



# Today's PTA Advocate: Speak Up to Stop Sequestration

By **Jacque Chevalier**

The word sequestration has been in the news lately when talking about the federal budget. Sequestration refers to across-the-board cuts, and depending on where you live and the amount of federal aid your community receives, those cuts could amount to as much as 17 percent. That spells bad news for schools unless parents, educators, and other concerned citizens work to voice our concerns with our elected officials.

It is no secret that schools and school districts increasingly turn to PTAs in an effort to plug funding gaps fueled by federal, state, and local budget cuts to education. In an economic environment where revenues are down, reliance on the safety net is up, and efforts to regain control of our fiscal future are front and center, public education is often the first fatality at state capitols and in city halls.

Capitol Hill is no different. Unless there is bipartisan action taken in Congress, sequestration, which is another way of saying across-the-board cuts, which will amount to more than 8 percent, will take effect in January 2013. According to recent state analyses that take into account a multitude of factors including reliance on federal aid, depending on where you live and the demographics of your school district, sequestration could translate into cuts of as much as 17 percent.

A steady increase in student enrollment year after year is now coupled with dramatic increases in student and family reliance on need-based assistance due to the nation's general economic downturn. All at a time when states and districts are being asked to implement daring and innovative new reforms—new evaluation and data systems, increased

attention to individualized learning, adoption of college- and career-ready standards, and the list goes on—the large-scale funding reductions year after year are making these reforms almost impossible to achieve. PTAs cannot be counted on to fill such large funding holes.

There is something to be said for arguments favoring spending smarter when it comes to public education. While PTAs at all levels fight for increased investment in public education at all levels of government, we also champion implementation of reform strategies that have a positive impact on student achievement and improve the educational delivery structure. Regardless of whether you consider yourself a “reformer” or “funder,” we can all agree that our public schools already struggle to do more with less.

If the prospect of sequestration in its current form—the loss of \$4.8 billion from early childhood through higher education—doesn't seem bad enough, there are deficit plans pending before Congress that would shift reductions entirely onto nondefense discretionary programs, including education. This would translate into education cuts of nearly 20 percent, or one out of every five dollars spent on Title I, special education, teacher preparation, afterschool programming, English language learners, arts in education, and more.

Approximately 1.3 million students in the high school class of 2010 failed to graduate nationwide. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, halving that national number of dropouts for just one high school graduating class would mean not only an additional \$713 million in increased state tax revenue in just one year, but also approximately 54,000 new jobs and an increase of \$9.6 billion in gross domestic product (GDP) down the line. Educating and graduating college- and career-ready

young people is essential to improving the long-term economic health and well-being of our nation. Achieving quality education for every child takes a shared commitment of families, communities, schools, and government all working together and investing in our future.

On August 10, more than 160 PTA leaders representing 42 states gathered for PTA Day at the White House to communicate that message of shared commitment to senior administration officials. PTA is urging Congress and the administration to identify and execute a balanced approach to deficit reduction that won't cripple our nation's schools. From Capitol Hill to the White House, PTA is forcing our nation's leaders to give answers to tough questions and reevaluate education as a national priority.

It is crucial that we as parents, teachers, and champions for education, reach out to our elected leaders and encourage the adoption of a fiscally responsible plan to avoid punishing cuts to education. Join more than 5 million members of PTA to speak for every child with one voice and champion educational investment. Visit [PTA.org/ChampionsofChange](http://PTA.org/ChampionsofChange) to learn more about PTA Day at the White House and join the PTA Takes Action Network for updates on this and other PTA advocacy activities.

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### ADVOCACY HELP FROM NATIONAL PTA

Want to learn more? National PTA's online advocacy toolkit offers step-by-step directions and examples to help you reach out to policy makers and the media. The toolkit includes information and downloadable tools on the following topics:

- PTA Advocacy: A Legacy in Leadership (DVD/Flash movie)
- Advocate for PTA (pdf)
- Conducting a Hill Visit
- Corresponding with Members of Congress
- How a Bill Becomes a Law
- Working with the Media
- Federal Appropriations and Budget Process
- Hosting Site Visits for Members of Congress

Go to [PTA.org/3020.asp](http://PTA.org/3020.asp) to view and download the toolkit today!

### ADVOCATE WITH YOUR VOTE

It is critical that all PTA members demonstrate their role as child advocates by becoming educated about candidates for public office and their positions on legislative issues that are important to children and public schools. By exercising our democratic right to vote, we are able to give children a voice. This is especially critical in the upcoming elections on November 6, 2012.

In the 2012 federal elections, voters will determine our president, our vice president, all 435 members of the U.S. House of Representatives, and 33 U.S. senators. In state elections, voters will elect 13 governors, thousands of state house and senate members, and countless mayors, regents, city council members, boards of supervisors, county officials, and school board trustees. Your vote can make a difference for our children and communities.

To help you become a more informed voter, National PTA has created the *PTA Votes 2012 Election Guide*. To review the guide, please go to [PTA.org/pta\\_votes.asp](http://PTA.org/pta_votes.asp).



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