

SPECIAL EDITION

Getting to Work on School Finance and Education Reform

The challenges for California's public school system are great. Each year thousands of dedicated teachers, administrators, school staff and volunteers help many students to achieve at high levels. But too many other students – especially those of color or from less wealthy communities – continue to be under-served and lag behind. It's a fact:

- California's schools serve the largest, most diverse student population in the country – more than six-million students;
- California has some of the most rigorous academic standards for students in the country; and yet,
- California's education system is among the most fragmented, complex and poorly funded in the country.

“There is still work to be done to ensure that our public schools serve all children well,” said Pam Brady, California State PTA president. “We want schools to help prepare *every* child for college or a career, and to help *every* child become a critical thinker and informed citizen.”

A movement to improve the state's education system and the way it funds schools has been gathering momentum in California for years. The state's intermittent budget crises add to the difficulty of achieving fundamental reform.

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“Strengthening the public education system, addressing the achievement gap, and ensuring the state properly funds all of our students – these remain the top education priorities of parents, of the public and of California State PTA,” Brady said. “We recognize



California's higher standards demand much of its young students, who learn in classrooms more crowded and with fewer enrichment activities than in most other states.

that major changes sometimes take time, but we are committed to making sure these issues remain at the forefront of the state's agenda. Nothing is more important to California's future than a strong public education system.”

As part of this effort, PTA joined with the California School Boards Association, Children Now and the League of Women Voters of California Education Fund to engage more state and local leaders in discussions about exactly what needs to be done to improve schools – from funding to accountability to professional development and school safety.

“Parents and community members, working with educators and civic and business groups, are ultimately the ones who must drive the process to reform our education system,” said Brenda Davis, Chair of California State PTA's School Finance Partnership Task Force and Immediate Past President. “It takes everyone working together to understand the challenges, identify solutions and get behind and push for those changes that need to happen.”



Reform Is Coming, We'll See It Through

Welcome to this Special Edition of *PTA in California!* This edition is funded through a grant California State PTA received from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, in partnership with the California School

Boards Association, Children Now and the League of Women Voters of California Education Fund.

This newsletter is one of the several ways PTA is advancing dialogue about vital education and school finance issues that our state must address.

As you know, an avalanche of change has already swept down on California's schools in the past two decades – statewide testing, class-size reduction, charter schools, interventions for low-performing schools, and bolstering reading instruction, to name just a few.

Our educators and school staffs have done an admirable job trying to implement all of these changes, which were often adopted piecemeal at the state level, sometimes with little supporting research and without the ongoing funding necessary to carry them out. Parents throughout California have been a significant partner in supporting these efforts. The pattern over and over again from the state has been to implement new educational programs and then cut the budget and stop them in midstream, before they are able to demonstrate long-term success.

The results of all this change for California's students have been mixed: Many students are showing steady increases in achievement, but many others still lag behind. We know we must continue to improve the system. And we have to do it in a more thoughtful, cohesive way to ensure long-term student achievement for all students.

The latest push occurred in spring 2007 with the release of the "Getting Down to Facts" studies. These 23 studies, conducted by Stanford University and commissioned

by state leaders, were meant to set the stage for more statewide dialogue about the resources and structural changes that might be necessary to strengthen California's K-12 public education system.

Following their release, many of us were poised for a serious effort to improve the system. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger even declared 2008 as the "Year of Education Reform." Unfortunately, the state's economy quickly put the discussion about serious reform on hold.

We've spent much of 2008 fighting to prevent deeper cuts to education and children's programs, rather than focusing on what we need to do and spend as a state to build and maintain a world-class system of schools.

I urge you not to give up hope. One of the strengths of PTA is our persistence and our dedication towards moving forward to ensure a first-rate education for all California students. Even though we've had to engage in a short-term battle over state budget cuts, the long-term need to invest and improve our schools is our highest priority.

"We know we must continue to improve the system. And we have to do it in a more thoughtful, cohesive way."

