

# PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**An investment we can't afford to cut.**

## EDUCATION COALITION

### Questions and Answers:

#### **Does California really have an education funding “crisis”?**

According to *Education Week*, a highly respected national publication, California already ranks 46<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states in the country in per pupil spending. Governor Schwarzenegger's proposed \$4.8 billion in cuts to our students and schools would move our state closer to dead last in the rankings.

California already has some of the largest class sizes in the country and ranks last in the number of school librarians, counselors and other support professionals available to students.

In addition, the *Getting Down to Facts* studies released last year show that California needs to spend at least 40 percent more on education in order to help all students reach the high academic standards the state has set for them.

California's public schools have already been forced to make substantial cuts in recent years, trying to do “more with less,” while cutting back on things like transportation, programs for at-risk students and after-school programs. The fact is, there's nowhere left to cut without directly impacting students in the classroom. More than 14,000 teachers across the state received layoff notices this year.

There is clearly a school funding crisis in California. We shouldn't be talking about cuts, we should be talking about increasing spending for our students so they have an opportunity to get the world-class education they deserve.

#### **How will a \$4.8 billion cut impact schools?**

More than 20,000 teachers and school employees have already received pink slips as a result of the proposed cuts.

A \$4.8 billion cut is equivalent to laying off more than 107,000 teachers, or 137,000 bus drivers, janitors, food service workers, maintenance workers and other education support professionals.

It is the equivalent of increasing class sizes statewide by as much as 35% or cutting more than \$24,000 per classroom.

It is also equal to reducing per-pupil spending by more than \$800 or eliminating all music, art and career technical education programs statewide with room to cut even more.

### **How should the \$14.5 billion budget shortfall be addressed?**

The Governor's budget proposes to balance the state budget through cuts alone. This approach would be devastating to our students and to the future of California. The final budget agreement must include increased revenues as part of any approach to balancing the budget and investing in California's future.

Our students did not create this problem, and their futures shouldn't be shortchanged because of it.

### **Isn't Proposition 98 the problem with our state's current budget crisis because it forces the state to spend more money on education?**

Prop. 98 is not the problem. In fact, the rate of spending on Proposition 98 education funding has grown much slower than spending of the state's general fund, or on most other programs. See Ed Coalition "Prop. 98 is not the problem" chart at [www.protectourstudents.org](http://www.protectourstudents.org).

Voters passed Proposition 98 as a minimum funding guarantee for schools. Our legislators should not undermine the will of the voters to make our students' education a priority.

### **Aren't you making too big of a deal about the teacher pink slips? Won't most teachers get their jobs back anyway?**

More than 14,000 teachers received layoff notices in March and the prospect of losing their jobs is very real for these teachers, their students and their families.

Many of our best and brightest new teachers are forced to find other work in order to make ends meet because they don't know if they will have a job next year. In fact, the state is still feeling the impact of the last round of budget cuts. A large number of these people never return to teaching. As professionals, they simply need the stability of knowing that they will have a job from one year to the next.

It's California's students who suffer most when their teachers and other educators are laid off. When schools are short on teachers, class sizes grow even larger and students don't get the individualized attention they need.

Every pink slip issued in our schools means diminished resources for our students.

**Won't this all change once the Democrats in the Legislature come up with their own budget?**

Right now there's only one proposed budget -- the Governor's proposed budget that cuts \$4.8 billion from public schools. School districts must make decisions about personnel in March, which is one reason why the Governor's proposal is so damaging to our schools and students.

Legislative inaction on the budget effectively forces school districts to make dramatic cuts based on the Governor's proposal because schools by law must submit their budgets for the next school year before the Legislative session ends. With no crystal ball to determine what the final budget will look like, school districts must plan for the worst.

Schools are given no choice, and have ALREADY been forced to make dramatic cuts that are in many instances irreversible.

While we hope that budget negotiations will be swift and effective -- many are predicting that this year's budget fight could go well into the late months of Summer and early Fall, further shortchanging our schools and students.

In addition, county offices of education are already projecting that 55 percent of school districts will not be able to meet their basic financial obligations.

