



NATIONAL PTA®

# 2014 PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA

113TH CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

**National  
PTA®**  
*everychild.onevoice.®*



## ADVOCATING FOR EVERY CHILD

Dear Advocate:

The National Parent Teacher Association® (PTA) is comprised of more than four million members, including parents, students, educators, school administrators, and community leaders. With more than 22,000 local units, PTA flourishes in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and Department of Defense schools in Europe and the Pacific.

Founded in 1897, PTA is the oldest and largest volunteer child advocacy association in the United States. Since our inception, we have worked side by side with policymakers at every level to improve the lives of our nation's children. For more than 117 years, PTA has been a leading voice in policy decisions that have forever changed the lives of children in America, including the passage of child labor laws, providing hot and nutritious lunches in school, improvements to the unfair and punitive treatment of children in the justice system, and overall increased education opportunities for all children.

As President, I am excited about what the future holds for PTA advocacy, and have made it a top priority for our association over the next two years. When a decision is being made that impacts children, families must be at the table and be ready to contribute in a meaningful way. We invite you to join with us, as we advocate for every child with one voice.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Otha E. Thornton Jr." in dark ink.

Otha Thornton  
**National PTA President**

**National PTA Legislative Committee:**

Stella Edwards, Chair, Virginia  
Brian Bonner, Vice Chair, California  
Vito Borrello, Member, New York  
Elizabeth Ysla Leight, Member, Maryland  
Jim Pulos, Member, Georgia

The committee can be reached at [legchair@pta.org](mailto:legchair@pta.org).



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## EDUCATION

PTA is the oldest and largest volunteer child advocacy association in the United States. Founded in 1897, PTA has a long, successful history of influencing federal policy to promote the education, health, and well-being of all children. Here are some of the areas where PTA has been instrumental in inducing change throughout its history:



- **Creation of Kindergarten classes**
  - **Child labor laws**
  - **Public health service**
- **Hot and healthy lunch programs**

- **Juvenile justice system**
- **Mandatory immunization**
  - **Arts in Education**
  - **School Safety**

The accomplishments have been many. Today, we continue our historic mission of speaking for every child with one voice. PTA advocates for federal policies that benefit children's health, well-being, and access to quality education.

PTA advocates for quality education and opportunity for every child in their own neighborhood. In 2014, PTA will work to do this by supporting policies that reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act/ No Child Left Behind (ESEA-NCLB); expand access to high quality early childhood education; improve special education through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); provide adequate funding for education, support continued improvements to nutrition programs, and foster safe environments before, during, and after school. Through these initiatives, coupled with efforts at the state and local level, we can make great strides in fulfilling the commitment we make to every child.



## Family Engagement

More than 40 years of research shows that when families are engaged, students are more likely to score higher on tests, earn higher grades, attend school regularly, have better social skills, demonstrate improved behavior, adapt well to school, graduate from high school on time, and pursue postsecondary education, regardless of their income level.<sup>1</sup>

Despite bipartisan consensus on the importance of family engagement in education, there remains no central mechanism to translate federal family engagement policies into general practice in states and local communities. Thus, there is little evidence that states, districts, and schools are implementing ESEA-NCLB's family engagement provisions to meaningfully engage families in the education of their children. Accordingly, National PTA supports the Family Engagement in Education Act of 2013 (S.1291/H.R. 2662) to target dedicated capacity-building and technical assistance for effective family engagement strategies where it's needed most while encouraging state and school district flexibility to identify programming that works best for individual communities. While National PTA urges passage of the full bill, in lieu of consideration of the full Family Engagement in Education Act, PTA asks for specific provisions to be included in reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind.

### **PTA URGES CONGRESS TO:**

- Establish a Family Engagement and Responsibility Fund as a State Education Agency (SEA) reservation of Title I funds.
- Retain and improve Title I, Section 1118, to create incentives at the state, district and school levels to meaningfully engage families in their children's education using research-based strategies.

