

CTA Quick Study

7 March 2008

Focus on the Budget

CTA, Coalition Vow Unified Front at Local, State Levels

CTA and the Education Coalition partners are crediting their unity and support from Californians across the state for derailing efforts to make massive mid-year reductions in school funding.

The Coalition's constituent organizations are urging their affiliates to form coalitions at the local level to battle Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's proposal to slash a total of \$4.8 billion from public education in the 2008-2009 budget year.

In a letter sent to its affiliates, the Coalition – which represents millions of parents, teachers, school support personnel, administrators, and other school supporters – reported that “We are proud that the members of the Education Coalition worked together to defeat mid-year cut proposals that would have been particularly harmful to students.” The letter notes that the \$506 million in reductions came primarily “from savings and unspent funds that would have been available for schools’ use later this year. While these reductions hurt, they are far less disruptive than the much-more massive reductions in current-year programs that had been proposed.”

Further, the Coalition letter notes that the combined efforts were able to defeat “proposals to manipulate the Proposition 98 Constitutional funding protection to make it easier to cut school funding in the future.”

At the same time, the Coalition warned that Gov. Schwarzenegger's proposed reductions would “cut school funding next year by nearly \$800 per pupil. [The cuts] would increase class sizes, eliminate critical support staff, and devastate programs that schools have put in place to help students meet grade level standards and pass the high school exit exam.”

“We are stronger working together to oppose these cuts [and maintain our] focus on the primary issue—to protect our students and to reject the Governor's proposal to suspend the Proposition 98 funding guarantee and cut school funding by more than \$4 billion.”

“It is important now more than ever that the education community come together [at the local level] to fight these devastating proposals to cut education funding,” the letter concludes.

Coalition groups have been working together on media events around the state to inform voters that the cuts the governor has proposed would wreak havoc on California's already under-funded public education system.

The proposed reductions would be the equivalent of laying off over 107,000 teachers or 137,000 support personnel, ending school one month early, or increasing class size by 35%.

The devastating impact of these proposed cuts has sparked mobilizations of more than one million Coalition members, including teachers, support personnel, and parents.

Opposing Education Cuts

Senate Democrats Back Tax Boosts to Save School Funding

(SACRAMENTO, Ca.) 4 March 2008 – Leaders of the Senate Democratic Caucus declared at a Tuesday morning news conference their opposition to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger’s proposed \$4.8 billion in education cuts and their support for loophole closings and new taxes to bridge the state’s budget gap.

Flanked by students, teachers, school employees, and administrators, Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata (D-Oakland), Pro Tem-elect Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento), Senate Education Chair Jack Scott (D-Pasadena), and Sen. Tom Torlakson (D-Antioch) told reporters at C.K. McClatchy High School in Sacramento that schools would be devastated by the governor’s slashes in funding.

Sen. Perata said that Senate Democrats would be withholding “for as long as it takes” their votes for approving a budget that contains these cuts. He noted that Republican lawmakers held up the budget for 30 days last year only to make the final spending plan worse. The Senate Democratic leader said his colleagues were willing to “fight the good fight” to protect schools from cuts.

The Senate Democratic leader urged the governor and Republican lawmakers to approve loophole closures and to adopt temporary and permanent new taxes, instead of cutting schools. Sen. Perata said that the Legislative Analyst had identified \$2.7 billion in loopholes that benefit wealthy special interests. The governor and lawmakers could cover the additional \$5 billion shortfall by raising the sales tax or adopting other taxes to raise additional revenue. The senator said the governor’s proposed cuts were wrong-headed. He noted that the governor said he would back the loophole closures until Republican lawmakers pressured him to recant.

Sen. Perata stressed that the state doesn’t have a spending problem – contrary to the governor’s assertions. Schools have an under-funding problem that is harming students, the Senate leader said.

The senator stressed that it will be important for teachers, parents, and other school supporters to get the word out about the havoc the cuts would wreak. Otherwise, he conceded, it’s just “politicians talking.”

Sen. Steinberg underscored that students were not the reason for the state’s spending problem. He stated that in the Sacramento area, the governor’s proposed cuts were forcing the layoffs of some 600 teachers and other school employees and an \$85 million reduction in schools in the county. Those reductions would “kill off” class size reduction, physical education, art, music, and library programs, among others.

Sen. Torlakson noted that California has already slipped to 46th nationally in per-student spending, a situation that will become worse under the governor’s budget plan. The senator calculated that the governor’s \$760 per-student reduction would force cuts of about \$400,000 to the average school.

Sen. Scott stressed that reports of layoff notices will also cause college students in education courses to rethink whether they want to go into teaching. As a result, the cuts will worsen the state’s teacher shortage.

Linda Tuttle, president of the Sacramento City Teachers Association/CTA/NEA, declared that teachers are committed to fight for their students and oppose the governor’s cuts.

Ellen Wong, a McClatchy teacher for more than 20 years, said that education is the only long-term solution to the state’s problems. Cutting physical education, art, music and other programs will exacerbate the state’s dropout problems.

Dave Gordon, the Sacramento County Superintendent of Schools, recounted that his children had been students at McClatchy at a time the state ranked much higher in per-student spending. He called for a renewed financial commitment to public education.

Staff for the Senate Democrats reported that the Sacramento news event is the first of a number scheduled around the state to highlight the impact of the governor's proposed cuts on local schools.

Contact Coordinator Training

More than 200 Gear Up to Win Battles for Students, Schools

(Los Angeles, Ca.) 23 February 2008 – More than 200 CTA members and staff engaged in intensive workshops as part of the CTA 2008 Contact Training Institute here.

The CTA representatives focused their attention on honing organizing skills to help them mobilize hundreds of thousands of teachers, educational support personnel, parents, and other school supporters in opposition to further education cuts. As Team leaders, these members and staff are the Association's primary organizers to mobilize members to get in touch with state and federal lawmakers and other elected officials on vital issues.

During the workshops and general sessions, participants heard from CTA leaders, who pointed out how much is riding this year on the budget deliberations in the state Capitol. The officers noted that schools are facing proposed cuts in excess of \$4 billion, cuts that would be the equivalent of reducing school support by \$24,000 per classroom.

"Our grassroots mobilization aims to help us protect school funding, win affordable health care for everyone, and secure each and every employee a secure retirement," CTA President David Sanchez told participants during his welcoming remarks.

CTA Vice President Dean Vogel recounted his own efforts in past years as a Contact Team leader. He urged the CTA members to use the already existing structures in Chapters in their area to generate contacts with legislators on key educational issues.

The CTA members and staff also heard from Sen. Alex Padilla (D-Pacoima), who warned them about the scope of the state's budget shortfall – some \$16 billion in red ink – and the unwillingness of some lawmakers to consider revenue enhancements to protect schools and other vital interests.

In his closing remarks, CTA Secretary Treasurer Dan Vaughn reminded the participants they had homework assignments: to mobilize their members "to communicate effectively with the governor and lawmakers about the devastating effects of proposed additional cuts on students and schools in their district.....to be persuasive in securing public officials' agreement to support CTA and the Education Coalition in the battle to protect public education."

√ **Here's What You Can Do**

CTA's Contact Team Coordinators are in the process of forming up their teams. If you'd like to help mobilize CTA members and other education supporters to help protect school funding, get in touch with your chapter or your local CTA staff person and volunteer.

For more information, contact CTA GR Communications Consultant Len Feldman at lfeldman@cta.org.