Delaware PTA 2024-2025 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. Legislative Priorities may be amended by the DPTA Board of Directors as social conditions and government policies necessitate additional response and action.

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 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 their 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 2024-2025 are as follows:

<u>Child Health and Safety:</u>

1) **Delaware PTA** will advocate for the state of Delaware to support all measures that protect students, staff, and families from gun violence. **Delaware PTA** supports gun safety legislation to reduce gun violence and deaths by establishing programs to educate students, parents, and community members about gun safety and violence prevention in collaboration with other partnering agencies.

Rationale: School safety is a critical priority for all parents, educators, students, and community members. **Delaware PTA** will advocate for legislation that ensures all staff

and students can attend schools that are safe so that all children can learn, grow, and reach their maximum potential.

2) **Delaware PTA** will advocate for a health-based standard of drinking water of 1 ppb in schools.

Rationale: While the state has taken steps to address problem drinking water taps in Delaware schools, many taps remain without filters and continue providing water with lead at unhealthy levels to students. There is no safe level of lead in water. The only health-based standard that exists for lead in drinking water is from the American Academy of Pediatrics which recommends that "state and local governments should take steps to ensure that water fountains in schools do not exceed water lead concentrations of 1 ppb."[1] The Delaware Department of Education has been instructed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to use an action level 7 ppb and while this is half of the federal action level for lead, is still not a health-based standard. The Standard of Good Repair, released in January 2024, lowered the action level in schools to 5 ppb.[2] However, there is currently no requirement that Delaware's school drinking water is lead-free. A health-based standard for drinking water in Delaware's public schools can protect children from exposure to lead in drinking water at school.

Background: In 2023, Delaware Secretary of Education Mark Holodick committed to a "filter first" approach to drinking water in Delaware's public schools yet a limited number of filters have been added due to cost. The goal was to install 1 water filter for every 100 children.[3] Filter first serves as a form of primary prevention. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, primary prevention "includes reducing or eliminating the myriad sources of lead in the environment of children before exposure occurs and is the most reliable and cost-effective measure to protect children from lead toxicity. … low-level lead exposure, even at blood lead concentrations below 5 µg/dL (50 ppb), is a causal risk factor for diminished intellectual and academic abilities, higher rates of neurobehavioral disorders such as hyperactivity and attention deficits, and lower birth weight in children."[4]

[1] Council on Environmental Health, American Academy of Pediatrics. (2016). Lanphear, B.P., Lowry, J.A., Ahdoot, S. Baum, C.R., Bernstein, A.S., Bole, A., Brumberg, H.L., Campbell, C.C., Pacheco, S.E., Spanier, A.J., Trasande, L.; Prevention of Childhood Lead Toxicity. *Pediatrics, 138*(1). https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/138/1/e20161493/52600/Prevention-of-Childhood-Lead-Toxicity?autologi ncheck=redirected

[2] Delaware.Gov. Senate Bill 270. Lead Testing. (January 2024). https://publichealthalerts.delaware.gov/wp-content/blogs.dir/203/files/sites/203/2023/12/SB270LeadTesting.pdf

[3] Barrish, C. (July 7, 2023). After three-year debacle, Delaware has plan to remove lead from school drinking water. It's taken two rounds of testing, and the process was marred by sloppiness and a lack of transparency, but a $3.8 million "shot of adrenaline" is coming. *WHYY.* https://whyy.org/articles/delaware-plan-lead-removal-school-drinking-water/

[4] Council on Environmental Health, American Academy of Pediatrics. (2016). Lanphear, B.P., Lowry, J.A., Ahdoot, S. Baum, C.R., Bernstein, A.S., Bole, A., Brumberg, H.L., Campbell, C.C., Pacheco, S.E., Spanier, A.J., Trasande, L.;

Prevention of Childhood Lead Toxicity. *Pediatrics, 138*(1). https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/138/1/e20161493/52600/Prevention-of-Childhood-Lead-Toxicity?autologi ncheck=redirected

3) **Delaware PTA** supports lead hazard assessments in all Delaware public and charter schools.

Rationale: SB 270, signed in October 2022, specifically directs the Delaware Department of Education (DOE) and the Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) to develop a series of school facility evaluation tools by January 1, 2024.[5] The SB 270 Standards of Good Repair guidelines were released in January 2024.[6] As part of this process, Delaware PTA urges DOE and DPH to perform lead hazard assessments for all schools prioritizing those built and before 1978. Delaware PTA supports funding allocation to make Delaware's public and charter schools lead-safe and healthy places for Delaware's students to learn. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) dust-lead hazard standards can provide the basis for risk assessors to determine whether dust-lead hazards are present[7] and we urge DOE and DPH to utilize a Dust-Lead Hazard Standard of lead at any level greater than zero reported by an EPA-recognized laboratory[8] be used when assessing for lead hazards in Delaware's public and charter schools. We also urge DOE and DPH to utilize Dust Lead Clearance Levels proposed by EPA in 2023 of 3 µg/ft2 on floors, 20 µg/ft2 on window sills, and 25 µg/ft2 on window troughs.[9] School playgrounds and fields on the school grounds should use EPA's 2024 final rule which generally uses 200 ppm for residential properties. When there are multiple sources of lead exposure, the U.S. EPA will generally use 100 ppm as the recommended screening level for lead in soil.[10]