### **KEY FACTS**

- Family engagement can raise student achievement so substantially that schools would need to increase spending by more than \$1000 per pupil to gain the same results.<sup>2</sup>
- The only stand-alone federal program for family engagement in general education – Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs) – was defunded in 2011.
- Teachers are much more likely to remain in schools where parents are involved and where they report high levels of trust with parents.<sup>3</sup>

## EDUCATION (con't)

- Increase the Local Education Agency (LEA) funding allocated for implementation of family engagement programming under Title I, Section 1118.
- Safeguard and improve state-based infrastructure for capacity-building and technical assistance in family engagement programming.
- Improve teacher and principal preparation to increase capacity for culturally competent family engagement practices to increase student achievement.
- Embed improvements in family engagement capacity-building throughout all titles of ESEA-NCLB.



## General Education

In the first session of the 113th Congress, both the Senate and House made considerable efforts to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—No Child Left Behind (ESEA-NCLB). In the second session, a comprehensive reauthorization of ESEA-NCLB will continue to be a top priority for National PTA. PTA urges thoughtful, bipartisan action to address needed changes to the law governing the federal role in general K-12 public education.

### PTA URGES CONGRESS TO:

- Provide access to a well-rounded curricula for all students.
- Safeguard and improve equity protections and dedicated funding streams for disadvantaged populations.
- Develop ambitious, yet appropriate, state-driven accountability systems with growth and performance goals to replace Adequate Yearly Progress.
- Guarantee that all students receive quality instruction from well-prepared teachers and pupil support personnel.
- Improve state longitudinal data systems and sharing of student data.
- Reject any proposal to divert public funding from public schools.

### KEY FACTS

- 2014 marks the seventh year of inaction on passage of comprehensive reauthorization of ESEA-NCLB, which expired in 2007.
- In the absence of reauthorization, at the date of this publication, 45 states, DC, Puerto Rico and the Bureau of Indian Education submitted requests for ESEA flexibility. The U.S. Department of Education has approved ESEA flexibility waivers for 42 states, DC and Puerto Rico.<sup>4</sup>
- Proficiency standards included in current ESEA-NCLB law measure only student performance and not academic growth.

## EDUCATION (con't)

### Education Funding

Despite nearly universal agreement from federal lawmakers on the importance of a high quality education for all students, federal funding for public schools has experienced dramatic cuts over the past several years. During fiscal year 2011, funding for education programs was cut by \$1.25 billion, with an additional \$233 million cut in fiscal year 2012. Between fiscal year 2010 and fiscal year 2012 more than 50 education programs totaling \$1.2 billion have had their funding completely eliminated – including the Parental Information and Resource Centers.<sup>5</sup> These cuts do not include the mandatory across-the-board 8.2% for education programs as a result of the Budget Control Act of 2011 (known as the sequestration). Unless Congress replaces the sequester permanently, these devastating cuts could continue for at least a decade.

As federal funding continues to diminish, schools also face cuts at the state level. At least 34 states provide less funding per pupil than they did six years ago, including 15 states that have reported reducing per pupil spending over funding levels just one year ago.<sup>6</sup> State and local government budgets are tightening, and schools are struggling to provide basic educational services. Federal law mandates educational equity and opportunity for all children, yet insufficient federal resources are allocated to serve all students and families in need of critical elementary and secondary education programs. Achievement gaps are widening as the result of inequitable distribution of resources in publicly funded schools and a lack of increased investment in formula grant programs such as Titles I and III of ESEA-NCLB. Achievement gaps along ethnic and socioeconomic lines are found in nearly every measure of achievement, including math and reading test scores, high school graduation rates, and college enrollment and completion rates.<sup>7</sup> PTA believes that federal investment in quality education is critical to our nation's long-term success.

