

Fourth District PTA Advocacy Communicator



FOURTH DISTRICT PTA ADVOCACY TEAM

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California's teacher shortage — how bad is it?

California is facing a teacher shortage in its public schools. How serious is the problem?

- When the school year began in 2015, there were more than 3,900 open teaching positions.
- Enrollment in teacher preparation programs has dropped 75 percent in the past 10 years.
- California is ranked last nationwide in student-teacher ratio.
- The state would need an additional 100,000 teachers just to reach the national average in the number of students per teacher.
- The number of teachers hired on substandard permits and partial credentials has nearly doubled in the past two years.

The shortage is especially acute in the areas of math, science and special education and in schools with high populations of children from low income families, English language learners and other high-needs students.

There is also a problem keeping new teachers in the schools. About 50 percent of new teachers leave in the first five years.

A number of factors have led to this situation: the retirement of many baby-boomer teachers, a lack of job security in previous years, inadequate support for new teachers, and negative commentary about the teaching profession by courts, legislators and the press.

Lawmakers in Sacramento have introduced a number of bills to address this problem. The following bills are supported by California State PTA.

- **SB 915 (Liu)** This bill would re-establish the California Center on Teaching Careers (CalTeach) to recruit qualified individuals into the teaching profession. CalTeach will conduct outreach activities, maintain a job referral database, and provide information to students regarding requirements, financial aid and admissions programs.
- **SB 933 (Allen)** This bill would provide funding to school districts to create or expand teacher residency programs. College students in teacher training programs would serve an apprenticeship with a mentor teacher in a classroom serving low-income students for up to three years. The apprentice would receive a stipend and would be required to teach in the district for four years.
- **AB 1756 (Bonilla)** Currently, students must earn a Bachelor's degree before spending an additional year of school to earn a teaching credential. This bill

would create a grant program for colleges and universities to provide an integrated teacher education program that would allow students to earn a BA and credential in four years.

- **AB 2122 (McCarty)** This bill would create a program to encourage classified school employees (non-teachers) to enroll in teacher training programs.
- **AB 2401 (O'Donnell)** Currently, new teachers in many school districts must pay to participate in a Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program. This bill would provide school districts with funding to provide the program free of cost.
- **SB 871 (Liu)** The recently established California Collaborative for Educational Excellence would be required to establish a statewide professional development program.

Rocky Chávez brings his ideas to the OC

Assemblyman Rocky Chávez, from Oceanside, had some good news for PTA at the April 22 Advocacy Forum. For one, his most pressing issue in education is parent involvement, which he says is vital to a child's education. He recognizes the need to upgrade our school buildings and supports the \$9 billion school facilities bond on the November 2016 ballot. He also said that input from parents and "burning up the phones" with organized campaigns influence the decisions of legislators.

Some of his other thoughts and opinions:

- California has the largest population of impoverished people in the United States. Sixteen percent of Californians live in poverty.
- California State Universities find it almost impossible to graduate students in four years. About 70 percent of freshmen need to take remedial classes in math and English. Juniors and seniors can't get the classes they need to complete their education.
- The teacher shortage is a big problem. We need to stop bashing teachers and make teaching professional again.
- Early Childhood Education, or Early Cognitive Development, is critically important. In an ideal situation, children would learn basics at home. However, 50 percent of families in California are single parent homes. Assemblyman Chávez would prefer to have private rather than public preschools, with subsidies for lower income families.

Court rulings are handed down in three cases related to education, but the issues are not resolved

Legal decisions were handed down in three important court cases related to public education during the past two months, but the issues involved have yet to be settled.

Robles-Wong v. California is an attempt to clarify California's constitutional obligation to provide an education for all students. The lawsuit claims that inadequate state funding denies children their right to an education that prepares them to compete and succeed in our global economy.

In 2011, a Superior Court judge ruled that California children do have a fundamental right to an education, but the state Constitution does not require the Legislature to fund public education at a specific level.

The case was appealed to the First District Court of Appeal. In April the three appellate justices split 2-1 in favor of the State of California. Two justices ruled that the state Constitution does not mandate a minimum level of funding for education and that it is not appropriate for the courts to decide how much money schools should get. The dissenting judge wrote that the Constitution's mandate to provide education "implies the need to maintain public schools at some minimum level of competence" and that the courts are capable of making this happen.

The plaintiffs in the case immediately said they would appeal the ruling to the California Supreme Court.

California State PTA is one of the plaintiffs, along with the California School Boards Association, the Association of California School Administrators, nine school districts (including Santa Ana Unified), and about 60 individual students and their families.

Vergara v. California is an effort to strike down five state laws that provide job protections for teachers, specifically tenure, "last-in-first-out" practices, and the complex, lengthy and expensive process to dismiss incompetent teachers. The lawsuit claims that these practices are to blame for the state's achievement gap and violate the rights of students, especially those who are low-income.

The case was filed on behalf of nine students from five California school districts by Students Matter, a non-profit founded by Silicon Valley businessman David Welch.

In 2014, a Superior Court judge agreed that the five statutes protect a small but significant number of "grossly ineffective" teachers, causing disproportionate harm to poor and minority students. The ruling was appealed by the State of California and the state's two teacher unions.

In April, the three justices of the Second District Court of Appeal unanimously ruled that there was no constitutional violation because plaintiffs failed to show "that the statutes inevitably cause a certain group of students to

receive an education inferior to the education received by other students." The judges said that school district administrators, not the statutes, decide where low-performing teachers are placed. "The court's job is merely to determine whether the statutes are constitutional, not if they are 'a good idea,'" the decision states.

The attorney for the plaintiffs said that the case will be appealed to the California Supreme Court.

Friedrichs v. CTA challenged the requirement that teachers pay fees to their local union to help pay for bargaining costs, even if they are not members of the union. Teacher unions negotiate contracts for all teachers and provide other services to members. They also use part of their dues to lobby and campaign at the local, state and federal levels. Teachers who do not wish to support a union's lobbying efforts pay "fair-share" or "agency" fees to cover the costs of collective bargaining.

The lawsuit was brought by Anaheim school teacher Rebecca Friedrichs along with nine other teachers and a teachers group, Christian Educators Association International. The Supreme Court heard the case in January.

The plaintiffs argued that agency fees violate their First Amendment rights, because bargaining with the state is no different from lobbying; it's all "inherently political." Teachers should not be forced to support lobbying efforts with which they don't agree, they said.

The CTA and the State of California responded that since the result of contract negotiations affect both union members and non-members, it is appropriate for non-members to share the costs for those negotiations. They also argued that unions represent the opinions of the majority and that those who disagree have the ability to make their opinions known.

Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died suddenly in February, leaving eight justices on the high court. In March, the court announced a 4-4 decision in the Friedrichs case. Since there was no majority ruling, the lower court decision upholding the agency fees remains in effect.

Observers do not expect this to be the end of challenges against agency fees. The Friedrichs case may be brought back to the Supreme Court, depending on who is appointed to replace Justice Scalia. Similar legal challenges are working their way through the courts in other states.



Count me in.