

# SRVEA SIGNAL

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## Public School Investment and Accountability Act

*From CTA Talking Points; December 19, 2008*

### CTA Files School Funding Initiative to Protect Students, Schools from Deeper Cuts and Ensure Future Funding

The Public School Investment and Accountability Act is a 1-cent sales tax that will generate new, stable and ongoing funding for public schools and community colleges. These revenues cannot be cut, delayed, borrowed or diverted by the Legislature or governor. The Act raises \$5 billion to \$6 billion annually. Strict accountability provisions ensure that taxpayer dollars are only spent to improve student learning. No funds can be spent on administrative costs. Independent audits are required each year and any misuse of funds is punishable by criminal or civil penalties.

- California's schools and colleges are in trouble. Because of the state budget crisis, education spending has been cut by billions of dollars. These cuts have left schools with overcrowded classrooms, out-of-date textbooks and too few teachers, counselors and other critical education staff.
- School funding has been delayed for months on end while politicians fight over the state budget, and it's clear that lawmakers can't agree on a solution for new revenues.
- Already ranking 46th in the nation in per-student funding, California's schools and colleges have been cut by more than \$3.5 billion in the past year, and face another \$4 billion in cuts under the budget plan approved by the Legislature in December. The Republican budget proposal would cut more than \$10 billion from education. It is time for ongoing revenues to schools that cannot be cut, delayed, borrowed or diverted by the Legislature or governor.
- Without any additional revenues our K-12 schools will be cut more than \$7.2 billion in the current school year. This staggering amount is the equivalent of reducing per-pupil spending by almost \$1,200 or \$31,500 per classroom, or laying off 160,000 classroom teachers or 180,000 bus drivers, custodians, food service workers and other education support professionals. Such cuts would devastate our classrooms.
- The funds would be used only for specific purposes such as reducing class sizes in all grades; providing quality teacher training, textbooks and instructional materials; restoring programs like art, music and career technical training, and increasing compensation to recruit and retain educators, faculty and education support professionals.
- California's budget process is broken and our students and schools are suffering the consequences. More students are being squeezed into already overcrowded classrooms, more than 10,000 teachers and education support professionals have been laid off, while art, music, technical and vocational education programs are being eliminated. The future of an entire generation of students is at stake.
- California needs a well-educated workforce. It is one way to improve our economy. We cannot afford to lose jobs to other states. Yet due to budget cuts, our community colleges may be forced to turn away thousands of students who want to learn the skills needed to succeed in the workplace.

## President's Message... Darren Day

Welcome to 2009. It looks like the remainder of the school year is going to be filled with trials and great uncertainty. Our state legislators are still locked in grid-lock while the state finances continue to spiral downward. I just read a new report out today that ranks California now 47th in per pupil spending on EL students. I guess the legislators are waiting for us to hit rock bottom. The unfortunate aspect of all of this financial mess is that the legislators won't feel the financial pain that most of the rest of the state's employees, children, poor, aged, and sick will feel. I wonder how they sleep at night.

Because there has not yet been a remedy to the state's financial crisis it looks inevitable that there will be layoffs this year, better know as RIF-Reduction In Force. Where those positions will be is uncertain at this time.

By the end of February each school site will be receiving a copy of the 2008-2009 Seniority List. I want everyone to check the Seniority List to make sure it is correct. Your job could count on this. The District is required to notice (RIF) all teachers that will not have positions the next year. Districts usually send out more notices than they need to due to the way the law is written. Luckily, we are a growing district and we hire additional teachers each year. Last year the SRVUSD hired almost 160 new teachers. This will help in rehiring some of those teachers who receive RIF notices. We will also have teachers who retire this year and those positions will have to be filled which will also help in rehiring some of those RIF teachers.

What I want all of us to remember throughout this entire process is that this will be a very difficult time for all SRVEA members. When teachers or other bargaining unit members are lost to lay-offs we all feel pain. We know the hardships that lay ahead for those who are not rehired. Those who remain have additional children placed in their classrooms, increased case-loads are heaped upon them, and working conditions deteriorate.

