

Opinion: Education reform key to solving California's budget crisis

By George P. Shultz and Eric Hanushek

Do we really need someone in Sacramento writing three paragraphs in the California Education Code containing 1,132 words that lay out the rules for school field trips? How about state approval of lesson plans for farm labor vehicle training? Of course not. And from these, we see an opportunity to break the gridlock in our state capital.

Sacramento is awash with discussions of deals about the budget (though apparently, despite the talk, there is no deal). The proposals generally involve pain from cuts in resources for many programs and services that is "balanced" by pain from increased tax rates. Not surprisingly, many legislators have been reluctant to sign on to such "deals." The negotiators, and the public, do not see how their lives are improved through the proposals. So we are left with the unwelcome choice between an unsustainable fiscal condition for the state that leaves our future in doubt or further cuts that seem unacceptably draconian.

We offer a real deal: Our children are our future, so Part One of the deal must be improving the quality of K-12 education, because California rates 47th in student achievement out of the 50 states.

We also have a stubborn state budget deficit, and the main word being used in addressing it is "cut." A better term for Part Two of the deal is "reform." When one makes that change, the money will be there.

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