

California Public Schools in Crises ~ A Letter to Parents

We are writing this letter to ask you to stand up for your sons and daughters, and the public education they must have to survive and thrive in the 21st Century.

Last year, the politicians cut public school funding by more than \$5,300,000,000. This year they tell us they're going to cut even more. They justify themselves by citing all sorts of statistics, but education is not about statistics, it's about children. And most parents know that their kids in public school are not receiving the education they need. We don't need to be mathematicians to know that:

- Class sizes are too large because there's not enough money to hire teachers.
- Many schools are in such poor repair as to be unsafe, with insufficient money for maintenance.
- There are constant and worsening shortages of materials, supplies, and equipment.
- Enrichment programs in languages, sports, art, music, & other areas are being slashed or eliminated.
- Pre-Kindergarten and Adult Education programs are being slashed or eliminated.
- Critical positions such as nurses, librarians, counselors, and janitors are being eliminated.

They tell us that these cutbacks are because of the current economic crisis, **but that's not true**. They've been cutting public education for years, long before this latest crises. Proposition 13 was supposed to relieve citizens burdened by excessive property taxes, but most of the benefit went to big business and commercial landlords. Corporations used to pay the majority of education-related taxes, but their share has steadily been reduced so that now individual taxpayers have to carry most of the load, and there is no longer enough money to adequately fund public education even in the good times, let alone the bad.

They tell us that public education provides equal opportunity for all, but every parent in California knows that there are rich districts and poor districts, "good" schools and "bad" schools. And despite all the rhetoric and promises, everyone knows that public schools serving Black and Latino communities get the short end of the stick, that non-white students receive unequal punishment and discipline, and that educational inequality is part of a pattern that cannot be separated from job discrimination, inadequate housing, lack of health care, and unsafe streets. In the words of Dr. King, the promise of equality in America is "*... a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds."*

They tell us that the only way to hold schools and teachers accountable is by imposing one-size-fits-all regulations decreed by distant bureaucrats. But children are not standardized assembly-line parts, and neither are individual schools or school districts. Who can best determine what each child needs, the parents and teachers who see them every day, or officials in Sacramento and Washington? Local communities—parents and teachers together—need the power to hold the system accountable, to support schools and programs that are succeeding, and to change those failing to educate our children.

Yes, kids must be educated to meet the requirements of the 21st Century. They also need an education that helps them grow into thoughtful and caring individuals capable of living productive, meaningful lives and function as empowered citizens in a democratic society.

Some people feel that charter schools are the answer to all our problems, but both charter and public schools get their funds from the same inadequate source. Pitting public and charter schools against each other in a losing battle for dwindling resources diverts us from the real issue—Sacramento's refusal to provide a quality public education to all.

Now is the time to take action.

October 7 Day of Action in Defense of Public Education – California
October 23-24 Conference in Defense of Public Education and Public Services
<http://defendcapubliceducation.wordpress.com/>