*Pam Brady,
California State PTA President*

One of our commitments at State PTA is to ensure we provide good information to help you learn more about the issues and jargon and choices. With the information in this special edition you can help inform others, and ultimately help our state make the decisions we need to invest in the future and support every child.

We know it will take many voices to remind our leaders that California used to be number one in the nation in its commitment to, and financial investment in, education. Education is far too important to just settle for how things are; we must unite our voices and remind our leaders of California's proud past history. Encourage them to solve the problem, be part of the solution and lead California to a better future!

Thank you for everything that you do on behalf of children and families!

The School Finance Project is a partnership of the California State PTA, the League of Women Voters of California Education Fund, Children Now, and the California School Boards Association. We are grateful to the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation for their support of this partnership and this special edition of *PTA in California*.

A Tradition of Advocacy

PTA's participation in the School Finance Project continues more than a century of advocacy on behalf of children.

One million members across the state and our team of volunteer lobbyists in the Capitol halls each speak for all children with one voice.

California State PTA's voice is the loudest in Sacramento fighting to retain class size reduction, which we helped to bring about. In recent years, PTA volunteers launched grassroots efforts to defeat the voucher initiative and to lower the threshold to 55% to pass school bond initiatives.

But working for better school funding is only one aspect of PTA advocacy for children.

Our volunteers have worked tirelessly to bring arts back into the schools with the "SMARTS – Bring Back the Arts" campaign.

In the 1990s, California State PTA developed a "Kids At Risk" legislation agenda and joined in the Red Ribbon campaign against the use of alcohol and other drugs. PTA spoke up for HIV/AIDS education when the subject was still largely taboo, and cosponsored the bicycle safety helmet law.

Many of the programs we take for granted today had their roots in PTA activism.

- The school lunch program legislated in 1925 began as PTA "Penny Kitchens."
- The Juvenile Justice System was created in 1941 with heavy lobbying by PTA.
- The California Congress of Mothers, as PTA was called then, was instrumental in bringing kindergarten to public schools in 1913.
- Issuing birth certificates was haphazard until 1915, when PTA pressed for a law requiring births be registered within 36 hours and deleting the terms "legitimate" or "illegitimate" from the birth certificate.

Pursuing the PTA objective "to secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children" has always been a vital part of the PTA mission. A PTA Legislation Platform that guides all PTA action on legislation is adopted biennially by delegates to the California State PTA Convention.

For more information, read the Advocacy section of the *California State PTA Toolkit* or visit the "Advocacy" section of the California State PTA website, www.capta.org.

School Finance Quiz

- 1. Revenue from California's State Lottery accounts for 15 percent of the average school's revenue.**
True or False?
- 2. Staffing expenses account for about 60 percent of a district's annual costs.**
True or False?
- 3. The per-student dollars allocated for 90 percent of California districts fall between:**
A) \$4,527 - \$9,548
B) \$6,678 - \$11,011
C) \$7,117 - \$12,154
- 4. California spends more per child than other large states.** True or False?
- 5. California has a lower student to teacher ratio than other comparable states.** True or False?
- 6. School districts are free to spend their money as they choose, without any external accountability.**
True or False?
- 7. Categorical aid is:**
A) Special credentials for teachers
B) The state's adopted math program
C) State or federal funding that is restricted for narrowly-defined purposes

answers

- 1. False** Lottery funds contribute, on the average, less than 2 percent of a school's income, generating about \$125 per student. A small portion of these funds is earmarked specifically for instructional materials.
- 2. False** Personnel costs dominate district expenditures, averaging 85 percent of the district budget.
- 3. B** \$6,678 - \$11,011
- 4. False** When adjusted for cost of living differences, Texas spends 12 percent more, Florida spends 18 percent more, New York spends 75 percent more and the rest of the country spends 30 percent more than California.
- 5. False** California averages 21.4 students per teacher; New York 13.8; Texas 14.9; Florida 18; all other states 15.6.
- 6. False** In addition to the legally required independent audits of district finances, County Offices of Education (COE) review and approve school budgets three times a year, and can impose sanctions and/or intervene to ensure fiscal responsibility.
- 7. C** State or federal funding that is restricted for narrowly-defined purposes

— California School Boards Association

The Basics of School Finance in California

ADAPTED WITH PERMISSION FROM EdSOURCE MATERIALS

Who decides how much money schools get?