### KEY FACTS

- During fiscal year 2011, funding for education programs was cut by \$1.25 billion, with an additional \$233 million cut in fiscal year 2012.<sup>8</sup>
- Between fiscal year 2010 and fiscal year 2012 more than 50 education programs totaling \$1.2 billion have had their funding completely eliminated – including the Parental Information and Resource Centers.<sup>9</sup>
- In fiscal year 2012, education funding represented two percent of total federal government spending.<sup>10</sup>
- Fully funding ESEA-NCLB title I, which provides aid for students at schools with high levels of poverty, would require an annual appropriation of approximately \$35 billion. This is roughly \$20 billion more than current annual funding for Title I.<sup>11</sup>
- While the federal government committed to covering 40 percent of the cost of IDEA funding, its actual share in fiscal year 2013 was 14.9 percent.<sup>12</sup>



**PTA URGES CONGRESS TO:**

- Safeguard vital education investments and exercise equity across discretionary funding in all deficit reduction efforts.
- Restore funding for the Parental Information and Resource Centers, Title V, Part D, Subpart 16 of ESEA-NCLB.
- Provide specified funding for authorized education programs through the appropriations process, not by allowing flexibility for Departments to determine funding levels.
- Increase funding for programs authorized under the ESEA-NCLB including Titles I, III and IV.
- Increase funding for IDEA so that the federal government provides at least 20 percent of the excess cost of educating children with special needs, with a concerted effort to work toward the federal government's commitment to provide forty percent.
- Maintain or increase investments in quality early learning programs including Early Head Start, Head Start, the CCDBG, and the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program.



## EDUCATION (con't)

### Early Education

In a competitive global economy, the education of our nation's children must begin long before they enter kindergarten. The evidence is clear that providing effective, targeted supports and interventions to children and parents starting at birth prepares children for later academic and career success. PTA supports federal and state incentives for high-quality child care and preschool programs for children ages 0 to 5. These programs should be affordable and accessible; developmentally appropriate; coordinated at all levels (federal, state, and local); and characterized by high standards for teaching, training, health, and safety. Additionally, PTA strongly encourages the inclusion of a robust family engagement component into all early childhood education programs.

Currently, there are several vehicles within Congress, the U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to meet the needs of young children and their families, including the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Child Care and Development Block Grant, Head Start/Early Head Start and the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program. National PTA will continue to advocate in Congress to strengthen early childhood education programs that further the success of our earliest learners.

### KEY FACTS

- From 2009-2011, an average 63 percent of low-income 3- and 4-year-olds in the U.S. did not attend a preschool program as compared to 45 percent of children from higher-income households.<sup>13</sup>
- Studies have shown that students who complete high-quality prekindergarten education or similar early childhood programs achieve at higher levels, including increasing high school graduation rates by 31 percent, college attendance by more than 80 percent, and employment by 23 percent.<sup>14</sup>
- Research indicates that high-quality pre-kindergarten, especially for disadvantaged children, can lead to a decreased need for special education services and interventions during a child's academic career.<sup>15</sup>
- Students who attend preschool are more likely to go to a doctor, receive appropriate health screenings and immunizations, and receive dental care.<sup>16</sup>
- Children whose mothers participated in quality home visiting programs for infants and toddlers recorded higher math and reading scores through third grade and are more likely to graduate from high school.<sup>17</sup>

**PTA URGES CONGRESS TO:**

- Increase access to high-quality public pre-kindergarten for all students to prepare them for successful kindergarten entry.
- Encourage local school districts to use Title I ESEA-NCLB funding to support high-quality early childhood education programs for eligible children age 0 to 5.
- Expand family engagement initiatives that begin at birth, both in the home and in other early learning environments, to ensure coordinated family engagement throughout childhood.
- Encourage state and local educational agency partnerships with families and community-based organizations to support the alignment, collaboration, and transition between early learning programs and programs for school-age children in order to improve learning outcomes, including developmental milestones and early literacy.
- Support increased evidence-based home visiting programs that provide parents of infants and toddlers with knowledge, skills, and resources related to child health and development.



## EDUCATION (con't)

### Special Education

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the main federal program authorizing state and local aid for special education and related services for children with special needs. IDEA requires states to provide a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) to children with special needs so that they can be educated to the greatest extent possible, along with all other children.

