



## **Delaware PTA 2020 Legislative Priorities and Positions**

Legislative Priorities and Position Statements are legislative efforts that are consistent with the purposes, mission and vision of Delaware PTA and shall include stewardship of legislation through the regulatory and policy implementation processes. The Delaware PTA Legislative priorities encompass the legislative initiatives defined below. These priorities are aligned with the National PTA Legislative Agenda.

**Mission:** To impact policy that benefits children by collaborating with decision makers on the development and implementation of legislative policies and initiatives in the areas of education, health and wellness and the judicial representation of Delaware's youth.

Delaware PTA will collaborate in creating policy, review and provide commentary on policy and regulations, and take positions on legislation, regulation and/or policy as it relates to the overall mission of the Delaware PTA and National PTA to ensure the well-being and education of all children in Delaware.

Delaware PTA will inform membership and solicit the input of our members on policy issues that impact the well-being and education of all children in Delaware.

**Our priorities for 2020 are as follows:**

### **Education Funding:**

- 1) **Delaware PTA** supports the restoration of close to 56 million dollars cut from the State Education budget since 2008. Delaware PTA believes that the state of Delaware should be investing in public education, not cutting the existing public education budget.

**Rationale:** The state reductions in funding have come in the most critical areas; such as safety and security, extra time programs for our children, reading and math teachers, funding for English Language Learners and funding to offset local tax increases. These cuts, along with declining tax assessments, force school districts to reexamine their budgets and schedule additional referendums in order to ensure critical services are provided. At the close of the 2019 Fiscal Year, 26 million dollars was cut from the state's

education budget. At the close of the 2020 Fiscal Year, there was not a restoration of these funds although when the budget was balanced over 200 million dollars was found. The cuts to education should have been restored. The burden of these education costs should not fall on the local taxpayers. It is up to the state of Delaware to fund our schools appropriately.

- 2) **Delaware PTA** supports the belief that funding decisions should remain within the local school districts. Delaware PTA will advocate that all education funding and allotment remain in the control of the local school districts. Delaware PTA will advocate in the best interests of our students and broaden the conversation regarding funding to all stakeholders and together, have critical dialogue with our state officials about concerns regarding the very real needs to support all students **and to provide the resources to students with the most need.**

**Rationale:** Delaware's definition of equitable funding has evolved in the last 5 years. School districts use careful planning and budget restraints to support the classrooms and schools with needed services in order to provide strong academic environments. Furthermore, the local school districts are responsible for the oversight and the raising of taxes to fund our schools through referendum and tuition tax and therefore the decision making regarding allotment of money should remain within local control.

- 3) **Delaware PTA** supports the reopening of schools in the 2020-21 school year with the appropriate funding for safe reopenings in all K-12 schools as well as using CARES act money creatively and intentionally. The funding from the CARES act should be used to ensure social distancing, safety protocols dictated by the CDC recommendations at a minimum, and to provide broadband to all public schools as well as digital devices to all students. We do not support backfilling district budgets to make up for shortfalls. The funding should be used for the purpose that it was intended.

**Rationale:** The reopening of public schools is not a one size fits all answer. Funding for the safe return to school should be a priority for all school districts. The CARES Act (The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act) was passed by Congress with overwhelming, bipartisan support and signed into law by the President in March 2020. This money is to assist schools in the safe reopening of K-12 schools. There is a great deal of flexibility with this spending. Therefore, the local school districts should be allocating these funds to assist in the safe reopening of our schools and for remote learning whichever the family chooses for their child(ren). Delaware PTA advocates that parents and families are part of all school reopening plans and discussions and have a seat at the table in decision making processes.

## **Special Education:**

- 1) **Delaware PTA** will advocate for a law that requires the State to fund basic special education funding for the K-3 years. Currently funding is only available for students identified as intense or complex. **[In October 2020, Governor Carney proposed that the General Assembly make Opportunity Funding permanent by 2023; by 2025, the state should grow the pot of money from \$35 million to \$60 million. Schools must report how that money is being spent annually. The General Assembly will also be asked to enact legislation starting in 2023 to expand funding for special education students in kindergarten through third grade. Currently, state funding covers only students fourth grade and up. Delaware PTA will continue to ensure that special education funding is appropriately allocated.]**

**Rationale:** Currently, the state does not provide funding for students identified with basic special education needs such as ADD, ADHD, Dyslexia, Dystopia and other basic special educational needs. Delaware PTA will support all legislation to fund basic special education in the K-3 years, so the local school districts do not bear fiscal responsibility. Furthermore, funding the K-3 years for basic special education would result in a reduction of class sizes for general education classrooms. The state invests millions of dollars in the 0-3 years, 3-5 years and then stops at Kindergarten. Kindergarten through third grade are the years where early intervention can be most impactful.

- 2) **Delaware PTA** remains steadfast that the burden of proof for providing special education accommodations remains with the local school districts and not the family and/or guardian.

**Rationale:** The proof for the need for special education services and appropriate accommodations needs to remain a responsibility of the local school districts, not fall to the family and/or guardian of the student.

- 3) **Delaware PTA** supports that when decisions are made around resources for students with special needs and students who are at risk that there should be guidance to determine the specific key elements required to meet the special needs of each subgroup of students.

**Rationale:** Providing funding without guidance may cause inefficiencies in providing needed resources for students with special needs. This lack of guidance has caused inconsistencies in providing needed resources. A clearer understanding and consensus of key elements and the level that they need to be delivered is a prerequisite for designing a system to meet these students' needs so that all children have the opportunity to meet their potential.

