

# Fourth District PTA Advocacy Communicator



FOURTH DISTRICT PTA ADVOCACY TEAM

FEBRUARY 2016

## Governor's proposed budget includes more money for schools

California's budget process began in January with the release of Governor Brown's proposed budget, which increases funding for K-12 schools by \$2.4 billion.

The increase would bring state's per-student spending to an average of \$10,591. The per-student amounts each school district receives will vary according to the Local Control Funding Formula, which allocates more funding to districts with high-needs students.

The total funding for K-12 schools and community colleges through Prop. 98 would increase by \$3.2 billion to a record \$71.6 billion.

The Governor's proposal includes \$1.3 billion in back payments for K-12 mandates, regulations that the state put in place and was required to pay for. School districts may use this funding as they choose. A backlog of \$1.8 billion would remain. The budget also includes \$248 million in new and ongoing funding for Career Technical Education programs in schools and community colleges.

Brown includes no additional spending for preschool, but proposes more flexibility in current state funding for

transitional kindergarten, preschool and a preschool quality system. Money from these three programs would be combined into a new \$1.7 billion Early Education Block Grant that can be targeted to low-income children.

The Governor continues to warn that the next economic downturn could be around the corner. Even an average recession could cut state revenues by \$55 billion over three years, he said. To prepare for this possibility, the Governor wants to add \$2 billion to the minimum that must go into the rainy day fund, bringing the balance in that account to \$8 billion by mid-2017.

During the next months, Assembly and Senate budget committees will review the proposal and develop their own versions of the budget.

In mid-May, the governor will issue an updated "May Revise" version of the budget based on actual revenues received through taxes. The state Constitution requires the legislators to complete the budget by June 15. If they miss the deadline, they permanently lose their pay and expenses for every day that the budget is not passed.

## Three pending court cases could have big impacts on education

Three court cases related to public education in California are pending in state courts and in the Supreme Court. The outcomes of these cases could have broad implications for the future of California's schools.

**Robles-Wong v. California** contends that inadequate state funding denies children their constitutional right to an adequate education.

In 2011, a Superior Court judge heard the case and ruled that California children have a fundamental right to an education, but the Legislature is not required to fund public education at a specific level. The defendants appealed and the case was heard by a Court of Appeal on January 27. The plaintiffs are awaiting a decision and hope that the case will be returned to the Superior Court for trial.

California State PTA is one of the plaintiffs in this case.

**Vergara v. California** claims that teacher tenure, layoff, and dismissal practices are to blame for the state's achievement gap and that this violates the rights of students, especially those who are low-income.

In 2014, a Superior Court judge agreed that the five statutes in question protected a small but significant number of "grossly ineffective" teachers, causing dispropor-

tionate harm to poor and minority students.

The ruling was appealed by the State of California and the state's two teacher unions. The case will be heard in an appellate court on February 25.

**Friedrichs v. CTA** challenges the requirement that teachers pay fees to their local employee union to help pay for bargaining costs, even if they are not members of the union.

The Supreme Court heard the case on January 11 and will announce its ruling later this year.

The lawsuit seeks to overturn a previous Supreme Court decision that allowed states to require all employees represented by a public-employee union to pay "fair-share" or "agency" fees. The other plaintiffs argue that this violates their First Amendment rights.

The CTA and the State of California contend that the result of contract negotiations affect both union members and non-members, so it is appropriate for non-members to share the costs for those negotiations.

If the court case is successful, all union dues and fees would have to be voluntary. This could undermine the bargaining and political clout of the CTA as well as other public employee unions in California and perhaps in the 24 other states that have mandatory fair share union fees.

## A look at how our districts are dealing with changes in education

Many thanks to the four superintendents who brought their expertise and insights to the Advocacy Forum on January 22. They are Dr. Mark Johnson, Fountain Valley School District, Dr. Sherry Kropp, Los Alamitos Unified School District, Anne Silavs, Cypress School District, and Dr. Sherine Smith, Laguna Beach Unified School District.

Our four guests provided a fascinating look at how our school districts are dealing with the current changes in education. A few highlights:

- Teaching practices have not changed significantly with the implementation of California's new state standards, but staff development by recognized experts continues to be important. There is a lot of research on what good teaching looks like, and that has not changed. Districts are looking for "signature practices" that work well and can be brought to other classrooms. There is a new emphasis on writing and critical thinking.
- Increased funding from the state has created challenges for districts as they attempt to balance the need for staff salary increases with other priorities, including the need to upgrade their school facilities. Superintendents are aware that they must make the best use of one-time money and plan for the inevitable drop in funding. School districts must cope with the fact that they will be required to contribute higher amounts to the state retirement system, which will amount to 20 percent of district budgets in coming years.
- The Local Control Funding Formula, which provides additional funding for districts with large numbers of high-needs students, has created differences in fund-

We all know what we want for our kids. School should be one long exciting field trip.  
~Dr. Sherry Kropp

ing levels among districts. For instance, this year Cypress School District is receiving \$7,500 per student while Santa Ana is getting \$9,500. This makes it difficult to put together a quality program for the high-needs students in Cypress, said Ms. Silavs.

- All four superintendents said they have plenty of parent involvement in their districts through PTA, booster clubs, advisory committees, and other avenues. The requirement to develop a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) has provided a new way for parents, businesses and the community to participate in the decision-making process. However, the process results in documents that are 80 pages or more in length. These are not as transparent and useful as the one-page list of priorities that school boards work with. There have already been 12 lawsuits filed against school districts regarding their LCAPs.
- A new challenge for school districts is a shortage of qualified substitutes as more teachers are hired. This makes it difficult to schedule staff development time.
- Teachers are dealing with "initiative exhaustion" as news programs are launched. The next challenge will be the implementation of new state science standards.
- Superintendent wish list for the State Legislature:
  - Rescind the reserve cap for school districts.
  - Find a way to keep school funding more stable so districts can focus on students and education programs can be more consistent.
  - Extend the time required for a teacher to gain tenure.
  - Take a more active role in funding the state retirement system.

## Opportunity gap is the problem

The term "opportunity gap" is replacing "achievement gap" in discussions within the education community. Children are not able to achieve academically if they do not have the educational opportunities they need to succeed.

"Access to mathematics, history/social sciences, visual and performing arts, health, physical education, career and technical education and more should be available to all children, regardless of what school students attend or where they live," said California State PTA President Justine Fischer. "When schools provide wide access to many different classes, students receive a full learning experience, are more likely to graduate, and are better prepared for higher education, employment and their roles and responsibilities as adults later in life."

## If you are going to Sacramento Safari



### Be sure to attend the Orientation Meeting

**Friday, February 5**

**9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m.**

**Fountain Valley School District  
10055 Slater Avenue, Fountain Valley**

**Questions? Contact Kim Anderson at  
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