Every summer the California legislature and governor decide how much money will go to kindergarten through 12th grade public education and how it will be divided among school districts, county offices of education, and the California Department of Education. A series of voter-approved initiatives provide significant restraints on both revenue options and how much funding must go to public schools. Although some changes occur each year, the system has looked about the same for more than 25 years.

What are the sources of district operating funds?

The column on the left of the diagram shows the five sources of operating funds for schools in California:

- The federal government contributes about 10% of the education budget, up from about 8% in 1996-97.
- About 60% of the funds are from the state—generated by business and personal income taxes, sales taxes, and some special taxes.
- Local property taxes are less than 23% of all funds. The Legislature and governor determine what part of these revenues goes to schools.
- The tiny line near the bottom of the column—less than 2% of the total, or less than \$125 per student—is from the California Lottery.
- Miscellaneous local revenues are about 6% of the total. These come from a variety of sources, such as special elections for parcel taxes (needs a two-thirds vote for approval); contributions from foundations, businesses, and individuals; food service sales, and interest on investments.

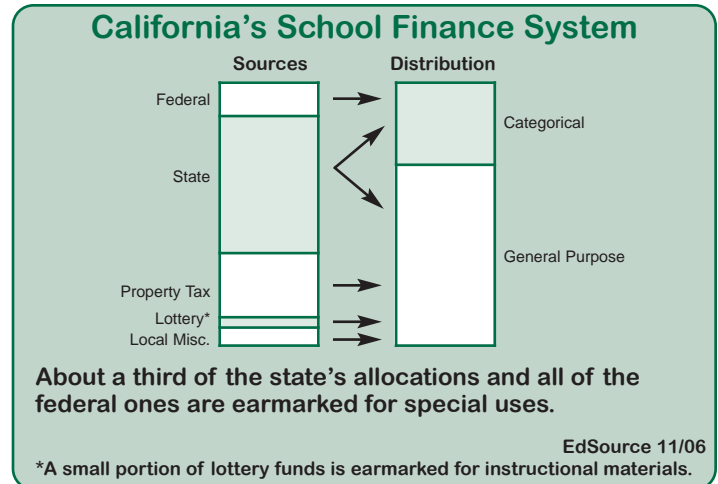
These simple boxes tell the whole story: There are no other sources of funds to run the K-12 public schools.

How are the funds distributed to school districts?

The column on the right shows how the different sources feed into school districts' operating budgets. Currently, about two-thirds of the money is for general purposes and almost one-third is earmarked for special purposes or categories of students.

Each district has its own particular combination of federal, state, and local sources. The amount depends on:

- The average daily attendance of students (ADA);
- The general purpose money the district receives from the state for each student (its "revenue limit");
- The support for specific programs for which it qualifies ("categorical aid").



The miscellaneous and lottery revenues provide less than 8% of funding statewide, but few restrictions are placed on its use. In some districts, this income represents a significant source of discretionary funds.

How is the amount that goes to each school district determined?

■ **Base Year Funding:** The Legislature established revenue limits (per-student funding amounts) at roughly what each district spent on general education programs in 1972, adjusted for inflation.

■ **Court Mandated Equalization:** The *Serrano v. Priest* court case, decided in 1976, had the net effect of making districts' general purpose money more equal per pupil in each type of district (elementary, unified, high school). By the late 1990s, revenue limits were within about a \$350 range for districts serving 97% of the state's students. But concerns about remaining inequalities prompted legislators in 2001-02 to pass a plan for further equalizing revenue limits.