**The Education Coalition reports that per pupil spending is \$7,081 -- the Governor says it is \$11,541. Why the discrepancy in the numbers? Which number is right?**

The Governor's estimates are much higher because he lumps in federal and state funding.

The Governor counts dollars that are spent at the state level and are never received by districts, including the state debt service on school facilities bonds. In addition, not all locally-received dollars are available for spending on K-12 education. These include funds for adult education and preschool programs. While the Governor counts these among dollars spent on public education, he does not use adult education or preschool enrollment for computing the per pupil amount, further distorting his numbers.

The Education Coalition uses the per pupil figures provided by *Education Week*, a non-partisan national publication that bases its calculation on the actual amount of money spent on a student in the classroom. The reality is California spends \$1,900 less than the National Average.

In addition, the *Education Week* numbers account for regional cost differences, whereas the Governor's numbers do not.

**The adequacy study says more money without reform will not improve schools. Why are you just asking for more money?**

The "Getting Down to Facts" studies from researchers at Stanford University say CA needs to spend 40 percent more in order to help all students reach the high standards we have set for them. So if we want to implement reforms in schools, we need to provide schools the resources they need.

The Governor's Committee on Education Report also calls for additional revenues and says you can't cherry-pick reforms without providing additional resources.

But in what was supposed to be the "Year of Education," the Governor has not proposed reforms – he has only proposed billions in devastating cuts to schools and students. In doing so, he is turning back the clock on the progress students and schools have already made.

Experts including the Fordham Foundation (one of the nation's leading proponents of rigorous academic standards), the Public Policy Institute of California, EdSource and researchers at Stanford University all confirm that California's K-12 academic and performance standards are among the most challenging in the nation.

With hard work, modest investments in teacher training and the adoption of standards-aligned textbooks, our students and schools have been making progress. Reading scores are up 25 percent and math scores have increased 17 percent in the last four years. This progress cannot continue with these proposed cuts to our public schools.

**I've heard some legislators argue that the education funding cuts are not really 10 percent—they are 1.9 percent. Is this true?**

When he released his budget, the governor announced across-the-board cuts of 10 percent to all programs, and unfortunately, his education budget does just that.

In fact, even the Legislative Analyst's Office reported that under the governor's proposal, schools would receive: "compared to a workload budget: \$4.8 billion less than full funding for current programs plus a 4.9 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA)," or the equivalent of a 10.9 percent cut.

The governor hasn't released any other proposals since then.

The thousands of parents and educators who have opposed these budget cuts know that while the 1.9-2.7 percent cuts apply to “adjusted” revenue limits, the governor is also proposing an additional 6.5 percent cut for categorical programs, including cutting critical programs like special education, class-size reduction, school counseling, gifted and talented education programs and instructional materials, just to mention a few.

In addition, by eliminating a cost-of-living adjustment, there is no way for school districts to keep up with students’ basic needs. Most Californians understand that as the price of gas increases along with health care costs and other basic daily needs, the cost of operating schools increases.

The more than 20,000 pink slips that have already been issued from struggling school districts to educators and school employees statewide is proof positive that the governor’s proposal decimates funding for local schools.

Our schools are already woefully underfunded – any further cuts to schools directly impact students. There’s simply no way around it.

**How can the budget deficit problem this year be solved if we do not make these cuts?**

The governor’s budget proposes to balance the state budget through cuts alone. This approach would be devastating to our students and to the future of California. The final budget agreement must include increased revenues as part of any approach to balancing the budget.

This budget flunks the basic test of government: it hurts our kids. Putting together a responsible budget is what we have elected our state representatives to do. What they must understand is that the state budget represents an investment in California’s future. Californians expect a budget that guarantees a prosperous future for California. And they expect a state budget that supports school and children’s services, not one that harms them.

**How much money is the Education Coalition planning to spend on this campaign?**

The Education Coalition will continue to lead grassroots efforts around the state to protect our public schools and students from these devastating cuts.

We will spend what it takes to get this message out to all Californians.