

California State Budget

This paper responds to the Governor's budget proposal as presented over the month of May. His proposals represent unacceptable cuts to education as well as an unfounded belief that the public will not accept new or increased taxes. The Governor's false deductions about the nature of voter intent from the May ballot results coupled by what can only be called a slash and burn mentality, if allowed to stand, will destroy California's education system.

As a progressive organization, the California Federation of Teachers (CFT) is concerned about how the cuts will affect all Californians, noting that sick or underfed children face severe difficulty learning even when they are able to attend school, and the quality of life for all Californians suffer without parks, libraries, and other social services. The impact of these deep cuts will not only be felt immediately, but will have a ripple effect. We also support ending the 2/3 requirement for passage of a budget. This paper, however, focuses specifically upon education funding.

Some facts

- California is 47th in the nation in per pupil spending, based on 2007-08 figures.
- The 2008-09 budget act passed in September funded Prop 98 at \$58 billion.
- The current plan proposes to reduce the 2008-09 enacted budget to \$49 billion.

Overview

- We cannot accept these draconian cuts to education. The proposed \$49 billion accounts for a total reduction of \$9 billion, within the last nine months. Although California stands to gain federal funds for schools that total just over \$6 billion, the \$9 billion represents an on going cut that will be compounded year after year, while the federal money is one time and to be used by the local agencies over a few years.
- These cuts will cause further layoffs, increase class sizes, fewer academic materials, and fewer educational opportunities. K-12 and community college districts have already begun eliminating or reducing summer sessions, eliminating both remedial opportunities and advancements to a significant segment of our population, driving California deeper into recession. We should be protecting jobs that support our economy and not adding to our economic problems by eliminating part-time teachers, cutting back programs, and laying off teachers, classified staff, and other support personnel and putting them on the unemployment line.

Representing faculty
and classified workers in
public and private schools
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childhood through higher
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Revenue

- The Governor has stated several times that the voters have spoken through the ballot box that they will not accept increased taxes. We adamantly disagree. Only one of the five failing ballot measures related to future increased taxes. And the exit polls have demonstrated only about 25% of those voting “No” voted based upon keeping taxes low. The polls have also shown that about 70% of voters are willing to pay progressive taxes in order to fund schools and other vital services. We agree with the Governor that the voters viewed the package as a whole too cumbersome; even those in Sacramento who deal regularly with the budget could not agree on the actual ramification of the special election propositions, much less on what they would actually do.
- The CFT has shared with the legislature and the administration that they can enact progressive taxes without hurting the economy of California or overburdening any of its residents. We should close corporate tax loopholes, some of which were approved in just these last two budget acts, enact an oil severance tax, and raise the highest income tax bracket to the 1993 level when Governor Wilson held office. A majority of the public supports these fair tax policies that would save our vital services. CFT also believes that we should amend the California Constitution to reduce the current 2/3 requirement to at least a 55% majority on parcel tax votes. This change will help schools and community colleges, allowing the wishes of a majority of voters to be followed. Additionally, lowering the voter threshold for such taxes would make the passage of parcel taxes consistent with the threshold now required to pass school and community college facility bonds.

No Outsourcing

- Non-teaching personnel contribute to student success and accountability decreases when institutions cut school staff and outsource services.
- Our research has shown that contracting out seldom produces the promised cost-savings, and that districts instead lose the capacity to adequately serve their students. Many contracting out programs enjoy short-term savings at the expense of higher long-term costs. Contracting out disrupts school stability, demoralizes staff, and leaves districts vulnerable to being held financially hostage in later years. Moreover, current law (Chapter 894, Statutes of 2002) does not ban contracting out; it merely sets reasonable parameters for school and community college districts so that they can sustain real cost savings.

Academic Standards and Student Performance

- California needs to sustain a variety of programs that have increased student learning, while allowing school districts additional control over their budgets. The Class Size Reduction program, established in 1996 to improve education, especially in reading and mathematics, of children in kindergarten and grades one through three, has already demonstrated success. Students perform best and teachers are most effective in smaller classes. Students need to be able to access age appropriate technical education and counseling systems that recognize the value of both safe work practices and career technical education.



- Additionally, we oppose wholesale plans to suspend or eliminate various K-12 education mandates, requiring school districts to continue the mandated activities, but denying state reimbursement for those activities, circumventing the clear intent of the voters in constitutionally requiring reimbursement of state mandates. Additionally, since mandates arose through policy needs, we cannot sidestep them through the budget process. Mandates can and should be reviewed through the legislative policy process so that all parties have an opportunity to discuss the mandates. “Suspending” mandates to avoid paying for them is a bad policy and a clear attempt to avoid this important constitutional requirement.

Testing

- Testing students is an important component in assessing student development and learning needs, but California’s tests have grown into a costly and educationally unsound enterprise. It makes sense to cut unnecessary, mandated tests. For example second grade tests do not help teachers help students because they are not age and developmentally appropriate.
- And it’s time to take another look at the costs and results of the high school exit exam, offered for the first time in 2001, to assess its effects.

Transportation

- We oppose the Governor’s proposal to cut home to school transportation by 65 percent, equivalent to \$403 million. This cut represents a devastating blow to school transportation services across the state, placing the safety and lives of public school children in harm’s way, and disproportionately impacting students with disabilities and those who are economically disadvantaged.
- In many rural areas, public transportation is not an option for children and the roads are very dangerous for pedestrians. And, in other areas of the state, children will have to walk through dangerous neighborhoods and on busy streets, or over busy freeways to get to school.

We urge you to consider these issues and commit to resolving California’s budget crisis without cutting education and vital social services and without increasing regressive taxes and giving permanent tax breaks to corporations.

Prepared by
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