■ **Property Taxes:** A district's revenue limit can be increased only by legislation, not by the school board, superintendent, or local voters. When property taxes rise, most schools do not directly benefit. The additional income goes toward the revenue limit, and the state's share is reduced proportionately. In about 60 of the almost 1,000 school districts, however, property taxes fill up or exceed the revenue limit. These districts get to keep their excess property tax revenues.

On average, California school districts have about three-fourths as many teachers as is true on average in the nation.

How Does California Compare?

California schools, once the envy of the nation, now lag behind schools in other states in funding, with the gap widening after the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978.

Moreover, California's system of financing schools differs from the pattern of the nation as a whole, largely due to Proposition 13's limits on the local property tax and other local revenues, as well as measures enacted after 1978 to help schools and local governments cope with the loss of local funding.

In 2005-06 – the most recent year for which data are available – California's schools:

- Ranked 48th in the nation with respect to the number of students per teacher, even with the state's Class Size Reduction Program for grades K-3. California averaged 19.1 students for each teacher, while the U.S. as a whole averaged 14.7 students per teacher in 2005-06.
- Ranked 34th among the 50 states in K-12 spending per student – roughly \$1,000 less per student than the U.S. as a whole. To reach the U.S. level of spending per student, California would have had to spend an additional \$5.9 billion in 2005-06, an increase of 11.1 percent.
- Ranked 34th in education spending as a percentage of personal income – a measure that reflects the size of a state's economy and the resources available to support public services. Californians spend 3.82 percent of personal income on education; the national average is 4.17 percent.
- Ranked above the U.S. average in percentage spent on instruction and student services – 95.3 cents vs. 93.9 cents of every education dollar for other states, while devoting significantly less to administration – 0.9% vs. 2.0% for the nation.

TAKEN FROM THE CALIFORNIA BUDGET PROJECT *SCHOOL FINANCE FACTS*, OCTOBER 2007
www.cbp.org

The Basics of School Finance in California

(Continued from page 4)

■ **Categorical Aid:** Designated funds are distributed by the state and federal governments according to the needs of the children in the district and the special programs for which the district qualifies. This aid is quite substantial in some districts and minimal in others. Since the 1960s, court decisions, legislative priorities, and pressure from interest groups have created a wealth of categorical programs.

Funding for some programs can be used only to provide funds for specific services, such as school lunches, or to serve the needs of particular students, such as English learners and low income students. The largest of these programs is Special Education, which provides funds for extra services needed to educate students with disabilities.

Some programs are completely voluntary. Others provide money to help districts pay for services they are required by law to provide. Still others are incentive programs intended to encourage districts to implement a specific program or reform, such as California's K-3 Class Size Reduction program.

Since the late 1990s, state policymakers have made some attempts to consolidate and simplify categorical programs.

But that has been offset by their tendency to create new programs when extra funds are available, as was the case with the 2006-07 budget.

Do California schools receive enough funding?

In California the question of funding adequacy consistently underlies discussions about improving public schools. Many people point to comparisons with education funding in other states to say California's funding is insufficient.

For almost three decades, this state's expenditures per pupil have trailed the national average. Since 1994-95 the state's expenditures have ranged from 84% to 96% of the U.S. average, depending on the year. In addition, the number of personnel California schools are able to hire is substantially lower than is true in most of the country. California has a high cost of living, and its residents' salaries are also consistently near the top.

The combination of below average per-pupil expenditures and above-average salaries results in some of the lowest ratios of staff to students in the country. On average, California school districts have about three-fourths as many teachers as is true on average in the nation. The numbers of school site administrators, district administrators, counselors, and librarians have historically been even lower.

Our thanks to EdSource and the California Budget Project for information used in this newsletter.
For facts and analyses on a variety of education topics, visit www.edsource.org or www.cbp.org.

