



LEGISLATIVE BRIEFS...

April 2008

Update: Where Are We With Vouchers?

President Bush's call for a \$300 million program called Pell Grants for Kids is the latest effort by his administration to channel tax dollars to low-income parents to help them send their children to private or religious school. This proposal has been denounced by a number of education stakeholders as a national "voucher" program that would only drain resources from public schools, particularly those in urban areas, which in many cases are in need of money.

The Basic Policy of NYS PTA is to ensure that federal, state and local funds designated for elementary and secondary education are used for public school support. NYS PTA opposes direct or indirect aid for non-public schools through vouchers. The President's proposal cuts funding and restructures the 21st Century Learning Centers, an important after-school program, converting it to a voucher-supported program. Vouchers deprive public schools of critically needed taxpayer funds by diverting those funds to private schools with no taxpayer or educational accountability. For more information:

<http://www.nyspta.org/CMT/Publications/AANationalCallInCampaignSupportAfterSchoolFebruary2008.pdf>

http://www.pta.org/ja_newsletters_issue_1201734154734.html

Take Action: <http://capwiz.com/npta2/home/>

Around the State:

Contradictions

Last month's issue of *Legislative Briefs*, expressed NYS PTA's deep concern for contradictions in Governor Eliot Spitzer's state aid reforms from the 2007-08 to the 2008-09 Executive Budget proposal. However, these contradictions cannot compare to those of recent events, which led to his resignation just weeks before the state budget deadline. On March 12th, we watched with a sense of disillusionment and sadness, our former governor, who only a year ago seemed to hold such promise for the educational future and issues of child well-being for NY's children, leave office. In contrast, it is with great anticipation and much hope that we welcome our new governor, The Honorable David Paterson – the hope that all can work together to heal a wounded trust and move swiftly and confidently forward with a shared mission to provide excellence in education and quality of life for NY's children and families. For Eliot Spitzer's statement to New Yorkers:

<http://www.state.ny.us/governor/press/0312081.html>

Governor's Office and Legislature Reach Consensus on State Revenue

Governor Eliot Spitzer, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, Senate Majority Leader Joseph L. Bruno, Senate Minority Leader Malcolm Smith, and Assembly Minority Leader James Tedisco announced that an agreement was reached on available revenues for the 2007-08 and 2008-09 State fiscal years.

The parties agreed that the weaker economic outlook reached in economic consensus would result in estimated General Fund receipts that are \$250 million lower for State fiscal years 2007-08 and 2008-09 than the amounts projected in the Executive Budget. For more information:

<http://www.state.ny.us/governor/press/0301081.html>

School Safety: Removal of School Resource Officer's Opposed

The 2008-2009 proposed Executive Budget includes a plan to reassign about 200 state investigators and troopers to Operation Impact, a program aimed at combating crime in the 17 counties in New York that account for 80 percent of all crimes in the state outside of New York City. Ninety-two of the reassigned officers will be school resource officers (SRO). SROs are said to play a critical role both as deterrents to crime and with suicide prevention.

State senators propose a plan to protect schools and children. The plan rejects the reassignment of state police school resource officers; restores funding in the state budget for the state Education Department's Office of School Personnel Review and Accountability, which performs criminal background checks on school employees; and combats the growing problem of child pornography, internet predators and sexual exploitation of children through the adoption of the Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Prevention Act of 2008 (S06747). For more information:

http://www.legislativegazette.com/read_more.php?story=2905

<http://www.assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?bn=S06747>

Around the Capitol:

Mental Health Insurance Parity

On Wednesday, March 5, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 1424: Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act of 2007 also known as the Kennedy-Ramstad mental health parity bill. The bill boasted a solidly bipartisan tally of 268-148. All NY Congressional members supported the bill with the exception of Thomas Reynolds (R-26th) and Randy Kuhl (R-29th). Charles B. Rangel (D-15th) was listed as "no vote". The bill prohibits treatment limits or the imposition of financial requirements on mental health and substance-related disorder benefits in group health plans which are not similarly imposed on substantially all medical and surgical benefits in any category of items or services under such plans. For more information:

<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-1424>

<http://www.psych.org/MainMenu/Newsroom/NewsReleases/2008NewsReleases/APAApplaudsPassageofMentalHealthParityLegislation3608.aspx>

Beef Recall: Food Safety in School Lunch Programs

Members of Congress have called for an investigation of food safety in the school lunch program following the massive recall of beef distributed to schools. Although considered a Level II, low-risk alert, the USDA has promised to reimburse districts for some of the costs of the recalled meat. For more information...

<http://www.nsba.org/HPC/Features/SBN/CurrentIssue/Schooldistrictshadlargeamountsofrecalledbeef.aspx>

http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/03/05/27lunch_web.html?print=1

http://www.fsis.usda.gov/PDF/Recall_005-2008_Release.pdf

http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/s.7_0_A/7_0_1RD?printable=true&contentidonly=true&contentid=2008/02/0055.xml

State Leaders to PTA's National Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C.

Hundreds of child advocates were in the nation's capitol as part of PTA's National Legislative Conference held on February 26-28. The three-day event brought together leaders representing every state in the union to sharpen their grassroots advocacy skills, conduct meetings with their elected representatives, and honor a local and state PTA with the PTA Outstanding Advocacy Award for their legislative efforts. Training and topical workshops prepared attendees to bring the 2008 PTA Message to the Hill: **PTA VOTES!** Meetings with legislators specifically targeted reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, The Child Nutrition and School Lunch Protection Act, and funding for education and child-related programs. For more information:

http://www.pta.org/ne_press_release_detail_1204039787046.html

http://www.pta.org/ia_category_details_1203706106687.html