

Little Hoover Commission Hearing on Education Governance and Accountability Sacramento – January 24, 2008

Thank you for extending the opportunity to the California State PTA to participate in this hearing and to engage with the Commission on important issues under the educational governance and accountability umbrella.

Governance

I would like to comment on where PTA stands on the issue of educational governance for the record.

Delegates to the 2003 PTA convention added new language to the California State PTA's Legislative Platform that gave PTA authority to weigh in on the discussion generated at the time by the recommendations around educational governance structures that were included in the report of the Master Plan for Education. More decision-making authority must be moved closer to the district and/or school site. Given the preeminent role of education in the State of California, we believe that the best interests of students are served by continuing to have an independently elected Superintendent of Public Education.

Last May delegates to the 2007 PTA convention adopted a new resolution, *Public School Governance Authority*, which requires the California State PTA to support "the separation of municipal government from local school district governance and to the constitutionally established independence of locally elected boards of education, directly accountable to the voters, taxpayers, communities, parents, and students of their district."

Although PTA did not take a formal position on legislative proposals put forward by Assemblymember Arambula, PTA had many concerns and did closely monitor the issue as it was discussed by the Legislature.

Assessment and Accountability

PTA believes that student assessments must include multiple measures, inform instruction and improve student learning. Accountability must be fair, not punitive. California's current accountability system is limited by reliance on STAR and the CAHSEE and the lack of a longitudinal data system to track individual student progress over time. The lack of a comprehensive data system is the weak link in our accountability system. It is critical that California make the collection and availability of educational data a high priority.

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An important tool in holding schools accountable is School Accountability Report Card (SARC). It was an important mandate of Proposition 98 approved by California voters in 1989 and strongly supported by the California State PTA. The primary objective of the SARC is to inform local school communities about the conditions and progress being made at the local school site. The SARC promotes a statewide standard of instructional accountability and conditions for teaching and learning.

However, the SARC has been modified to add many more elements over the intervening years to the point that the SARC has become increasingly cumbersome and complex. The intended audience and purpose of the SARC has been somewhat lost. As a result the SARC has become less useful to parents and the community. In fact a UCLA study found the SARC harder to comprehend than several IRS forms and Microsoft Windows XP.!

PTA continues to believe that the SARC is an important tool for holding schools and policymakers accountable for providing a quality education to all children and supports efforts to improve communication between home and school. PTA believes that such communication must be regular, two-way and meaningful.

PTA supported legislation last year, AB 1061 by Assemblymember Mullin, that proposed several changes to simplify the SARC by deleting a number of elements and directed the CDE to convene an advisory group to consider other changes that might enhance usability and to report back. PTA actively participated in the work of the advisory group and we are hopeful that the changes recommended will be approved and will once again provide parents with information about school quality and student achievement. Some of the recommendations include adding language to elaborate and clarify the descriptors that precede each of the elements.

PTA has been disappointed that more is not done at the school site to explain the meaning of the elements to parents. We have advocated for site administrators to hold meetings to provide an overview and to answer questions. In recent years the SARC has usually been available electronically on the schools website, and it is often difficult for parents to obtain a copy at the school site. Web sites maintained by the CDE and EdData currently require a lot of savvy and persistence to access information. We are excited about the Governor's plans to launch the School Finder website being developed through a partnership with both Microsoft and Google. This new website will present information in a much more user friendly way for parents, allowing them much easier access to information that will be helpful in evaluating their school.

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No Child Left Behind

Too often efforts to provide information and to inform parents about their schools and choices meet the letter of the law, but not the spirit of the law, especially with NCLB. The National PTA's recommendations for the ESEA-NCLB reauthorization are built on four core principles:

More accountability to parents

Parents must be better informed of what is going on in their child's school and each state must hold schools accountable for implementing their parent involvement plans.

Better data through a more understandable delivery system

Information from school accountability systems should be geared towards informing parents—since parents have the primary decision making responsibility for their child's education.

Better resources to help teachers and parents

Parental Information and Resource Centers and other existing state and local resources with expertise in parent engagement and community outreach should be better utilized as part of the solution. Further, teachers need better preparation on how to engage and develop positive partnerships with parents to support active parent participation in their child's education.

Community support

Schools need to be an active, essential part of a community again. Residents, businesses, and organizations in the community must collaborate with schools in making the schools more successful, and must understand that they have a stake in children's education.

PUBLIC SCHOOL GOVERNANCE AUTHORITY

Adopted by Convention Delegates May 2007

- WHEREAS,** The Constitution of the State of California creates school governance separate from municipal government; and
- WHEREAS,** The California State PTA believes that locally elected boards of education should be directly responsible for and accountable to their constituents; and
- WHEREAS,** It has been proposed in some cities and school districts of California that there be a change in the public school governing structure by transferring the governance authority to municipal government; and
- WHEREAS,** The California State PTA was instrumental in passing Proposition 3 in 1946 that amended Article IX of the California Constitution, which clearly established a separation of powers between municipal government and school district governance; and
- WHEREAS,** The California State Constitution, Article IX, Section 6, clearly states “No school or college or any other part of the public school system shall be, directly or indirectly, transferred from the public school system or placed under the jurisdiction of any authority other than one included within the Public School System”; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA, its units, councils, and districts, reaffirm and recommit themselves to the separation of powers between municipal government and local school district governance and to the constitutionally established independence of locally elected boards of education, directly accountable to the voters, taxpayers, communities, parents, and students of their district.

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Background Summary

In California a governance system that separates control of municipalities and school districts is evident from the earliest versions of the State Constitution and follows through several constitutional changes. Early versions of the Constitution refer to the duties of the County Superintendent of Schools as separate from those municipal governments.

The California State PTA in 1946 believed education reform was necessary due to population growth, a shortage of schools and teachers, and a history of municipal governments meddling in school district governance. To prepare for growth and to reaffirm the separation of schools and cities, PTA sponsored Proposition 3, a sweeping package of reform measures that among other provisions, prohibits transfer of any public school or college to any authority not under the public school system. Proposition 3 added Article IX, Section 14, to the State Constitution and states “The Legislature shall have power, by general law, to provide for the incorporation and organization of school districts, high school districts, and community college district, of every kind and class, and may classify such districts.” Proposition 3 was overwhelmingly approved by 74% of the voters.

The State requires independence of school boards from local municipal government, placing education in the hands of education professionals and elected school trustees to manage the district’s affairs. School trustees are readily accessible to parents, students and educators. Though *Serrano v. Priest* and Proposition 13 sorely tested this concept, even those challenges only served to ultimately buttress California’s commitment to public education as shown by the passage of Proposition 98, which created a formula for state funding of education.

The constitutional separation of powers has remained intact in California until recently when the mayors of Los Angeles, Fresno and other cities attempted to take over urban school districts through legislative action. After Assembly Bill 1381 was chaptered in 2006, legal action was taken in the Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles. The court decreed that the defendants “refrain from enforcing or implementing AB 1381 in the execution of the course and scope of their official duties.” The ruling holds that AB 1381 violates State Constitution Article IX, Sections 5, 6, and 8.

To date there is no conclusive evidence that municipal governments could do a better job of educating our children. In a time when voters feel more and more disenfranchised and distant from their elected officials and public agencies, school boards remain close to those they serve. PTA believes our children are better served by an independent California public education system.