Parents' Priorities for School

Policy Issues and Recommendations

Based on existing resolutions and position statements, and on the input from members as part of the School Finance Project, California State PTA strongly recommends the following priorities as the state considers any public education reforms:

Systemic Reform

- California's public education system must focus on student needs, rather than being "compliance-driven."
- The definition of a quality education must include breadth and depth far beyond the 3 "R's." The end goal must be to develop students with lifelong learning and career skills – critical and creative thinkers able to contribute to society and fulfill their own potential.
- Quality education must be individualized. The system must respond to how individual children learn, and there must be multiple ways to assess and evaluate student progress. One size does not fit all.
- Equity and equal access are paramount. In schools and communities across the state, every child must have access to quality programs and services.
- Any reforms must be funded at levels that ensure successful implementation. Once implemented and funded, reform efforts must be given a chance to work.

Funding

- More resources are needed for virtually every aspect of education, from materials, textbooks, and supplies to technology, libraries and facilities; plus expanded and enhanced human resources via trained professionals in all academic curriculum areas, arts education, physical education, nutrition, health and counseling services.
- We must increase the overall per-pupil allocation of funding to provide the staff, support services and other resources needed to improve outcomes for all children.
- All funding must be used effectively and efficiently.
- The state budget process must be stable and allow for adequate resources and planning at the local level.
- The school finance system at all levels must be easier to understand, so that it helps strengthen confidence in, and support for, public education.
- The school finance system must account for differences in the needs of children and local communities.

High Quality Staff

- Quality education depends above all on quality staff. California's efforts to raise student achievement and reduce the achievement gap require additional investments in training and support for new and experienced teachers, as well as leadership development for administrators.
- Teachers must be expertly trained in interdisciplinary approaches; they must be able to deliver curriculum and assessments in multiple ways. As individuals, they must be culturally competent, emotionally invested, and committed to lifelong learning.
- Leadership development must include training in the evaluation and coaching of staff.
- Additional investments must be made to raise staffing levels of school support personnel in order to help improve student outcomes.
- More flexibility in the compensation of staff should be considered.

Parent and Community Engagement

- Strengthening the connection between families and schools must be a priority, including programs that assist parents in better understanding their role in the educational success of their children.
- Staff development at all levels must include strategies to increase parental and community engagement and to promote home-school connections.
- Laws and regulations should be reviewed and revised as appropriate to allow maximum collaboration between local agencies and entities that deliver programs and services for children and families.
- Schools should be centers of the community. Partnerships must be forged with parents, the business community, youth groups, social services – everyone with a vested interest in the community. There should be open communication and a sense of ownership by all members of the community.

From the California State PTA policy brief (October 19, 2007). The surveys, focus groups and reviews necessary to produce this document were funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation as part of the School Finance Project. To read the full report of the group, visit www.capta.org and type "School Finance Project" into the search feature. The PTA policy brief can be found in the Education section of www.capta.org.

Finance and Education Reform



California State PTA President Pam Brady congratulates state winners in the PTA Reflections arts program, one of the ways in which PTA has worked to broaden the curriculum to develop critical and creative thinking.

Governance

- Decision-making authority must be moved closer to the district and/or school site.
- Whenever it is in the best interests of children and families, local schools and locally elected school boards that are accountable to the local communities who elect them, must have maximum ability to set policies and make decisions to ensure all students meet the standards.
- The state should establish standards and maintain and support the state accountability program.
- Accountability must include multiple measures and be focused on student learning; it must be fair, not punitive.

Facilities

- Quality environment and facilities are essential. Learning environments must be clean, safe and configured to promote multiple ways of learning.
- All teachers and students must have the materials and resources they need.
- Class sizes must be reduced across all grade levels.

Data

- School and state data systems must be accessible, comprehensive and understandable, so as to enhance the ability at the local and state levels to evaluate programs and make informed decisions about reforms.
- Student performance must be measured across time.
- Assessments must be accurate, timely and student-focused. They must be recognized primarily as a means of improving classroom instruction so all students can succeed, not as a scorecard for evaluating schools.

