

NATIONAL PTA LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM 2005–2007

The National PTA Legislative Program is the primary authority for action taken by National PTA on federal legislation and regulations.

The National PTA Legislative Program has four components:

- **Legislative directives** are the organization's current legislative priorities. They are determined by the legislative committee and adopted by the National PTA Board of Directors.
- **Policy statements** are broad statements on children's issues that form the basis for resolutions and position statements. Policy statements become official when they are passed by delegates at the National PTA Annual Convention or by the National PTA Board of Directors.
- **Resolutions** with legislative intent can be proposed by any PTA. The National PTA Board of Directors recommends resolutions for consideration by delegates at the National PTA Annual Convention. Resolutions must be approved by the convention body and then ratified by the National PTA Board of Directors to become positions of the organization.
- **Position statements** are initiated by committees of the National PTA and approved by the National PTA Board of Directors.

LEGISLATIVE DIRECTIVES

The legislative directives below were formulated based on what is expected to be at the forefront of the federal legislative and administrative agenda. Rather than providing an exhaustive list of the areas where National PTA is involved, these directives are indicative of where National PTA expects to target its efforts and increase our effectiveness. While National PTA can typically anticipate many of the issues that will be presented by Congress, every year new and unexpected issues emerge to which National PTA responds. All legislative work, therefore, whether planned or unplanned in advance, will be consistent with National PTA's resolutions and positions statements.

I. PARENT INVOLVEMENT

- Support, expand, and improve parent involvement policies in federal legislation
- Support, expand, and improve efforts to create effective and accountable parent involvement provisions in federal regulations and guidance
- Support, expand, and improve school-linked parent resource centers
- Support, expand, and improve methods to encourage teachers to engage parents

II. PUBLIC EDUCATION

- Support, expand, and improve programs that recruit, develop, and retain highly qualified educators
- Support, expand, and improve student preparation for and access to post-secondary education and the workforce
- Support, expand, and improve efforts to increase funding to provide quality education for all students
- Support, expand, and improve efforts that ensure public funds are used exclusively for public schools

III. SAFE AND NURTURING ENVIRONMENTS

- Support, expand, and improve access to quality early childhood education
- Support, expand, and improve child nutrition, health, and wellness programs
- Support, expand, and improve efforts to inform parents on media and technology safety issues
- Support, expand, and improve access to quality before- and after-school programs
- Support, expand, and improve efforts to modernize school facilities and environment

RATIONALE

I. Parent Involvement

Parent involvement not only promotes student achievement, but also benefits school personnel and parents themselves. Research has demonstrated that when parents are involved in a child's education, students achieve more, regardless of socio-economic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parents' education level. The most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that student's family is involved in his or her education both in the school and at home. Parent involvement contributes to better school attendance, improved homework completion rates, decreased violence and substance abuse, and higher graduation rates. Parent involvement takes many forms including making decisions about children's education, health, and well being, as well as advocating for children's success. Recognizing that parents are a child's first educator, administrators, teachers, and school staff need clear direction and tools to make parents true partners in their children's education.

Long before research confirmed the above findings, National PTA successfully initiated campaigns to incorporate parent involvement provisions in federal education programs. National PTA's on-going legislative priority will be to build upon these gains and to strengthen current parent involvement provisions, regulations, and opportunities.

- **Federal legislation:** National PTA is pleased with the parent involvement provisions included within the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The parent involvement provisions of the law, however, are less visible to the media, and, in general, are receiving less attention from state legislators and school districts and are not being effectively implemented and enforced. National PTA will continue to work with lawmakers to improve the NCLB parent involvement provisions, increase parent involvement professional development opportunities, and hold schools, districts, and states accountable for how they implement parent involvement provisions. Furthermore, National PTA will work to incorporate effective parent involvement policies and programs in all appropriate federal education laws.
- **Federal regulations and guidance:** National PTA will work with the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to provide technical assistance to states and local school districts to implement effective parent involvement activities, policies, and practices. These policies must be developed, implemented, and evaluated with input from parents, educators, and community members. National PTA will continue to work with ED to emphasize the importance of effective parent involvement policies and encourage the collection of data on parent involvement policies and practices in the states, and disseminate the findings to states and school districts. The reports should also include case studies of successful models of parent involvement programs that can be replicated in other schools.
- **School-linked parent resource centers:** National PTA supports efforts to provide services, supports, and opportunities to improve student learning, stronger families, and healthier communities. National PTA recognizes the variety of social influences and environmental conditions to which children are exposed; schools alone cannot be expected to provide the foundation young people need to succeed. Research shows that school-linked services help to increase student achievement and save money by reducing overlapping services. School-linked parent resource centers often serve those children and families most in need, helping at-risk families develop the capacity to manage their own lives successfully, while making schools more welcoming to families and increasing community support for the schools. Such services provide parents, schools and support organizations with training, information, and technical assistance to understand how children develop and what they need to succeed in school. Successful centers work closely with parents, family advocates, educators, community organizers, faith-based activists and others committed to educational success for all students, especially low-income, minority, and English language-learning students.
- **Teachers and parents as partners:** National PTA believes that parent involvement merits a process of continuous improvement and a commitment to long-term success. Effectiveness of parent involvement shall be measured in part by improvements in student academic achievement and in school

performance. Research shows that when teachers involve families, the benefits can include better student attendance, higher graduation rates from high school, fewer retentions in the same grade, and higher achievement in reading and math. National PTA supports professional development opportunities for school personnel to foster greater collaboration between parents and teachers. Suggested areas of training include communicating and working effectively with families, planning and implementing volunteer programs, increasing family support for learning, using technology to bridge the gaps in communication between the home and school, and strategies for increasing family involvement. The best models for training include the National Standards for Parent and Family Involvement Program, as well as those that provide staff with several opportunities to interact, work together, and monitor and evaluate progress.

