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April 21, 2013

The Honorable Joan Buchanan
Chair, Assembly Education Committee
California State Assembly
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: **AB 88 (Buchanan)**
Position: Seek Amendments

Dear Assemblymember Buchanan,

The California State PTA has long supported the state moving to a less complex and more transparent method of financing public schools, one that is equitable, provides additional resources based on student needs, helps address the achievement gap, and empowers those closer to our schools with greater decision-making authority.

We commend Governor Brown for proposing major education finance reform aimed at achieving these essential goals.

The Governor's proposed Local Control Funding Formula (contained in AB 88, Buchanan) includes a number of major policy changes that will impact how schools and programs operate beginning in 2013-2014. The major concepts in the proposal have the potential to make important improvements to California's educational system; however, some critical aspects remain to be addressed to ensure the plan will have the intended impact of improving access to a quality education and academic achievement for all students.

We are eager to work with you, the Governor and the Legislature to help address these aspects to benefit all children and students in California.

1. Adequate funding must be the top priority

The State constitution guarantees that every child is entitled to a free, appropriate public education. California also sets standards for what every student should know and be able to perform at each grade level. Given this, we believe the state has a clear obligation to ensure that adequate resources are provided to local education agencies, so that every child has access to the programs and services he or she needs to successfully master the state-approved standards.

Unfortunately, the State continues to be negligent in addressing this obligation. The proposed new funding formula – while positively directing additional resources to English Learner

students, students from low-income families and foster youth, and reducing certain onerous reporting requirements on school districts— does not rectify the larger challenge faced by all students: the chronic underfunding of schools. California’s public schools rank at or near the bottom in nearly every category of resources. For instance, we have the largest class sizes and the most students per counselor in the nation. *Education Week* estimates that California ranks 49th among states in per-student funding.

Any proposal to change how we fund schools must include a concrete plan for how the state will increase and sustain funding over time to provide all students with the quality education they deserve. Otherwise, there will be a false perception that our state’s severe school funding crisis has somehow been “fixed” when it has not.

2. *All students must have access to a full curriculum*

In addition to ensuring adequate resources to prepare all children to meet the state-approved standards, PTA strongly believes that every child must have access to a full, well-rounded curriculum that includes arts, science, technology, engineering, physical education, civics and career technical education. These courses are vital to helping our youth reach their full potential, participate in our democracy, thrive in the global economy, and be prepared for college and careers.

Whether through a district plan, site plan, block grant or other method, every school district **must ensure** that all students have access to this full curriculum.

3. *Additional funding for students with specific needs must be used to serve those students.*

Research shows that English Learners, students from low-income households, and foster youth need additional resources. We are grateful to the Governor for addressing this in his plan. While allowing for local flexibility in determining their use, supplemental or concentration grant funds must directly benefit each of the subgroups that generate the additional funding.

4. *Clear mechanisms for accountability, transparency and meaningful engagement of parents, teachers, staff and local members of the school community must be in place.*

We support the Governor’s general philosophy that more effective educational decision-making occurs at the local level rather than at the state level. We support locally elected boards having greater authority to make decisions affecting their schools and communities. To best exercise this local control, school districts must be guided by clear accountability and reporting measures, and they should establish and support mechanisms for meaningful engagement of parents, teachers, staff and others at the **school site level** to facilitate input into decisions. Additional attention must be given to ensure that the perspectives of all parents, especially those who have traditionally been less involved in decision-making, are actively sought.

In addition to these four overarching aspects of the proposal, California State PTA also offers the following specific recommendations for further improving the LCFF:

Accountability

Accountability systems drive what happens in schools. Therefore, effective accountability must include a meaningful evaluation of school and district plans, not just a compliance checklist. It must also include interventions and consequences, with the infrastructure to support them, for districts/sites that are not meeting their planned fiscal and achievement outcomes. In addition:

- There should be equitable and objective standards and metrics to evaluate a district's plan.
- The plans should clearly show how supplemental or concentration grant funds benefit each of the subgroups that generate the additional funding – English learners, students from low income households and foster youth.
- Systems of accountability, flexibility, and local control should measure and disclose in a uniform way how funding is used to support the base funding for all students at every school and how additional funding for students with needs is provided to the schools they attend.