Use the search feature of the California State PTA website, www.capta.org, to find:

- Current legislation
- Position statements
- Legislative priorities
- Sacramento Update
- Legislation Conference

The Road to School Finance and Education Reform

Important steps have been taken on the road to achieving comprehensive school finance and education reform. For example, both the Governor and Superintendent of Public Instruction appointed blue ribbon task forces to bring forth recommendations on improving schools through changes to the state’s educational system. This work builds on the earlier Master Plan for Education and was in part set in motion by the results of the “Getting Down to Facts” studies. All of the reports can be found at the state PTA website, www.capta.org/sections/programs/education.cfm. Below are summaries of those key reports:

Master Plan for Education Pre-K – University	Governor’s Committee on Education Excellence
<p>In 1999, in an effort to strengthen the planning and coordination of California’s complex educational system and to serve as a guide to future decisions of the Legislature and policy makers, the Legislature established a Joint Committee to Develop the Master Plan. It was chaired by then-Senator Dede Alpert from San Diego.</p> <p>Development of the plan involved five broad-based working groups considering different aspects of the education system. Ultimately their work led to a package of reform bills introduced in the Legislature in 2004.</p> <p>While some component parts of the bills have since been enacted, the comprehensive package was not adopted. Still, the findings of the Master Plan Committee created a foundation for later reform recommendations.</p>	<p>Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed a 20-member panel in 2006 which issued a series of recommendations this spring. The panel’s goals were to: strengthen teaching and leadership; ensure fair funding that rewards results; streamline governance and strengthen accountability; and use data wisely.</p> <p>Teaching: Teachers and administrators need more practical training and professional development.</p> <p>Funding: The Commission calls for a transition to a “student-centered funding system,” where the amount of funding provided by the state is determined more directly by student needs.</p> <p>Governance: The Commission urged greater autonomy for decisions about schools to be made at the local level; and to streamline and deregulate parts of the education system.</p> <p>Data: The system should be able to track achievement by students over time.</p>
The “Getting Down to Facts” Studies	The Superintendent’s P-16 Council
<p>In March 2007, Stanford University’s Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice released 23 studies called, “Getting Down to Facts: School Finance and Governance.” The studies, commissioned by state leaders and funded by private foundations, made findings in four key areas:</p> <p>Finance: The system of funding schools is complex, irrational, prescriptive, centralized and unstable. California spends a relatively low amount per student compared to other states. The system treats similar districts differently and fails to provide adequate resources for students with high needs.</p> <p>Governance: The system has strong accountability and an unusually high degree of regulation.</p> <p>Personnel: Training for teachers and administrators is out of touch. California has fewer teachers and support staff per student than other states.</p> <p>Information and Data: California lags in data collection related to student learning.</p>	<p>Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O’Connell assembled leaders in education, business and communities to examine the achievement gap between students. Among their findings:</p> <p>Preschool Education: Achievement gaps begin before kindergarten. Efforts to close them will require effective preschool and better alignment of standards from preschool through high school and into college.</p> <p>Teaching: Focus on academic rigor; tie rewards to academic improvement. Better align education systems from preschool to college. The state should be a resource for classroom-ready materials.</p> <p>Strategies: Create a robust information system. Give greater local flexibility and control. Develop community partnerships.</p> <p><i>Many of these reports’ recommendations are consistent with California State PTA’s positions. Other recommendations delve into areas where PTA has expressed concerns in the past, or does not yet have a position. We encourage you to review the full reports directly at www.capta.org/sections/programs/education.cfm.</i></p>

Who Decides?

California's education system has many layers of control.



LOCAL

School District

Local Governing Boards have the most authority at the local level. They are charged with making decisions regarding policy, programs and funding at all schools in their district. Boards hire a superintendent who manages the district and reports to them. The board sets the local district budget and school allocations; however, they have little control over the amount of funding the school receives and spending decisions are often severely limited by state and federal program requirements.