II. Public Education

National PTA believes that public education provides a common experience for building and maintaining a commitment to the basic values of a democratic government. A strong system of public education is vital to our nation's well being. State and school districts must assume primary responsibility for maintaining excellent public schools, and the federal government is a critical third partner in assuring that all children have equitable access to a high-quality education in these public schools.

National PTA's goal of making every school a high-quality school requires implementation of effective practices and proven methods for enhancing teaching and learning, including

- **Teacher quality and professional development:** National PTA supports high-quality teacher preparation, licensing, hiring, and professional development for educators, particularly for beginning teachers to support the achievement of all students. National PTA will advocate for legislation that will result in programs and policies designated to increase the recruitment and retention of talented and committed educators. Special emphasis will be placed on ensuring teacher diversity and addressing the special needs of rural and urban areas.

National PTA recognizes that educational opportunities for students in the public schools of this nation are dependent on the quality of instructional programs and personnel. Teacher preparation, staff development, and retention of quality educators are critical investments in children. Standards regarding teacher education, licensing, hiring, and professional development make an important difference in the qualifications and capacities that teachers bring to their work and, thus, contribute to enhancing quality and equity in public education. Teacher education must include a strong emphasis on subject matter content in the chosen discipline and parent involvement in education, as well as child growth and development.

Further, less-experienced educators are disproportionately teaching the more challenging student populations. Low-income and diverse students must no longer be denied a fair share of the necessities that assure their success in school, such as adequate resources and highly qualified teachers. National PTA supports enhanced teacher quality and professional development for low income and diverse student populations as a means of equalizing educational opportunities for all students.

- **Student preparation for post-secondary education:** National PTA supports legislation intended to increase high school graduation rates, improve preparation for post-secondary education and career development, and increase access to higher education for all children. In today's economic climate, a high school diploma is no longer sufficient to secure a job that will provide financial security and upward mobility. Post-secondary education is now needed for many jobs that in the past did not require a degree, and advances in technology have created a greater need for a highly trained workforce. Too few students, however, are graduating from high school and even fewer are properly prepared for the rigors of a post-secondary education and the workforce.
- **Funding for child-related and education programs:** National PTA believes a sustained national commitment to increase federal spending for education is more critical than ever for strengthening our nation's economy and ensuring a quality education for all students. National PTA advocates for legislation that increases the federal commitment to education and child well-being, targets funds to students most in need, and maintains and strengthens existing quality programs.

National PTA applauds the fact that federal funding for elementary and secondary education has risen nearly 35 percent since 2001, and Title I grants to local educational agencies have increased more than 45 percent since 2001. While most states are experiencing severe budget crises and schools are strapped for funds to carry out basic educational services, NCLB has placed new demands on schools to improve student achievement. Additional targeted federal funds would help schools afford specific interventions that could help improve student test scores, such as reducing class sizes in early grades, providing preschool programs, and ensuring students learn from highly qualified teachers. Increased investment in our education system is essential if we are to ensure our economic and national security. In uncertain times, increased education investment is our best defense.

- **Public funds for public education:** National PTA supports using public funds exclusively for public schools and opposes vouchers, tax credits, deductions, and other such funding sources to finance education for private and religious schools.

America's system of universal public education is a cornerstone of our society, and has played a vital role in educating citizens for democracy, instilling our shared values, and helping our children understand and appreciate our diversity. Yet there is a growing pressure to privatize education. The two initiatives designed to divert public funds to private education are vouchers and education tax subsidies. These programs primarily benefit wealthy families whose children already attend private schools or are home-schooled.

III. Safe and Nurturing Environments

The current student population in public schools is the largest ever and is expected to increase through 2008. Aside from its size, today's student population is remarkable for its diversity in language and culture and for its changing health, education, and social needs. In addition, students face pressures that have changed dramatically from a generation ago, such as commercial and media influences that pervade their culture. To meet the complex needs of this expanding and diverse school population, policies that integrate a range of education, health, and social services are needed, such as

- **Early childhood education:** National PTA will work with lawmakers to improve access to high-quality, school-based and school-linked early childhood education opportunities, and to ensure that federally funded programs promote school-readiness and incorporate strong parent involvement provisions.