Through the years, PTA has worked to improve IDEA. PTA will continue to work with Congress to increase coordination in the implementation of ESEA-NCLB and IDEA, ensuring that all students graduate college-and career-ready, that family engagement remains a fundamental principle of IDEA, and that the rights of children with special needs and their parents are fully protected.

#### **KEY FACTS**

- Approximately 5.7 million students in the United States receive special education services under IDEA Part B.<sup>18</sup>
- Research shows that students with special needs are more likely than students without special needs to be involved in the school disciplinary process. For the 2009-2010 school year, the out of school suspension rates for all racial groups combined are 13 percent for students with special needs and 7 percent for those without special needs.<sup>19</sup>
- IDEA requires children with disabilities to have an individualized education program (IEP) to set reasonable learning goals for the child and to specifically state the services that the school district will provide. Parents have the right to be actively involved in the development of their child's IEP.
- Parent Training and Information (PTI) Centers provide training, information, and support to parents of children with special needs. PTI Centers assist parents in the development of their child's IEP, and assist parents in obtaining the appropriate information about the range, type, and quality of programs, services, and resources for children with special needs both in school and at home.
- A staggering 25 percent of African-American students with special needs were suspended out of school at least one time in 2009-2010.
- From the 1994-95 through the 2008-09 school year, the percentage of students with special needs who graduated with a regular high school diploma increased from 42.2 percent to 61 percent.<sup>20</sup>



**PTA URGES CONGRESS TO:**

- Include and codify a statutory definition of family engagement in education in IDEA Part A Section 602. Codify PTA's research-based National Standards for Family-School Partnerships as a best practice model for family engagement in special education.
- Amend IDEA to require transition planning services for special education students to begin no later than the age of 14, and encourage school districts to employ transition planning coordinators to assist in the facilitation of transition planning services for special education students and their families.
- Require the U.S. Secretary of Education to convene a national body of family engagement researchers and expert practitioners to develop indicators on effective family engagement in special education.
- Ensure all students, including special education students, receive quality instruction from teachers and student support personnel who have, at a minimum, successfully completed state licensure or certification processes.
- Require the inclusion of a classroom-based behavioral management plan that focuses on prevention during the development of every student's IEP and 504b plan. Require that both general and special education teachers know how to respond to behavioral problems with positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS).



## CHILD HEALTH AND NUTRITION

National PTA has been closely involved with federal health policy since the association's inception. PTA has played a pivotal role in the creation of the U.S. Public Health Service and the Department of Health and Human Services, as well as the original passage of both the National School Lunch Act and the Child Nutrition Act.

Implementation of provisions included in the last reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act — the 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act — continues to be a top priority for National PTA. The law dramatically improves the quality of the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, increases the reimbursement rate for meals served, supports community efforts to reduce childhood hunger, establishes nutrition standards for all foods sold in schools, and includes improvements to strengthen Local Wellness Policies (LWPs).

### **PTA URGES CONGRESS AND THE ADMINISTRATION TO:**

- Maintain the improved nutrition standards for the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs.
- Support implementation of nutrition standards for all foods sold in school.
- Release the USDA rule to strengthen and improve Local Wellness Policies.

### **KEY FACTS**

- More than 31 million students participate in the National School Lunch Program each day.<sup>21</sup>
- Nearly 20 million children participating in the National School Lunch Program receive a free or reduced-priced lunch.<sup>22</sup>
- Ninety-four percent of U.S. school districts reported that they expected to meet updated federal nutrition standards for lunches by the end of the 2012-13 academic year.<sup>23</sup>
- Childhood obesity rates in America have tripled over the last thirty years. More than 31 percent of children and adolescents are overweight or obese.<sup>24</sup>

## SCHOOL SAFETY

National PTA has long advocated for the health and safety of all children. PTA believes that the safety of children and faculty in all school settings is a fundamental right, and has made it the utmost priority for our programmatic and advocacy work. PTA supports the inclusion of safety education in the curriculum at all levels of public schools. During the 113th Congress, PTA will advocate on behalf of the association's priorities to ensure all schools provide safe learning environments.

