

# Fourth District PTA Advocacy Communicator



FOURTH DISTRICT PTA ADVOCACY TEAM

JANUARY 2015

## Hot Topics for Education Advocacy in 2015

January 2015 marks a new beginning for the State of California. Governor Jerry Brown begins his historic fourth term. The State Legislature reconvenes for a two-year session with many newly-elected members and new leadership for each of the houses – Speaker Toni Atkins in the Assembly and President Pro Tem Kevin de León in the Senate.

In the area of public education, here are some potential hot topics in 2015:

- **The State Budget.** One of the first items of business for the Governor will be to complete his proposed budget, which must be submitted to the Legislature by January 10. The state's tax revenues have increased, but Gov. Brown has reiterated his intention to maintain a frugal budget and reduce the state's debt. Legislators want to use some of the revenue increase to restore social services that were cut during recent years, including early childhood care and other services for children.
  - **School facilities funding.** The state has run out of bond money to fund school construction and renovation. Last fall, the legislature dropped plans to place a \$4.3 billion school construction bond on the November ballot when Gov. Brown indicated he would veto the measure. The Governor said that the state should not be involved in school facilities funding and that a new system should be developed to give school districts "appropriate local control and fiscal incentives." Assembly Member Joan Buchanan, who wrote the ballot measure, said the ultimate decision "may rest with the courts." Meanwhile, there are indications that a signature gathering campaign may be launched to put a school facilities bond on the 2016 ballot.
  - **Prop. 30 tax increases.** The temporary Prop. 30 tax increases approved by voters in 2012 prevented further funding cuts for California's K-12 schools. These tax increases begin to expire in 2016. Legislators will have to decide whether to extend the taxes or do without the additional revenue.
  - **Teacher tenure and dismissal.** AB 215, which revised the procedures for dismissal of teachers in cases of egregious behavior, was signed into law last year.
- A controversial decision by the Los Angeles County Superior Court in the Vergara v. California court case ruled that state laws on teacher tenure, dismissal and layoffs are unconstitutional and violate the rights of students. The state plans to appeal the decision. State legislators are likely to propose additional legislation on this issue.
- **Testing.** California terminated its standardized testing program in 2013, as Common Core State Standards were being implemented in schools but corresponding tests were not yet available. In the spring of 2014, field tests of the new Smarter Balanced assessments were administered to students, but parents did not receive results. This spring most of the state's 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students will take the online tests in math and English language arts. Results will be posted, providing a first look at how well students are handling the new standards. Education leaders have questioned the usefulness of the high school exit exam, and there may be discussions about eliminating that test.
  - **Accountability.** California's Academic Performance Index (API), the state's process for evaluating schools, was suspended in 2013. The State Board of Education must develop a new system by October. SB 1458, enacted in 2013, requires the accountability system to include indicators such as graduation rates and college and career readiness factors.
  - **Early childhood education.** During the last legislative session there were several attempts to expand state pre-school and Kindergarten programs, most of which were unsuccessful. However, there was a \$115 million increase in the state budget for the existing California State Preschool Program, which serves four-year-olds from low-income families. This allowed an additional 11,500 children to participate in the program in 2014-15. The push to provide early education for needy children is likely to continue. AB 47 (McCarty) would make the state's full-day pre-school program available to all eligible low-income children. CAPTA has not as yet taken a position on this bill.

## Gov. Brown points to school funding increase in state budget

There was good news for the state's public schools in Governor Jerry Brown's inaugural address, delivered on January 5.

"After years of underfunding and even borrowing from our local schools, the state now has significantly increased its financial support for education," the Governor said. "Next year schools will receive \$65.7 billion, a 39 percent increase in four years."

Schools were budgeted to receive \$60.9 billion during the current fiscal year. The Governor was expected to issue his complete budget proposal for the coming year on January 9.

The Governor also talked about continuing challenges in education.

"The tasks ahead are daunting: making sure that the new system of local control works; recruiting and training tens of thousands of teachers; mastering the Common Core Curriculum; and fostering the creativity needed to inspire students," he said. "Teachers need to be held accountable but never forget: they have a tough job to do. They need our encouragement, not endless regulations and micro-management from afar."

## Advocacy Roundtable



Special Guest:  
**Ron Bennett**  
CEO of School Services of California

Hear the latest news about California education issues from a recognized expert.

**Friday, January 23**  
**9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.**

Fountain Valley School District Board Room  
10055 Slater Avenue, Fountain Valley 92708  
(Please park at the back or side of the building, not in front.)

**All PTA members are welcome to attend.**

## Sacramento Safari!

March 16 and 17

Register today!

Prices increase on January 23.

Registration deadline: February 27

### Safari Participants:

Be sure to attend the Orientation Meeting

**Friday, March 6, 9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m.**

Fountain Valley School District

10055 Slater Avenue, Fountain Valley 92708

## CAPTA Legislative Conference

If you can't attend Sacramento Safari, you have another opportunity to visit the state's capitol with PTA: the California State PTA Legislative Conference.

This year's Conference will be held February 9 and 10, with overnight stay at the Embassy Suites Hotel. Registration is \$210 for adults and \$105 for students. Hotel and travel costs are separate and reservations must be made by participants. Special PTA rates at the hotel are available until January 17. Conference registration close on February 5.

For more information and registration, go to [www.capta.org](http://www.capta.org) under Advocacy.

## School Boards Association set to fight cap on school district reserve funds

Prop. 2, approved by voters in last November's election, created a general rainy day fund for the state, with a separate "Prop. 98 Reserve" for public education.

In conjunction with this measure, the state legislature passed SB 858, which puts a cap on individual school district reserves. The limit on each local reserve is based on the size of the district. The legislature contended that a state rainy day fund reduces the need for local reserves. Gov. Brown signed the bill into law.

The restriction on school districts will not go into effect until the state puts money into its education reserve, which is not likely to happen for the next several years. Nevertheless, school districts are adamantly opposed to the measure and the California School Boards Association has made it a top priority to see the law repealed.

California State PTA has not taken a position on this issue.