Quality early childhood education programs are essential to improving the school-readiness of young children. Children who attend high quality pre-kindergarten programs are less likely to be held back a grade, less likely to need special education and more likely to graduate high school. Research has shown that at-risk and low-income children benefit the most from such programs. Yet, they also are the most likely to attend low-quality programs, if they attend a program at all. Studies have shown that participants in early childhood education programs go on to have higher employment rates and are less likely to become dependant on welfare or engage in criminal activity.

- **Child nutrition and wellness:** National PTA has long sought to improve child nutrition and wellness, as well as health and fitness programs, in the school and community. We will continue to work with lawmakers to improve children's health and nutrition and will support legislation to update, expand participation in, and enhance the quality of child nutrition programs.

Child obesity has become a health issue of epidemic proportions. Between the late 1970s and 2000, the percent of children ages 6–11 who are overweight more than doubled, and the percent of adolescents ages 12–19 who are overweight tripled. Our children’s diets are contributing to increased risks for heart disease, cancer, diabetes, osteoporosis, and other serious diseases. The rise in poor nutrition, inactivity, and weight problems is not only negatively affecting children’s health, but is also adversely affecting their academic achievement. Supporting child nutrition and wellness programs is a cost-effective investment that will save money in future expenses associated with poor nutrition and low academic achievement, such as school dropouts, unemployment, and preventable health problems.

- **Media and technology safety:** National PTA will work to increase awareness of the impact of television, video games, and music and movie violence on the children of this nation and encourage development of programs to assist families and children in using critical viewing skills. National PTA will work to increase awareness of rating systems for mass media to alert parents to objectionable content, and awareness of tools available for parents to control the information to which their children are exposed.

Technological advances have a strong effect on the welfare of children and their families. National PTA is committed to the development and use of mass media that will improve the quality of life in America by serving as a positive resource in the education and development of America’s children and youth. National PTA believes that parents, broadcast and cable media, content providers, and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) have a responsibility to support, monitor, and improve the quality of programs and productions.

- **Before- and after-school care:** National PTA will work with lawmakers to improve current law and develop new legislation and incentives that will provide high-quality child-care programs that are affordable and accessible.

More than 14 million children take care of themselves after the school day ends, including almost 4 million middle school students in grades 6 through 8. Just 6.5 million children are in after-school programs—but the parents of another 15.3 million children say their children would participate in after-school programs if such programs were available. Studies have shown a correlation between participation in after-school programs and improved attendance rate, higher academic performance, better social and conflict resolution skills, lower dropout rates, and reduced need for remedial education programs. Research also shows the numerous cognitive, behavioral, and social benefits of before-school care, particularly for children from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Despite the numerous positive effects, few families have access to quality, affordable before- and after-school programs.

- **School construction/renovation and school environmental health:** National PTA will continue to support various efforts to improve public school facilities as adequate, up-to-date school buildings are critical to providing high-quality learning opportunities for children.

It is estimated that some 14 million American children attend deteriorating public schools. Of the existing 80,000 schools at least one-third are in need of extensive repair or replacement and at least two-thirds have environmental problems such as the presence of asbestos, lead in water and paint, or leaking underground storage tanks and radon. In some cases, entire schools do not meet basic local and state codes for health and safety. These inadequate conditions have led to overcrowding, health and safety hazards, and lower student academic performance.

POLICY STATEMENTS

National PTA supports the following concepts:

- Agencies with responsibilities for education, health, or welfare services to children and youth must have:
 - Clearly defined responsibilities
 - Provisions for adequate funding and structure to effectively meet legislative intent
 - Methods for Congress and interested citizens to review implementation of legislation and regulations
- All federal legislation concerned with education and child welfare must include provisions that ensure maximum state and local control.
- All federal funds for educational, health, and welfare services for children and youth must be channeled through appropriate state or local governmental boards or agencies.
- Federal and state support of services for children should ensure equalization of opportunities.
- The constitutional rights of the individual must be protected.

Education Policies

National PTA supports federal legislation toward the following goals

- To ensure that federal funds for education will be appropriated only for public schools that are publicly controlled and tax-supported.
- To provide for adequate financial assistance for education beyond high school in publicly controlled, tax-supported institutions.
- To encourage and assist school districts to meet the needs of special populations
- To assist in the provision of supplementary and supportive public school and community service on an equitable basis.
- To encourage parent involvement, an essential part of the PTA Mission, by promoting an environment in which parents are valued as primary influences in their children's lives and essential partners in their children's education and development.

Health and Welfare Policies

National PTA supports federal legislation toward the following goals:

- To assist states in providing necessary public health and welfare services for children, youth, and families.
- To extend and support research focusing on the needs of children and families
- To provide regulation of manufacture, advertising, or sales of products hazardous to children and youth.
- To develop programs to strengthen local and state programs of prevention, control, treatment, and rehabilitation for juveniles.
- To protect the ecological and environmental qualities of life necessary to the development of healthy and productive youth.
- To provide for consumer protection for youth and families.

National PTA supports federal legislation toward the following goals:

- To support the preparation of youth for their responsible contribution to a strong national defense program consistent with their educational needs.
- To support diligent efforts for international cooperation and world peace.
- To provide adequate funding for school and community services to children in areas under federal government control.
- To protect copyright benefits by means that will not impede education.