### Safe Routes to Schools

The commute to and from school is an opportunity to increase students' physical activity, reduce fuel costs, and encourage family engagement for younger students who require a parent escort. Unfortunately, while many communities, schools, and families promote the idea of walking and biking to school, the reality is that many students in urban, suburban, and rural areas do not have access to safe walking and biking routes.

In 2005, Congress passed legislation that created the National Safe Routes to School Program (SRTS) to make conditions safer for children to walk and bike to and from school. The majority of SRTS funding is invested in infrastructure improvements near schools, with some funds also supporting programs to teach children traffic safety skills, ensure that motorists are driving safely around schools, and encourage more children to walk and bicycle. The National PTA advocates for safe communities for all children, and will continue to push for safe, healthy, and economical transportation solutions.

### KEY FACTS

- Approximately 50 percent of students walked or biked to school in 1969, compared to just 13 percent of students today.<sup>25</sup>
- While distance to school is the most commonly reported barrier to walking and bicycling, private vehicles still account for half of school trips between 1/4 and 1/2 mile—a distance that could be covered on foot or bike.<sup>26</sup>
- Studies show that children who walk and bicycle to school are more physically active, have lower body mass index scores and rates of obesity, and are more likely to meet physical activity guidelines than students who are driven or bused to school.<sup>27</sup>

## SCHOOL SAFETY

### **PTA URGES CONGRESS TO:**

- Support transportation infrastructure improvements, including (but not limited to) sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, crossing signals, traffic signals, and street lighting to allow parents and children to safely walk and bicycle to school.
- Promote programs that increase public knowledge of traffic safety skills.
- Encourage states to use federal transportation safety funds to improve roadway safety measures for non-motorized forms of transport.

### **Bullying**

Bullying in schools is a pervasive problem that negatively impacts school safety and impacts the rights of students to learn in a safe environment without fear. Both bullying other children and being the target of bullies are considered risk factors for youth violence by the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Research shows that bullying can have lifelong consequences for all children, including those who witness bullying. Bullies whose behavior goes unchallenged risk ending up as violent adults, engaging in domestic violence and future child abuse. National PTA advocates for policies and programs that address the prevention, intervention, and elimination of bullying.

### **PTA URGES CONGRESS TO:**

- Build a national effort to inform the public about the risks and costs of bullying for all children and ways to address and eliminate the problem.
- Promote bullying prevention programs that include the training of teachers, parents, students, and school personnel to enforce school rules and policies.

### **KEY FACTS**

- In 2011, approximately 28 percent of students ages 12–18 reported being bullied at school.<sup>28</sup>
- In addition to emotional damage, students who experience bullying show decreased academic achievement—including lower grade point averages and standardized test scores—and are more likely to miss, skip, and drop out of school.<sup>29</sup>
- Kids who witness bullying are more likely to use tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs, have increased mental health problems, and have decreased school participation.<sup>30</sup>



## Gun Violence Prevention

PTA supports the Second Amendment and recognizes the right to bear arms. However, other rights guaranteed by the Constitution, such as free speech and private property, have reasonably been restricted to protect the freedom and safety of our fellow citizens. PTA believes the same principle should apply to the Second Amendment and that every attempt must be made to prevent and reduce violence, especially incidents involving the use of firearms. PTA also believes that the most effective school climate is one that is gun-free. Families, educators, community members, and government must prioritize this issue to ensure a safe learning environment for all children.

### **PTA URGES CONGRESS TO:**

- Promote initiatives that raise public awareness and improve education on firearm safety.
- Pass legislation requiring a waiting period and background check prior to purchasing a firearm.
- Prohibit the sale of non-sporting ammunition, including large-capacity combat magazines.
- Support a ban on the sale, purchase, and possession of military-style assault weapons, including firearms which were originally designed for military or law enforcement purposes; are designed to be fired in full- or semi-automatic mode in combat; and are designed to accommodate a large-capacity combat magazine.

