take Action

As part of its study, the committee should include in its review the school district's budget, the current contract, and initial contract proposals. (Any subsequent contract proposals must be made public within 24 hours after their introduction.)

To remain neutral, PTA should not attend separate meetings with either school district or employee association representatives, but may invite representatives from all sides to present their views. Similarly, PTA must not distribute information provided by either side, but may prepare its own impartial information for distribution.

The committee reports its results of the study with any recommended action(s) to the PTA membership. Recommendations might include comments to be made to the school board and/or to the bargaining unit. Such comments must be made within the framework of California State PTA policies and positions.

### Helping to involve and educate the public

Because decisions of great importance to the quality of education are made when local school boards and employee groups meet at the negotiating table, PTA can help to educate parents about the negotiations process. The only way the public can become a valid part of the process and present viewpoints pertinent to the current contract or proposals is for public input to be based on knowledge of the operations of the local school district. To help everyone to advocate positions that support a high standard of education for students in the classroom, CAPTA has developed an overview of the collective bargaining process, along with a glossary of terms and contents of a typical teacher's contract, that may be distributed by local PTAs (*CAPTA Toolkit*, 4.5.54, p. 151).

### Contract considerations

While the contract proposals under consideration will vary widely, parents may wish to keep in mind issues affecting class size, maintenance of standards, workday and workload, conference time, extracurricular activities, and release time for teachers.

PTA believes that all school employees are entitled to the benefits of fair employment practices, and that locally-elected school boards have legal responsibility for decision-making with full disclosure and public accountability.