Superintendents typically wield a substantial amount of authority over the practices, procedures and operations of the schools in their districts. They influence the district funding priorities, curriculum, and goals. However, their authority is limited by the local school board and state and federal program requirements.

School Site

School-site Councils are advisory bodies that include principals, teachers, parents, and students (at middle and high schools). They are charged with developing a Student Plan for School Achievement. The plan, which is approved by the school board, includes goals, strategies, funding sources and budget. It is a requirement of specific funding the school receives.

Principals are charged with running the day-to-day operations of their schools. However, their authority on particular issues can vary substantially between districts and is always limited by district policies and state law. The principal is usually the first person parents consult when concerns or issues arise.

STATE

The State Legislature and the Governor form the middle and largest layer of this multi-tiered “cake” of authority. Through both their budget-making authority and the multitude of laws they routinely pass every year, the ability to make decisions at the local level is restricted further.

The Secretary of Education is appointed by and advises the Governor.

The State Board of Education (SBE) consists of 11 members appointed by the Governor. It is the governing and policy-making body of the California Department of Education and sets K-12 education policy in the areas of standards, instructional materials, assessment, and accountability. The SBE adopts textbooks for grades K-8, adopts regulations to implement legislation, and has authority to grant waivers of the state Education Code.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction is elected independently and heads the Department of Education.

The California Department of Education (CDE) through program guidelines and administrative regulations, holds much of the statewide decision-making authority for education. It implements the decisions of the State Board of Education. It oversees testing, accountability, and implementation of adopted standards and materials.

FEDERAL

The Secretary of Education is appointed by the U.S. President as part of his advisory Cabinet and leads the federal Department of Education.

The U.S. Department of Education distributes federal education funding and monitors its use. Examples of federal funding are the No Child Left Behind Act; Title I funds for low income students; the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for Special Education; English Learners programs and Vocational education.

COUNTY

County Offices of Education are governed by elected **County Boards of Education** and run by county **Superintendents**. County offices have specific oversight functions and serve as a liaison between school districts within their counties. They also may provide educational services to special populations like delinquent youth.

Understanding “Edu-speak”



Joining in a discussion about school reform can feel like entering a foreign country without a phrase book. Here are some common terms and abbreviations drawn from Ed-Data and EdSource.

Academic Performance Index (API): The cornerstone of California’s Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999, the API measures the academic performance and growth of schools based on a variety of tests and establishes a statewide ranking of schools according to those scores.

Block Grant: Multiple allocations of special-purpose funds combined into one. A block grant tends to have fewer restrictions on how the money is spent than the original funding types had.

California Standards Tests (CSTs): State tests within the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program that are based on California’s academic content standards in: English (grades 2-11); math (grades 2-11); history (grades 8, 10, and 11); and science (grades 5, 8, 10, and high school science students).

Categorical Aid: Funds from the state or federal government granted for special purposes, including instruction for children with special needs; the School Improvement Program (SIP); school busing; arts programs and instructional materials.

Emergency Permit: In California, a one-year permit issued to people entering the teaching profession who have not yet completed some of the legal requirements for a credential. Emergency permit holders must have a college degree, pass the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST), and have some subject-matter knowledge. The permit allows the person to work only in the hiring district.

Mandated Costs: School district expenditures that are required because of federal or state law, court decisions, administrative regulations, or initiative measures. Since the passage of Proposition 4 in 1979 (the Gann Limit), the California Constitution has required the repayment of mandated costs to school districts.

Opportunity To Learn (OTL): The standards that measure the extent to which key educational resources—such as experienced teachers, adequate materials, rigorous courses, and safe, clean, uncrowded facilities—are provided at a school site. Providing an “opportunity to learn” helps abolish the achievement gap by making sure students and school staff have what they need to be successful at high levels.

