

March 5 PLAN Forum: A Call to Action on Governor Schwarzenegger's Budget Notes on Proceedings

Melia Franklin welcomed parents, advocates, community residents to the Forum. Today's event would focus on the state budget, the governor's proposed budget cuts, and how these cuts could affect you and your family.

The goals of the Forum included:

- Get informed about the state budget
- Learn skills and tools to make a difference
- Find out what other groups are doing to fight back
- Take action!

Melia introduced Joe Wilson as the day's emcee and guide. He offered an inspirational quote for the day, to guide participant's work for the day:

" Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every person a potential activist, and every minute a chance to change the world..."

- Dolores Huerta

Joe also urged attendees to get angry about decisions being made that affected their lives and their children's lives, and to turn that anger to collective action.

California Budget 2005-2006

Rochelle Robinson of the California Partnership gave an overview of the governor's proposed state budget for 2005-2006. It includes:

- Significant cuts to monthly grants for families receiving CalWORKs, suspending the state-mandated cost of living adjustment (COLA), as well as suspending COLA's for disabled and elderly SSI recipients.
- Cuts to child care subsidies for low-income working families and reduced reimbursements for child care providers
- Continued cuts to public education, including refusing to honor the state-mandated Prop 98 spending requirement, a cut of \$2.3 Billion.

A panel of parents from Oakland Parents Together (**Costlo Moore**), Parent Voices (**Wendy Vielman**), and LIFETIME (**Terri Martin**) shared their personal stories and the potential effects the state budget cuts would have on their families.

Their perspectives included:

- Struggling school districts being taken over by state administrators means that local accountability is weakened, parents and community residents are shut out of the process, and students lose.
- College education is increasingly out of reach of working families with children
- Children are placed at risk when child care options are eliminated

- Despite personal crisis, parents continue to strive to achieve, and to speak out.
- Every action helps, and everything we do can make a difference

What You Can Do:

- Hold public officials accountable – ask questions, get answers
- Get the information and the facts – then act
- Speak out whenever you can
- Tell a friend – get others involved

Maria Luz Torre of Parent Voices, SF facilitated a presentation, “What Is Advocacy?” Attendees were asked their ideas on what advocacy means.

Responses included:

- Standing up for one’s right to be
- A voice
- Speaking up for someone, something
- Advocating for children’s rights
- Persuading people
- Defending the rights of others
- Empowering someone, changing things
- Creating a vision of what’s possible
- Being a freedom fighter
- Organizing the unorganized
- Giving ideas to others
- Defending women, children, and others without power
- Action and follow through
- Unity, standing together
- Advocating for others without regard to race
- Creating a ripple effect with one’s actions

The Cost of War

Total military spending averages about \$1.2 Billion each day, which is \$50 Million every hour, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. With the same amount of money, in just one day we could:

- Provide an annual housing allowance of \$25,000 each, for **48,000 families!**
- **Send 8,000 high school graduates** to Stanford University for four full years!
- Pay for full year child care subsidies for more than **100,000 working families!**

Education vs. Incarceration

California spends almost \$31,000 per inmate each year to incarcerate its prison population. The cost per youth at the California Youth Authority is nearly \$60,000 per year, per inmate. This more than three to six times as much as California spends per pupil in public schools. California ranks near the top in prison spending per inmate and near the bottom in per pupil spending.

What are the real intentions of the federal No Child Left Behind Act?

- Mandate unrealistic standards that are nearly impossible to meet, and intentionally limit resources to ensure that virtually ALL public schools become subject to federal redesign
- Significantly weaken the teacher's union by superseding collective bargaining agreements
- Increase privatization of public schools by promoting charter schools
- Promote the military as a THE career option for students of color
- Make advancing to college more difficult for non-English speaking students by promoting standardized testing irrespective of language access.

California Education Facts

- California schools have the third highest standards in the country but are among the lowest funded schools.
- California schools have been cut by nearly \$10 Billion in the past four years
- The Governor has proposed cutting an additional \$2.3 Billion from public schools

What Education Cuts Mean to You and Your Child:

- Cuts to arts, music, sports programs
- Closing school libraries
- Teacher layoffs
- Larger class sizes
- Children left behind

What you can do: Advocacy Skill-building breakout groups

Participants broke into 5 groups to practice telling their story/making demands in an advocacy setting (legislative visit, media interview, public testimony).

Observations included:

- Personal stories/experiences bring issues to life, making them real and relevant.
- Personal stories ask the listener to "share the pain," empathize with the teller; it's difficult for a policymaker to "demonize" a real person with a real story.
- It's hard to Keep it Short and Simple – KISS – but important! Practice and feedback can help.

Five parents practiced in front of the full group. Keys to success included:

- Naming specifically who you represent and speak for.
- Demanding something specific, with a time-line for response.
- Following up with something in writing.

Action Pledges:

Participants pledged the following budget actions:

- Organize parents through the San Francisco State Family Resource Center to go to Stand for Children Day in Sacramento on May 5.
- Encourage organizations like PLAN to join with the California Teachers' Association to stop the cuts.
- Organize others from this group to join March 4 Education for an action in Sacramento on Tuesday, March 29 to demand educational justice!
- Join California Partnership in the state Capitol for testimony at key hearings on April 7th and April 14th to fight cuts to CalWORKS and other health and human services programs.
- Attend a Town Hall meeting to defend public education on Tuesday, March 8, 6-8pm, at the First Congregational Church of Oakland. 510-763-4020 x 15
- Organize a letter writing campaign at City College of San Francisco and go to Stand for Children Day on May 5 in Sacramento. Call 415-239-3109
- Join Youth Together at an April 20th Action to oppose the college fee increase and help build an adult support network for youth.
- Organize children to write letters to the Governor and have each child put a "penny for education" in their envelopes and ask that the Governor spend it on education in the classroom. For a flyer and sample letter, visit http://www.march4education.org/a_penny4education_letter.pdf
- Highlight corporations that don't pay their fair share of taxes (Marin Grassroots Leadership Network)
- For a list of California's "no tax" corporations (and a lot of useful information about the 2005-06 budget and the budget process), visit the California Budget Project's website at: <http://www.cbp.org/2004/0409allgain.pdf>

Send flyers and announcements to info@parentactionnet.org and we will get the information out to this group via email!