

Money, clout on the line for Calif. teachers union

By Laurel Rosenhall, Calmatters

The California Teachers Association, one of Sacramento's most powerful interests, is heading into an extraordinary year with decisions on the ballot, in the Capitol and in the courts holding the potential to impact its clout for many years to come.

Billions of dollars for schools will likely be at stake on the 2016 ballot as well as pivotal campaigns for state Legislature and a question about union pensions. Meanwhile, the Capitol is expecting a robust debate about how schools are evaluated and courts will hear two lawsuits challenging the teachers union.

"It's a big year for education in California. To the extent we're part of that, it's a big year for us," said union president Eric Heins.

CTA has become a force in Sacramento by pouring millions into influencing ballot measures and electing lawmakers, then millions more lobbying legislators after they take office. The union's formidable political operation – spending about \$200 million on campaigns and lobbying in the last 15 years – is funded by roughly 300,000 classroom teachers who pay approximately \$1,000 each in annual union dues.

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