Program Improvement (PI): A plan to improve the performance of students in a school that did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) for two years in a row. Only schools receiving federal Title I funds are placed in Program Improvement.

Propositions 98 and 111: Voter-approved initiatives that amended the California constitution in 1988 and 1990 to guarantee a minimum amount of funding for K-14 education each year. The propositions included formulas for calculating the guarantee under different economic conditions. Proposition 98 also mandated School Accountability Report Cards.

Significant Subgroup: Groups of students categorized by ethnicity, poverty, English learner status, and Special Education designation. Under NCLB, every subgroup within a school must meet set goals as well as the school as a whole.

Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program: A statewide testing system that was enacted in 1997, STAR has three elements: 1) California Standards Tests; 2) California Achievement Tests, Sixth Edition Survey (CAT/6), a nationally normed, standardized, multiple-choice, basic-skills test that is given only in grades 3 and 7; and 3) Aprenda 3, given to Spanish-speaking English Learners. The Aprenda 3 is being replaced by the Standards-based Tests in Spanish (STS). Student achievement on certain STAR tests largely determines a school’s ranking on the Academic Performance Index.

Supplemental Services (under NCLB): Additional services, such as tutoring or transfer with free busing to a higher-scoring school, that the school district must provide to students from low-income families attending schools in Program Improvement.

Title I: A federal program providing extra money to schools with a higher percentage of educationally disadvantaged students, including children of migrant workers. Schools receiving Title I monies must involve parents in deciding how those funds are spent.

For a comprehensive glossary visit www.EdSource.org.

Becoming a Force for School Reform

Reading this special issue on education reform has hopefully piqued your interest in playing a more active role in making education reform a reality. California's children need you, and the window of opportunity for focusing on significant education reform is open now.

PTA members are powerful; they know what is happening in their schools and have a wealth of resources to help them band together for change.

A little time every month spent encouraging elected officials and influential partners to act now on education reform could reap considerable rewards for children and schools – especially if that power is multiplied across the state.

For many, engaging in this process might be a new activity and some direction on how to become a compelling force for school reform might be helpful.

Below is a list of activities we believe will ensure that this opportunity for reform is seized. You can find more resources, links and tips for effective advocacy at the California State PTA website, www.capta.org.

The First Step to Get Involved: Be Informed

In this issue we have presented brief summaries of the reform recommendations put forth by committees appointed by Governor Schwarzenegger and Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell, as well as two pivotal earlier works, the Master Plan for Education and "Getting Down to Facts" studies.

- Read or skim the full reports (see page 8).
- Read California State PTA positions on the website or in the advocacy section of the *Toolkit*.
- Sign up for legislative alerts and Sacramento Update at www.capta.org.

California's children need you, and the window of opportunity for focusing on significant education reform is open now.



Pat Dingsdale, director of legislation for California State PTA, addresses a rally at the Capitol protesting proposed cuts in public school funding.

Step 2: Join with Others

- Confer with your PTA/PTSA's legislative committee to gain a deeper understanding of the issues and the process for change at the Capitol.
- If you don't have a legislative committee, start one. Remember, you don't need to do this in one day or one week. Banding together with other members of your PTA or PTSA will allow the workload to be spread around.
- Attend local and statewide forums or conferences about reform.

Step 3: Action

Once you have a basic understanding of reforms being discussed:

- Write letters to elected officials.
- Meet with influential local leaders.
- Talk to business and local government leaders about the importance of school reform to your community as a whole.
- Visit legislators in their home districts.
- Call the Governor and Legislature to let them know that seeing education reform take place is your top priority in the coming year.

For information on how to join or start a PTA at your school, go to the membership section of the California State PTA website, www.capta.org.

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This edition of PTA in California is devoted to informing and involving all parents in the growing discussion about school finance reform.

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The mission of the California State PTA is to positively impact the lives of all children and families by representing our members and empowering and supporting them with skills in advocacy, leadership and communications.

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