Transparency

With decision-making shifted to the local level in more than 1,000 school districts, the LCFF must include transparent information that is accessible to parents, educators, community members and the public to allow for significant oversight.

- There should be clear straightforward reporting on how much funding was generated by the school population at each school, and what was spent by the district at each school in relationship to the district's plan.
- There should be clear, straightforward annual reports to each school community on the use of funds and the impact on student achievement and restoration of programs and services.
- All districts should uniformly report expenditures by appropriate category and uniformly distinguish between school and school district expenditures.

Meaningful Parent/Family Engagement

Stakeholders must be involved in the development of the state template and district plans. Districts must have a process in place for ensuring input into the plan from local stakeholders. We recommend that:

- Each year the governing board, in person or through appropriate representatives, seek input at an open public meeting with the school's parents, teachers, administrators, other school staff, and pupils, as appropriate, at or near each school site, about the

needs of each school with recommendations of how funds should be used and the outcomes that will be reached.

- At the time it makes its decision about the use of the funds each year, the governing board explain publicly and online, and to each school site, how its proposed expenditures will improve educational outcomes, restore programs and services that have been cut, ensure a high quality education at each school site, and how the board will determine whether those improved outcomes have been achieved.
- In addition to requiring that all district plans establish goals around improving student achievement, districts should also be required to establish (and be held accountable for funding and meeting) goals around improving public engagement in the district.

Class-Size Reduction

We believe that younger children need smaller classes to meet their individual needs. A plan must address restoring K-3 class size to no more than 20 students.

Base Grant Level

The proposed base grant level is too low and should be increased. As a starting point, all districts should more quickly be restored to at least 2007-08 levels.

Increasing the base grant benefits all students, including those with special needs, as districts are able to do such things as reduce class sizes, lower student-to-counselor ratios, strengthen professional development, and offer a full curriculum.

We further recommend that formulas for TIIG and Home to School Transportation should be revised and distributed in an equitable way to meet the needs of students. Additionally, the proposed new formula must provide for enrollment growth.

Formal statewide evaluation

There should be a formal evaluation of the new formula, similar to the CAHSEE evaluation, to see how it is working and its impact on districts, local schools and students.

Timeline and Implementation

The proposal to change California's education funding formula is a significant and important issue for our schools. We appreciate taking the time to have this fully reviewed through the legislative policy process. We also believe that implementation must take a measured approach to allow governing boards and districts time to plan to meet the needs of all students.

Conclusion

The proposed Local Control Funding Formula represents a momentous opportunity for California to improve a school funding system that is inadequate, overly complex, and does not address the unique needs of many students. It is also an opportunity to actively address the achievement or “opportunity” gap that exists among students.

We urge the legislature to carefully consider the substantive and lasting reforms being proposed to ensure that they will provide positive outcomes for children and avoid unintended consequences.

California State PTA represents nearly 900,000 members at school sites across the state, including more than half at Title I schools. Our association is uniquely positioned to offer policy recommendations based on the experience and perspectives of local parents, educators and volunteers whose children, grandchildren and communities are served by California’s public school system.

We stand ready and willing to further engage in the dialogue and policy work to help improve the current school funding system so that it more effectively serves all students.

Sincerely,

Carol Kocivar
President
California State PTA

cc: Governor Jerry Brown
Darrell Steinberg, Senate President pro Tem
John A. Pérez, Speaker of the Assembly
Members of the Assembly Education Committee
Rick Pratt, Chief Consultant, Assembly Education Committee
Rick Simpson, Deputy Chief of Staff, Speaker John A. Pérez
Karen Stapf Walters, Governor’s Education Advisor