



California Federation of Teachers
American Federation of Teachers, AFT/AFL-CIO

CFT EDUCATION AGENDA 2005

Key education challenges face Governor Schwarzenegger and the Legislature in 2005. The economy is not going to grow enough to close the gap in the budget. The Governor is going to have to decide whether to continue cutting public education and other necessary social programs, or find ways to increase revenues. Unfortunately the Governor has decided to divert the focus away from realism—a growing state population means the need for growing state programs to address its needs—with demagoguery and attacks on public workers, including teachers and other public school employees.

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Preserve Prop. 98 funding guarantee
Cuts threaten achievement gains
- 2. Review K-12 Standards**
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1. BUDGET

Protect funding and achievement gains

K-12

California school funding is already among the lowest in the nation, and now Gov. Schwarzenegger proposes additional education cuts.

California ranks 44th in per pupil spending (*“Quality Counts 2005,” Education Week Report*) among the states (2001-2, the last year available). Factoring in Gov. Schwarzenegger’s 2003-04 and 2004-05 multi-billion dollar cuts, California appears headed to the very bottom of the states in providing school funding.

Over the past four years, the children of California public schools have withstood cuts of \$9.8 billion as compared to Proposition 98 mandates. Last year, Gov. Schwarzenegger’s budget put us \$2 billion further in the hole, but the governor promised to give schools and community colleges the Prop. 98 share of revenues that exceeded the budget – an amount estimated to be at least \$1.2 billion.

The governor has broken that promise, further harming California’s school children. This means we will continue to see school closures, increases in class size at all grade levels, staff reductions at the school site and district offices as well as devastating shortages of librarians, counselors, nurses and other critical staff.

The recent Rand Corporation study shows that California’s K-12 school system has fallen from a national leader 30 years ago to its current ranking near the bottom in almost every category, including per-pupil funding and class size. California has the second-highest ratio of students per teacher in the nation, with five more students per class than the national average.

The total reductions mean:

\$1,550 less per student

\$38,750 less per classroom

Additional cuts will undermine recent state improvements in national achievement tests (e.g., fourth grade math and reading scores have improved more over the past seven years than any other state).

Moreover, across the board cuts in school funding hit hardest those most in need. We should be building a system that provides the resources to educate all our children. That means more money.

STATE REVENUE: ADEQUACY AND EQUITY

The CFT agrees with Warren Buffet: Proposition 13 needs revision if California is to regain long-term financial stability. Property taxes have been the most reliable revenue source for public services, but Prop 13 established an unfair type of stability. It created inequities between commercial and residential taxes, and within the residential tax structure as well. It's time to review Prop 13 as part of a new tax structure that generates adequate and stable funding while treating taxpayers fairly.

Fair tax policies are the financial foundation of a modern society. Shredding social programs is not a solution; it's part of the problem. The federal tax breaks for the rich included hidden costs in deteriorating our quality of life. In California, the reduction in vehicle license fees meant a deeper state budget problem, and a rolling effect on important county and municipal programs dependent on state funding. It's irresponsible and deceptive to reduce state revenues while increasing fees for students and users of libraries and parks. Our surveys tell us that people are happy to support targeted taxes that support necessary social programs. It just takes some courageous leadership to make it happen.

We also need to acknowledge the impact of federal tax cuts on California's schools and other important social services. Close to ten percent of local school budget come from federal programs, which are being starved by the massive and growing federal budget deficit. The CFT proposes that the state legislature send a joint resolution to Congress calling for a rollback of the tax cuts for the wealthy.

2. REVIEW AND ADJUST STATE ACADEMIC STANDARDS

It's time to review the state academic content standards. We remain committed to high quality achievement goals. But we have now lived a few years with the most recent set of academic content standards. Serious concerns have arisen out of our experience.

- ***YEAR-TO-YEAR***

When the standards were developed by a state commission and the State Board of Education, those bodies used for guidance the criteria for standards published by the AFT. One of the most important was that the standards specified for a given academic year could be covered in a year. This is particularly important because our California standards are quite linear and progress is dependent on mastering the material of one year to have a sound basis for the next. Yet we know from our teachers that this is all but impossible in too many cases.

- ***DEPTH OF SUBJECT MATTER***

The AFT's Albert Shanker Institute found in a recent state-by-state review of social studies standards that they look good on paper, but most states, including California, have too many standards. Consequently, classroom coverage is thin, leading to a thin understanding of what being a citizen means, and of what are the rights and responsibilities of Americans.

The State Board of Education has authority to review and adjust state standards, and we will be asking them to do so.

3. PRESERVE ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Student Access Crisis

If implemented, the Governor's proposed Prop 98 community college cuts (approximately \$200 million) would have a deep impact on the colleges' ability to deliver quality instruction. Skyrocketing student fees mean fewer middle class and working class students (let alone students from disadvantaged backgrounds) can afford to attend college and university. While K-12 enrollment has flattened out, the echo of the Baby Boom has increased college enrollment demands at the same time funding is being cut. Tens of thousands of Californians are seeking new careers to keep pace with the rapidly changing economy. At the same time, student fee increases are preventing many Californians from enrolling in community colleges and four-year schools. Historically, each percent increase in student fees brings a drop in enrollment of roughly one hundred thousand community college students.

Community college funding is not based on the number of students the colleges

serve. Instead, it is based on population growth as a whole. Inadequate funding has resulted in cuts in programs and layoffs of instructors across the state, shortchanging community college students trying to prepare themselves for jobs and citizenship in California.

