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Schwarzenegger Continues To Run From Education Pledge *AB 8 Veto latest disconnect between words and action*

San Francisco, CA – Education advocates today decried Governor Schwarzenegger's decision to veto Assembly Education Committee Chair Julia Brownley's bill Assembly Bill 8 (AB 8), pointing to it as yet another example of refusal by the Governor to move forward on a long overdue overhaul of California's archaic and highly dysfunctional school funding system.

"Instead of focusing his leadership on laying the groundwork for school finance reform in California, Governor Schwarzenegger has again avoided ensuring all students are funded by a system that enables them to meet high standards," said Liz Guillen, Director of Legislative & Community Affairs at Public Advocates Inc., a nonprofit law firm and advocacy group.

The bill had wide bipartisan support, passing the Assembly 79-0 and the Senate 31-6, and receiving the endorsement of business, parent, student, teacher, good government and civil rights groups.

Funded by outside sources, AB 8 would have required that a bipartisan governmental working group propose a new school funding structure to the Legislature by December 2010 that, among other things, would make the system equitable, rational, and based on the actual costs of educating California's diverse student population.

In his veto statement, Schwarzenegger said in part: "This bill merely authorizes the convening of yet another working group that can be accomplished without statutory authorization. I am concerned that this bill provides the appearance of activity without actually translating to achievement."

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Assemblymember Julia Brownley strongly disagreed with the Governor's rationale. "I was shocked and puzzled by the governor's veto of AB 8. Without question, overhauling California's school finance system is the most important education reform effort California can undertake. The governor's own Committee on Education Excellence said the current system is not equitable or efficient. If, as he said in his veto message, this can be done without legislation, why hasn't he made a single move toward that? AB 8 would require a concrete action plan be brought forth within a year's time. His lack of urgency on this most important issue is appalling."

In addition to the Governor's Committee, a 2007 state-requested set of studies from scholars across the ideological spectrum agreed that California's public school funding system is irrational, inequitable, and hopelessly convoluted. Yet, Schwarzenegger has taken little action to implement any major reforms since vowing that 2008 would be "the Year of Education." Lately, his education legacy has only grown bleaker. The Governor has overseen unprecedented cuts to California education funding, totaling a shocking \$2,000 per student over the past two years. For a state that the respected weekly Education Week already ranks 46th in the nation in per pupil spending, California is likely now closer to 50th.

"Instead of having the State take a crucial step toward fixing a school funding system that everyone acknowledges is broken, the Governor has put the brakes on reform," said Carmen Iñiguez, Statewide Alliance Director with Californians for Justice. "It's ironic that the governor says he does not want to give only the appearance of progress. He's been all talk and no action on this crucial issue."

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The Campaign for Quality Education is a statewide coalition of grassroots, civil rights, policy and research organizations committed to educational equity for all communities served by California's public schools. For more information, see <http://www.quality-education.org>