### **KEY FACTS**

- In 2010, an average of 7 children and teens died from guns in the United States each day and another 43 suffered nonfatal gun injuries.<sup>31</sup>
- Firearm-related death is the second leading cause of death, after motor vehicle crashes, for young people ages 1-19 in the United States.<sup>32</sup>
- Two out of three child and teen gun deaths in 2010 were homicides and a little over one out of four were suicides. In contrast, among adults, one out of three was a homicide and two out of three deaths were suicides.<sup>33</sup>

## JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION

National PTA has been a longtime supporter of policies advocating for the rights of children and youth involved in the justice system. As early as 1899, PTA convention delegates passed a resolution supporting the extension of juvenile courts and probation systems to protect children and youth from being incarcerated with adult criminals.

First passed in 1974, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) is the primary federal law regarding juvenile justice reform. The law provides grants to states to implement juvenile delinquency prevention and intervention programs. Two critical protections included in the JDDPA are the:

1) Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders (DSO) core requirement which encourages community-based interventions for children who commit status offenses; and, 2) the Jail Removal and Sight and Sound core requirement that protects children from being incarcerated with adults.

Children arrested for “status offenses” (non-criminal behaviors, such as truancy) are in need of family-focused, school and home-based interventions, rather than secure placement in dangerous, overcrowded juvenile detention centers. Congress recognized this necessity in 1974 when it included the DSO core requirement in the JJDPA to ensure that youth with non-criminal offenses would be treated differently than delinquent children. However, JJDPA was amended in 1980 to include the Valid Court Order (VCO) exception, which allowed children with status offenses to be jailed for violating a court order not to commit subsequent status offenses. This exception has undermined the DSO core requirement, leading to a significant number of children being held in secure detention when other community-based interventions would be more appropriate.

JJDPA is now due for reauthorization, presenting an opportunity to improve the protections provided by the law to children and youth in the justice system. National PTA will continue to work with Congress to advocate for a strengthened JJDPA that ensures the effectiveness of the law’s core protections and focuses on improving juvenile justice systems across the country.

### **PTA URGES CONGRESS TO:**

- Strengthen the DSO core protection of the JJDPA by eliminating the VCO exception to ensure that youth who are truant are kept out of juvenile corrections facilities.
- Update the JJDPA to decrease overreliance on youth incarceration and out-of-home placement by promoting effective family-focused and school-based interventions for truant youth.

- Reauthorize the Second Chance Act—an important source of funding for youth reentry programs across the nation.
- Modify the definition of “adult inmate” in the JJDPA to allow states to place children convicted in adult court into juvenile facilities instead of adult prisons without jeopardizing federal funding.
- Extend the Jail Removal and Sight and Sound Separation core protection of the JJDPA to all children under 18 years of age who are held pretrial, regardless of whether they are charged in juvenile or adult court.
- Expand family engagement in juvenile justice by creating a National Technical Assistance Center on Family Engagement to provide support to state and local justice and child-serving agencies interested in starting or growing existing family engagement programs.
- Strengthen the Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) core protection of the JJDPA by requiring states to take concrete steps to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system.

## KEY FACTS

- Each year, juvenile courts handle roughly 1.5 million cases and more than 250,000 youth are prosecuted in the adult criminal justice system.<sup>35</sup>
- Family and community-based alternatives to incarceration are less expensive to tax payers and more effective than detention, which frequently leads to the interruption of education, children failing to return to school after release, and future delinquency.<sup>36</sup>
- Children prosecuted in the adult system are 34 percent more likely, on average, to be rearrested than children retained in the juvenile justice system.<sup>37</sup>
- African-American youth represent only 17 percent of the overall youth population<sup>38</sup> but they make up 40 percent of those held in juvenile detention facilities.<sup>39</sup>
- On any given day, approximately 10,000 children are held in adult jails and prisons.<sup>40</sup>









## APPENDIX

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