This is a time when I want us to band together. Support all teachers and groups of our bargaining unit. Nurses, counselors, psychologists, speech therapists, certificated librarians and teachers all belong to SRVEA and we all matter and SRVEA will fight to protect as many bargaining unit members as the budget allows.



SRVEA will be working very closely with the District during this difficult process. Please keep yourselves informed, listen to your Site Reps, read your Signal, read emails that I send and log on to the SRVEA website, which will be up and ready by the end of January.

I wish I had better news for the beginning of a new year but, together, we will weather this financial storm together.

### Emergency Versus Urgent Care

Everyone knows the expense of the emergency room. Between the individual physician's fees, hospital fees, and rising copayments you might find yourself having to decide about seeking medical attention or just "sticking it out." There is an alternative to the emergency room if you are a subscriber to Blue Shield HMO. As with many HMO's, Blue Shield offers Urgent Care services. These services are available throughout the region, depending upon the physical group you enrolled with when first picking a Primary Care Physician. Urgent Care can be utilized for any non-life threatening illness such as finding relief for the flu and colds, injuries, cuts and abrasions, as well as vaccinations and other services. More and more Urgent Care facilities are becoming full service and available when your personal physician is not available. Urgent Care facilities reduce the burden on the health care system. For more information about the Urgent Care facilities available in your area, contact Blue Shield.



## Op Ed— The Importance of Professional Respect and Responsibility

*By Laura Finco, Women's Issues Chair*

One might wonder how the topic of professional respect and responsibility comes under the purview of Women's Issues; but all it takes is a look at women's contribution to the profession of teaching and the realization that for decades we struggled for equality to understand the connection.

Historically, women had only a couple of options when it came to choosing a career path, and often as soon as the wedding bells rang the only option was to raise her family. Nowadays, we not only work and raise our families but we are often the main source of income. When we first stepped out of the mold that society prescribed, we were not looked upon favorably. But part of evolving professionally and developing the right to be respected as professionals means sometimes going outside of the mold.

Earlier this year SRVEA Negotiations Committee stepped out of the mold when bringing to the bargaining table a request made by a large percentage of certificated personnel. We asked the District to change the Sick Leave policy. Current policy states that each certificated staff receives 10 days of sick leave (or a fraction depending upon part time status). These days are carried over and accrue each year. Our current contract outlines how these days can be used including for personal necessity. However, there are often times when life catches us off guard and we need to take time off, but there is no "category" in the current contract to cover the absence so we are left with a few limited choices: be honest and request time off, hoping that our administrator will approve and we only receive "sub deduct" instead of "full pay dock", or we lie and call in sick.

The current contract does not allow us to use our professional discretion when we need to take time away from work unless the reason falls under a specific category and everything else puts us in the quandary of having to lie.

Many major corporations including the March of Dimes have begun using the term "Personal Time Off" leave rather than "Sick" leave, knowing that there are situations when employees need to take time off for a variety of reasons. The idea is that rather than lying, allow their employees the professional discretion and respect them enough not to put them in the predicament of having to lie. Most of these companies that utilize PTO leave allow for all days to be used with discretion of the employee. Our Negotiations Committee requested a percentage of our sick leave days be allowed to be used as "personal time off." Thus far, the District has been unyielding in their willingness to discuss this as contract language. They know that staff is not always honest about "calling in sick" and it appears that they almost prefer that than to allow us to use our adult judgment.



There would, of course, be guidelines, since everyone agrees that for this type of leave we would want to minimize any temptation to abuse PTO; however, the change would be a strong indication that certificated staff is respected as professionals and as adults, capable of making decisions in the best interest of our students and maintain the balance between our obligations to work and to our own families.

As we evolve into the 21st century, it is time that we stop the "winks" and "we know about the lies" type of discussions and get down to the reality. Our lives do not always fit into nice molds and categories. And we should not be financially penalized or morally jeopardized when we need to make the decision about needing to be away from work. Allow us the professional discretion to make personal decisions. Allow us the respect and trust our judgment. We have, by the way, "come a long way" from the days of old.