## **School Governance:**

- 1) **Delaware PTA** supports the reduction of local school board terms from 5 to 4 years. Noting that this could increase the number of parents and community members that may commit to serve by reducing the length of the term.

**Rationale:** Serving on a school board is an excellent way to engage families and the community in their local school districts. Furthermore, if a school board member proves to have interests other than their fiduciary and moral responsibilities to serve the community and the health and welfare of children, this would reduce the amount of time they are elected to serve.

## **Child Health and Safety:**

- 1) **Delaware PTA** will continue to advocate for the state of Delaware to provide significant resources and incentives to local school districts to create connected communities, positive school climates and trauma-informed schools to support student health and success that keep students healthy and attending school.

**Rationale:** A positive school climate improves a student's ability to learn and grow. Children should come to school excited to learn in a safe and nurturing school environment, without the fear of bullying, hunger or violence. Our association believes that all schools must be trauma-informed or sensitive schools. Furthermore, Delaware PTA supports state funded professional development for educators in all areas of trauma informed care and restorative practices

- 2) **Delaware PTA** supports the protection of all undocumented students. Delaware PTA believes we must ensure that all children, including undocumented children, have the opportunity to reach their full potential and become productive members of society. Access to a free public education is the most effective method of securing this opportunity and should not be denied.

**Rationale:** All undocumented school-aged children are entitled to have access to a high quality and free public K-12 education. Furthermore, undocumented school-age children may not be constructively denied a free education through coercion, illegal data collection, profiling or interference via threats of deportation. To allow such would be a foreclosure upon their future contributions to our society. Children should feel safe to attend school and not feel threatened that their families may be at risk of deportation. Furthermore, students of all ages K-12 should attend school to learn and not stay home due to a threat to their citizenship.

- 3) **Delaware PTA** will advocate to support healthy sleep for adolescents and to improve the efforts of local school districts to aim for school start times that

allow students the opportunity to achieve optimal levels of sleep and to improve their physical and mental health, safety, academic performance, and quality of life.

**Rationale:** Studies have demonstrated that the duration of sleep for an adolescent results in better academic outcomes for secondary school students. Evidence proves that implementation of later school start times for adolescents affords students the opportunity to obtain optimal levels of sleep, thereby improving physical and mental health, safety, academic performance, and quality of life; and can be achieved with no change in the number of hours spent engaged in athletics, extracurricular activities, and homework after the schedule change.

- 4) **Delaware PTA** will advocate for legislation to ensure a focus on SEL (Social Emotional Learning) resources so these resources are provided to all families and educators. These resources are essential given the emotional and social challenges our children continue to face due to the pandemic. While everyone is concerned about the return to learning this fall, whether hybrid, virtual or in-person, teachers and families are thinking about more than books and lessons, they are contemplating children's social and emotional well-being. With stressors from home and lack of social interaction, students will enter the classroom in need of smiles, understanding, support, and compassion. SEL just might be the biggest challenge educators and families will face and it will likely be the challenge that most greatly impacts educational outcomes of our students.

**Rationale:** SEL is the process that helps students learn critical skills, attitudes, and mindsets for social and emotional success. These skills cover five major areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationships, and responsible decision-making. SEL resources promote social and emotional learning and has become a major focus in schools and youth-serving organizations, as research continues to document the value and importance of such training for both academic and life success. Full support for these resources including professional development for our educators need to be a priority for our school districts.

- 5) **Delaware PTA** will advocate to fully fund a school nurse for every school building regardless of the number of students assigned to that school building. Delaware PTA will support that the state fully fund this and that the burden of the cost not fall on the local school district.

**Rationale:** Currently each school building earns a nurse based on student enrollment. The cost of funding a nurse for each building falls to the local school districts if it does

not meet student enrollment criteria. The state must fully fund a full time nurse for every building that enrolls students regardless of the number of students.

- 6) **Delaware PTA** will advocate for funding to test children 3 years and under for lead poisoning. Testing must be required by law and made simple for parents and less invasive for children. Delaware PTA will advocate for single prick testing in children.

**Rationale:** Currently there is no mandate to test children 3 years old and under with a simple finger prick test. This type of testing would be less intimidating to children and families. One prick testing does not cause anxiety and fear in children. Mandated testing in children under 3 is preventive. Early intervention of possible positive traces of lead in children will lower the rate of effects that lead poisoning can cause such as long term health issues, developmental delays and learning disabilities. The state must make an investment to lower the long term effects of lack of testing and ease the path to testing.

#### **Juvenile Justice and Delinquency:**

- 1) **Delaware PTA** supports Action for Delaware's Children (formerly known as The Hope Trust for Delaware's Kids) the Department of Justice's proposal to invest Delaware's windfall revenues in a long-term program to improve the lives of Delaware's at-risk youth.

**Rationale:** Budget cuts in education stand to have a disproportionate impact on Title I schools as they depend more heavily on federal dollars than higher income schools. Action for Delaware's Children will help restore funding for early intervention and support for children Birth to 24 months. This is not only critical for early identification of possible school supports and services, but it is critical in giving low income children the best possible start in life. Furthermore, this proposal will support quality early childhood options for low-income children, provide more after-school and summer enrichment programs and provide additional funding for Delaware's high-poverty schools. Delaware PTA believes that the proposal, as written, will allow for recipient schools/districts and/or community organizations, to develop a plan to sustain their program. Each of the proposed initiatives under the Action for Delaware's Children is supported by a current National PTA position statement or resolution.