No Child Left Behind places a hidden burden on community colleges

The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act requires that paraprofessionals (instructional aides) now must have an Associate of Arts degree or an alternative program of academic preparation. A large influx of paraprofessionals is turning to overcrowded community colleges to obtain needed certification.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

It now costs close to \$7000 for a year of “free” public higher education in the UC system. Officially, this isn’t tuition; it’s “fees.” And it doesn’t count rent, food, or books. With these, the full cost of a year at UC Berkeley is \$22,000. In the coming year, fees will rise again.

4. GOVERNMENT REFORM PROPOSALS

Fund Adequate Teacher Salaries; Oppose Merit Pay

Governor Schwarzenegger has proposed to institute merit pay, rather than adequately fund teachers’ salaries. This tired and discredited idea is simply put forward now to divert attention from the governor’s broken promises. What California needs to do is to restore and expand funding for our staff development programs, including peer assistance and review (PAR), Beginning Teacher Support & Assessment (BTSA), reading and math institutes, and bonuses for those teachers who become certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

The governor has also revived another anti-union slur: that “the system” prevents bad teachers from being fired. “The system” does no such thing. If administrators properly document incompetence or other serious problems, any teacher can be terminated. What the Governor doesn’t like is that current law requires due process for everyone. Teachers are professionals, and refuse to be treated as if they were at-will employees.

Protect Teachers' Retirement

Teachers and other public education employees receive inadequate pay, but can at least count on a secure retirement benefit when they retire. Now Governor Schwarzenegger proposes to disrupt two of the most stable and successful pension programs in the nation (PERS and STRS) and replace them with defined contribution programs. Teachers and school staff should not have to worry about whether they will be able to make ends meet after their years of service have concluded.

Repeal of outsourcing protections in public education

Oppose repeal of SB 1419

A stable workforce of non-teaching personnel is important for student success. Accountability decreases when institutions cut school staff and outsource services without competitive bidding. Many outsourced programs show short-term savings but eventuate in higher long-term costs. Outsourcing services without protections disrupts school stability, demoralizes staff, and leaves districts vulnerable to being held hostage by corporations in later years. Repealing current outsourcing protections would force students to endure deteriorating services, and communities to say goodbye to decent jobs with a committed workforce, as a rotating corps of perma-temps replaces full-time employees.

A Word About "Special Interests"

The Governor is overly fond of the term "special interests." It doesn't behoove someone who has raised money at a record rate from corporate sources to describe organizations that advocate on behalf of six million children and hundreds of thousands of public servants as "special interests." The term was coined a hundred years ago to describe the baleful influence of corporations—in California, especially the Southern Pacific Railroad—over government. If you want to see a true contemporary variation on this theme, you could start by looking at the governor's contributors' list and the list of boards and commissions he proposes to eliminate, and those that he would retain.

5. PREPARE TEACHERS TO REPLACE THE TENS OF THOUSANDS RETIRING

Teacher Preparation and Retention Programs are Failing

Tens of thousands of California teachers are preparing to retire. Teachers are retiring faster than their replacements are being prepared. Unless increases in compensation, recruitment and support are provided, California faces a massive teacher shortage.

Cuts in teacher support programs undercut teacher retention

Research shows that teachers who stay beyond their first five years will most likely continue teaching throughout their careers. Mentoring and support programs are key to boosting the numbers of beginning teachers who remain beyond five years. At the time when we need these support programs, they are being cut back and combined.

Beginning Teacher Support & Assistance (BTSA) and Peer Assistance & Review (PAR) funding has been reduced and these two programs have been combined. Primarily due to the challenges of teaching in a severely under-funded system, 45% of California teachers leave during their first five years. (*Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning*)

6. UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL

The best guarantee of student success is an early start. We need a universal preschool program in California to ensure that all children have access to a quality education right from the beginning. The state has a patchwork quilt of public programs that covers barely 15% of our more than one million 3 and 4 year olds. (An additional 100,000 are in federal Head Start programs.)

All early childhood educators need to make a living wage, and to prepare themselves with high-standards training. Yet California is one of a handful of states that does not require a bachelor's degree for lead early childhood teachers, and the average annual salary for early childhood teachers is a poverty-level \$21,130. (AFT Report, "At the Starting Line".)

7. HEALTH CARE

The declining ratio of school nurses per student threatens the health of our students. Historically, the Federal government and the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) have recommended a school nurse-to-student ratio of 1:750. To-

day, nationally, there are only enough school nurses employed to provide a ratio of 1:1,155. In California, the ratio is 1:2,532 (CDE, 2004).

Rising health care costs are having a major fiscal impact on school districts and educators, and on the state's ability to deliver quality education.

The growing cost of premiums, and who will pay for those increases, has become a huge concern in school district contract negotiations and budgeting.

The lack of affordable health care for para-educators, part-time faculty and other educators impacts the ability to teach.

The lack of affordable health care for students impacts their ability to learn, and decreases school funding based on student attendance. Nearly seven million Californians lack health coverage; over one million of these are children.

It is imperative in the wake of the defeat of Proposition 72 that the state enacts effective health insurance reform. The best solution is one that reduces waste and extends coverage to all who need it. Senator Sheila Kuehl is crafting legislation to address the health coverage crisis. It's time the state (and the country) joins the rest of the advanced industrial world and provides universal health coverage through a single-payer plan.