## LIFE CHANGES. CTA IS THERE TO HELP.

It's inevitable – our lives change. And, with change, CTA Member Benefit Programs will adapt to meet your changing needs. In this section of your Member Benefits website, you'll find information about what you should consider – and what actions you may want to take – when certain changes occur in your life. These changes include: having a baby or adopting a child, getting married or divorced as well as forming or ending a domestic partnership, changing jobs and/or moving, suffering a disability or serious illness, experiencing a death in your family, a CTA member dying, or nearing retirement.

In the event any of these changes occurs in your life, go to MyCTA and click on the change either from the list above or the menu bar. Once you begin reviewing the particular change, you'll find several links to other areas of the Member Benefits website where you can obtain additional information about a particular benefit or program.

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## CTA SCHOLARSHIPS NOW AVAILABLE

The California Teachers Association is pleased to announce that applications are now being accepted for the 2009 Scholarship program. Information about the individual scholarships is available at [www.cta.org](http://www.cta.org) or from our Chapter President, Darren Day. These scholarship applications are now available:

- Scholarship for Dependent Children
- Del A Weber Scholarship for Dependent Children Attending Continuation High School Program
- Scholarship for CTA Members

## CTA interview with CalSTRS Chief Investment Officer Christopher Ailman

### **CTA: Are the funds in CalSTRS stable since the economic downturn?**

**Christopher Ailman:** The benefits our members receive do not depend on the size of the CalSTRS investment portfolio. However, the portfolio has more than enough assets to weather today's turbulent market. Also, CalSTRS' 88 percent funding status is well above the 80 percent average considered healthy for a public pension fund.

### **What investment strategies does CalSTRS have in place to safeguard against turbulent markets?**

CalSTRS' main investment strategy for protection from market turmoil is threefold. First, our diversification spreads the risk. Our asset classes are U.S. stocks, international stocks, bonds and other fixed-income securities, real estate, and private equity. Secondly, we are a patient, long-term investor, which has been the most reliable model for investment growth over time. Thirdly, our highly skilled professional staff works with the best asset managers in the world.

### **Can you explain how the funds are protected by law?**

CalSTRS benefits are a contractual right protected not only by the California Constitution but also by the U.S. Constitution. Article 1 Section 9 of the California Constitution and U.S. Constitution Article 1 Section 10 both hold the state to its contractual obligations.

### **Pensions tend to use a system which includes actuarial smoothing. Can you explain what actuarial smoothing is and how it results in predictable performance over the life of a CalSTRS pension?**

To understand how smoothing affects the CalSTRS fund, you have to keep in mind that the fund makes money in two ways: through contributions by members, school districts and the state of California, and through investment income. So double-digit investment returns the past three years will help cushion us during lean years such as 2007-08. That means CalSTRS doesn't have to ask the Legislature to raise contribution rates because of one bad year.

### **Can you provide any current educational information (online or otherwise) that can assure members of CalSTRS' financial stability?**

Your best bet is to look at the following webpage: [http://www.calstrs.com/Newsroom/What's%20New/market\\_fluctuations.aspx](http://www.calstrs.com/Newsroom/What's%20New/market_fluctuations.aspx). There you will see that our size, diversification and legal guarantees mean that our members' benefits will be paid out and that the fund will weather this financial turmoil.

### **Anything else you would like us to include in this brief Q&A for our members?**

Since its founding 95 years ago, CalSTRS has grown and evolved into a sophisticated, well-managed and well-diversified financial institution. CalSTRS is not only built to withstand the difficulties of a struggling economy, but is poised to take full advantage of the coming financial recovery. CalSTRS is dedicated to fulfilling its mission of sustaining the financial security of California's educators today and far beyond the next 95 years.

Do something interesting or exciting? Planning an incredible lesson or activity in your classroom?  
Share your experiences! Newsworthy items and articles are being accepted for future issues of the Signal.  
Simply send hard copy to Laura Finco at Stone Valley Middle School or email at [lfinco@srvusd.net](mailto:lfinco@srvusd.net) as an attachment.

For additional information regarding the Benefits of CTA Membership, go to <http://www.cta.org>