

Fourth District PTA Advocacy Communicator



FOURTH DISTRICT PTA ADVOCACY TEAM

MARCH 2019

Report from Sacramento Safari 2019

Fourth District PTA members bring their messages to the capital

It was a great time to be in Sacramento, with a new governor, a new state superintendent of education, lots of money in state coffers and education policy-makers focused on serving the whole child. Sixty-eight PTA members and one student spent two days in the state capital to gather information from 15 speakers on a variety of education topics. We then split into small groups to visit legislative offices in the state capitol.

We brought four messages to state legislators:

1. Our kids need mental health resources and support services now.

California's mental health resources and support services fall far behind those provided to children in other states. Our students have suffered because of severe cuts in the numbers of counselors, health professionals, school nurses, learning specialists, librarians, and administrators. As a result, students struggle daily with issues that affect their ability to learn and be socially connected.

The average delay between onset of symptoms and intervention is eight to ten years. These children need resources to get help sooner. Without intervention, we will continue to see 37 percent of students with a mental health condition drop out of school, or worse: 70 percent of youth in juvenile justice systems have a mental illness.

California State PTA supports **AB 8 (Chu)**, which would increase the ratio of students to campus mental health professionals from less than 1265:1 to 600:1.

2. PTA supports late school start time.

The research is clear: The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Sleep Medicine urge middle and high school students to start school no earlier than 8:30 a.m. to accommodate natural sleep cycles that shift during adolescence. Teens who get enough sleep suffer less from depression and obesity, are less likely to be involved in automobile accidents, earn better grades, have higher standardized test scores, and enjoy an overall better quality of life.

CAPTA supports **SB 328 (Portantino)**, which would ensure that most middle and high schools would start their school days no earlier than 8:30 a.m.

3. Arts education is not optional.

Every student has the right to a dynamic, creative education that includes the arts. The California Education Code requires arts education. Yet 88 percent of California schools fail to meet this standard. Schools have cut Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) education even

though studies show that the arts:

- connect students to school,
- increase the graduation rate,
- raise academic performance, and
- boost a student's ability to create, collaborate, think critically, and communicate.

4. California needs a stable, long-term funding system.

California must examine options to create stability in our long-term funding sources for education and other important priorities. The current system is too volatile and leaves California's children behind the levels of education, health, and welfare enjoyed by children across the rest of the nation. Our state should plan to support its future.

PTA supports **AB 39 (Muratsuchi)**, which would raise the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) base grant as well as the supplemental and concentration grant amounts throughout the state for the 2019-20 school year.

Resources for arts advocacy

Children who participate in the arts are four times more likely to be recognized for academic success, said CAPTA Executive Director Sherry Griffith, one of the speakers at Sacramento Safari. Students who study the arts score about 100 points higher in the SAT. For some students, particularly those who are at-risk, an art program is the only reason to continue attending school.

California students in grades 1 to 12 are required to have instruction in dance, music, theater and visual arts, yet most public schools do not have comprehensive visual and performing arts (VAPA) programs. In effect, they are in violation of California law, Griffith said.

Join California State PTA in its campaign to get the arts back into school! You will find an array of resources at capta.org, including a new interactive dashboard that shows the VAPA programs school districts and individual schools now offer. You can also view or download "Parents' Guide to the Visual and Performing Arts in California Public Schools," a 38-page booklet describing what children should be learning at each grade level and a list of careers related to the arts.

You can find these resources and more at capta.org under Focus Areas/Education/Curriculum/Arts Education.

Lawmakers may place more restrictions on charter schools

The future of charter schools was a hot topic for several speakers at Sacramento Safari. Charter schools are “running away with a lot of public money,” said Assemblyman Patrick O’Donnell, chair of the Assembly Education Committee. “Our schools aren’t for sale.”

Orange County Assemblywoman Cottie Petrie-Norris expressed concern that in Orange County “time and again local school districts have turned down charter applications but the Orange County Department of Education board approves them. Charters have a place, but not at the expense of public schools.”

John Fensterwald, editor-at-large at EdSource.org, predicted that this legislative session will bring new restrictions on charters.

Meanwhile, SB 126, co-authored by O’Donnell and Senator Connie Leyva, was on a fast track in the state legislature. It was quickly approved by the Assembly and passed by the Senate a few days later. Governor Newsom, who encouraged the bill’s quick passage, is expected to sign it into law. California State PTA supports this bill.

“The bill will require charter schools to follow the same laws governing open meetings, public records and

conflicts of interest that apply to school districts,” according to an EdSource article. “They include ensuring board meetings are open to the public, providing records to the public upon request and, to prevent personal gain, banning board members from voting on contracts in which they have a financial interest.”

O’Donnell and other legislators have introduced a package of bills that would place additional restrictions on charter schools. The bills would eliminate the ability of charter schools to appeal rejected applications to the county and state, put a cap on the number of charters allowed in the state, permit school districts to consider financial impact when looking at a charter application, and forbid a charter school that can’t find a site from locating in an adjoining school district.

California State PTA has not taken a position yet on these bills. CAPTA believes charter schools have a valid place in our public school system but that they should not reduce resources for public schools. They should be fiscally and academically accountable and involve parents in decision-making. (The complete statement is at capta.org under Focus Areas/Advocacy/Position Statements.)

Where to find resources to advocate for mental health services

About one in every five California teens ages 12 to 17 suffers from emotional or mental health issues. Early intervention can make a big difference.

A child’s school should be a safe environment where a student can get help and support. Yet less than 37 percent of young people with mental health problems get the services they need.

California State PTA supports AB 8 (Chu), which would require every public school, including charter schools, to have at least one mental health professional available during school hours for every 600 students. Schools with fewer than 600 children would be required to have one mental health professional, or one to serve several schools, or an arrangement with an outside agency to provide services.

PTA members who advocate for mental health services at their schools can find resources and information at capta.org under Focus Areas/Health and Safety/Mental Health.

Information is also available in “A Guide to Increase Mental Health Services for Students,” created by Project Cal-Well, a consortium involving the California Department of Education, ABC Unified School District, Garden Grove Unified School District, and San Diego County Office of Education. The guide is available at www.cde.ca.gov.

Another valuable resource is NAMI — the National Alliance on Mental Illness. This all-volunteer member-based organization provides an array of free services including support groups for people living with mental illness and their families, advocacy for better laws, and community presentations designed to provide hope, dispel myths, and eradicate the stigma of mental illness.

The organization sponsors “NAMI on Campus” high school clubs, to encourage awareness and acceptance and provide students with a safe place to deal with their issues. NAMI will also provide presentations for students, parents and staff, as well as training in dealing with mental health issues for all school staff members.

For more information, go to the Orange County NAMI website at NamiOC.org.

Fourth District PTA Advocacy Forum
Friday, March 29, 9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Orange County legislators
will talk about upcoming issues.

Fountain Valley School District
10055 Slater Avenue, Fountain Valley