

Fourth District PTA Advocacy Communicator



FOURTH DISTRICT PTA ADVOCACY TEAM

MARCH 2020

Good news and tough times wrapped into one

“Good news and tough times wrapped into one.” That describes the current state of education in California according to Ken Kapphahn, from the Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO), one of our Sacramento Safari speakers. That sentiment was echoed by other experts.

California schools have received substantial funding increases during the past seven years. “We have deepened our investment in children and distributed the money in a more equitable way,” said Roberta Furger, from the Learning Policy Institute. This has led to significant increases in math and reading test scores, and graduation rates, she said.

However, when inflation is taken into account the funding increases have only brought our schools back to funding levels from before the Great Recession. California continues to rank at or near the bottom nationwide in every measure of school funding or school staffing. Various studies indicate that California would need an additional \$26 billion to ensure that every student has an opportunity to meet state standards, Furger said.

California’s economy is still going strong, but there are concerns that it is slowing down and may head into a recession. This is especially true because of uncertainties about the spread of the coronavirus and how that will impact markets. The state has a \$22 billion reserve account, but that would be gone quickly in a recession, said Assembly Member Patrick O’Donnell.

Furger pointed out that California faces some of the biggest education challenges in the country. We have the highest percentage of students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch and the highest percentage of students who are English language learners.

Statewide, the student population is dropping due to a

lower birth rate and young families moving out of state, although some areas are still growing. Lower student enrollment means less per pupil funding for school districts. Meanwhile, costs for health coverage, gas, electricity and other expenses continue to rise.

Another challenge for school districts is in the area of special education. During the past two decades there was a dramatic rise in the number of children with special needs, especially those with autism. (The rate of students with autism increased from one in 600 in 1997 to one in 50 in 2017, according to an LAO report.) Costs to serve these children have gone up but special education funding from the state and federal governments has remained essentially flat. This means that school districts must contribute increasing amounts from their general funds to provide these services.

Adding to the financial pressures on school districts are higher costs for the state retirement system for school employees. The state, school districts, and employees all contribute to the state pension system and that money is invested in the stock market. During the Great Recession the pension fund lost two-thirds of its value, said Kapphahn, and the system has not recovered from that. As a result, districts and employees are required to pay increasingly higher contributions to the system. In the next fiscal year pension costs will increase by \$900 million. This will take up most of the cost of living increase that districts receive from the state.

Orange County school districts are feeling these challenges. In March 2019, 11 out of 28 county school districts filed “qualified” budget reports, indicating they may not be able to meet their financial obligations during the current year or two subsequent fiscal years.

Fourth District PTA’s message to California lawmakers

The 78 participants in this year’s Sacramento Safari split into small groups and visited the offices of 12 state legislators to present the following concerns:

School funding: California has made substantial progress toward increased education funding. Do not stop that momentum. Our children and their teachers need support services from psychologists, nurses, aides, and librarians. PTA supports AB 39 (Muratsuchi) which continues raising California’s public education base funding to equal the nation’s average per-pupil funding level.

PTA supports California’s legislative efforts to create

a stable, steady, long-term revenue system to continue this upward funding trend so that California education can once again lead the nation in student achievement and success instead of being 41st in the nation.

Rising special education costs impact all students. Rising special education costs have put increasing burdens on many school districts. The federal government currently provides less than 14 percent of the cost of these accommodations, leaving the individual school districts to make up the difference from their general funds.

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PTA responds to President Trump’s budget proposal

National PTA President Leslie Boggs issued the following statement on President Donald Trump’s budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2021:

“National PTA is extremely disappointed to see the administration’s FY2021 budget proposal cuts funding for crucial public education programs by \$6.1 billion, while including a \$5 billion annual investment in private school options.

“Our public education system provides all children access to opportunities, experiences and knowledge that improve their overall well-being—regardless of their race, religion, ability or socioeconomic status. Private school

vouchers fund the education of only a few, select students; divert resources from the students and schools that need it the most; and lack accountability measures. PTA opposes any private school choice system that drains vital public school resources. Public dollars must remain in public schools.

“Robust and equitable investments in our public education system are critical to ensure all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Far too many children continue to be left with insufficient resources. It is essential that public education is strengthened with the support of adequate funding for the long-term success of every child and our nation.

“National PTA is particularly concerned by the administration’s proposal to combine 29 critical programs that support and advance student outcomes into one block grant. We are also concerned with the elimination of funding for Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants that provide much needed services for the safety, health and well-being of students. Consolidating funding for essential education and student well-being programs will fall woefully short in meeting the needs of all students. This proposed block grant will cut \$4.7 billion from the combined funding the 29 programs previously received in FY2020.

“Our association is especially disappointed that the Statewide Family Engagement Centers (SFEC) program is included in the block grant proposal. This will mean federal funds authorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) for family engagement could be spent on other initiatives, and not family engagement. Family engagement is a proven strategy to positively impact student achievement and school performance.

“We now call on Congress to make vital investments in public education that are critical to improve our schools, make every child’s potential a reality and increase our nation’s economic competitiveness.”

Fourth District message to lawmakers

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PTA believes that all our children from preschool to high school deserve an equitable educational environment that allows them to achieve their potential in a supportive atmosphere. Providing these special services at the expense of being able to fully fund regular programs lowers everyone’s educational experience instead of creating an environment where all children, regardless of needs and services, are allowed to thrive. We support ongoing additional resources for special education to address these increasing costs.

Vaping and Safety The increased numbers of our youth who abuse e-cigarettes and vaping greatly concern many Orange County parents. In 2016, only 3.8 percent of 12th graders reported smoking. By 2018, the Healthy Kids Survey revealed that 25 percent of high schoolers admit to vaping. The proliferation of fruit and candy-flavored nicotine and marijuana-based vaping pods over the past two years alarms parents who feel helpless to deal with the low regulation of such products. The unknown health ramifications have taken both parents and communities by surprise.

PTA strongly supports educating parents about the potential harmful effects to the adolescent brain from vaping nicotine, chemicals, and marijuana. We work to inform parents on how to identify signs that their children are using nicotine and how to have meaningful discussions with their children about it. PTA supports legislation to regulate vaping, study the long-term effects, and provide information to families and others.

Save the Date: Friday, April 3

Advocacy Forum

9:30 a.m. Location to be announced

CAPTA Advocacy Webinars

Join California State PTA Director of Legislation Shereen Walter and members of the Legislation Team during monthly Advocacy Webinars to discuss all the latest information.

The webinars take place the first Wednesday of the month from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Webinar registration link:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/rt/1383569761862691852>

Webinar ID: 436-971-571

For more information go to capta.org/focus-areas/advocacy/