Background: According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, primary prevention "includes reducing or eliminating the myriad sources of lead in the

[5] Delaware State Senate. 151st General Assembly, Senate Substitute No. 1 for Senate Bill No. 270: AN ACT TO AMEND TITLE 14 OF THE DELAWARE CODE RELATING TO FREE PUBLIC SCHOOLS. https://legis.delaware.gov/BillDetail/109594

[6] Delaware.Gov. Healthy Schools. https://publichealthalerts.delaware.gov/healthyschools/?fbclid=IwAR0HrDiCguQGKcdMwuVBQ-LjP7y5gX1wfhnRzS_m28GWRHmkgAoio_iymo8

[7] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). (July 12, 2023) Biden-Harris administration proposes to strengthen lead paint standards to protect against childhood lead exposure. https://www.epa.gov/lead/hazard-standards-and-clearance-levels-lead-paint-dust-and-soil-tsca-sections-402-and-403

[8] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). (July 2023). EPA's proposal to strengthen dust-lead standards. https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-07/DLHS%20DLCL%20Reconsideration%20Proposed%20Rule%20Fact%20Sheet_0.pdf

[9] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). (July 2023). EPA's proposal to strengthen dust-lead standards. https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-07/DLHS%20DLCL%20Reconsideration%20Proposed%20Rule%20Fact%20Sheet_0.pdf

[10] Filippelli, G.M., Dietrich, M., Shukle, J., Wood, L., Margenot, A., Egendorf, S.P., Mielke, H.W. (2024). One in four US households likely exceed new soil lead guidance levels. *Geohealth,18;8*(6). https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC11184640/

environment of children before exposure occurs and is the most reliable and cost-effective measure to protect children from lead toxicity. … low-level lead exposure, even at blood lead concentrations below 5 µg/dL (50 ppb), is a causal risk factor for diminished intellectual and academic abilities, higher rates of neurobehavioral disorders such as hyperactivity and attention deficits, and lower birth weight in children."[11]

4) **Delaware PTA** supports recess as a critical means of supporting mental health. Consequently, **Delaware PTA** opposes taking away recess to deal with behavioral events.

Rationale: Physical fitness is associated with greater academic achievement and improved mental health. Access to recess is associated with better classroom behavior and social development.

Education Funding:

1) **Delaware PTA** supports funding and reforms that provide equal and equitable access to high-quality education, delivered by highly qualified staff, and prepare all children for college, career, and citizenry. **Delaware PTA** believes that the state of Delaware should invest in public education and not cut the existing public education budget.

Rationale: 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 continued funding for the maintenance and modernization of school facilities and funding for general school operations.

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 the allotment of money should remain within local control.

[11] Council on Environmental Health, American Academy of Pediatrics. (2016). Lanphear, B.P., Lowry, J.A., Ahdoot, S. Baum, C.R., Bernstein, A.S., Bole, A., Brumberg, H.L., Campbell, C.C., Pacheco, S.E., Spanier, A.J., Trasande, L.; Prevention of Childhood Lead Toxicity. *Pediatrics, 138*(1). https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/138/1/e20161493/52600/Prevention-of-Childhood-Lead-Toxicity?autologi ncheck=redirected

3) **Delaware PTA** supports full funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and all other state and federal laws affecting the education of children and youth receiving special services in Delaware and continues to encourage local communities to monitor their enforcement. **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. More than 80% of students who qualify for services under IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) in the USA, have disabilities classified as mild to moderate disabilities such as speech delays, learning disabilities, dyslexia, and other impairments such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), sensory processing disorder or mental health conditions.

High expectations for students with disabilities:

1) **Delaware PTA** supports initiatives that close the achievement gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities. High expectations for all students help develop an understanding that students with disabilities are first and foremost general education students.

Rationale: More than half of all students with disabilities spend at least 80% of their school day in general education classes. Students with disabilities need quality general education instruction in addition to targeted interventions and accommodations. The **Delaware PTA** firmly believes that attempts to close this achievement game will significantly improve success rates in both special education and general education classrooms.

Parent and Family Engagement:

1) **Delaware PTA** supports initiatives that allow access to parent involvement in all schools. **Delaware PTA** fully supports the need for background checks for all

individuals interacting with students but believes that districts, not parents/guardians, should incur the financial burden.

2) **Delaware PTA** will encourage School districts to adopt the 6 Tenets of Family Engagement.[12]

[12] National PTA 2022 updated National Standards for Family-School Partnerships
https://www.pta.org/home/run-your-pta/family-school-partnerships

Rationale: Decades of research show that family engagement matters for student success. Parents and families are key partners and play a critical role in the success of our school system. Schools need to eliminate this economic barrier so that families can be fully engaged in the educational process.

Nutrition:

1) **Delaware PTA** supports initiatives that allow for universal school meals. **Delaware PTA** fully supports requiring schools to provide supplemental nutrition assistance for all staff and students.

Rationale: Food insecurity in Delaware is on the rise and 1 in 6 of children in Delaware struggle with hunger. Additionally, research indicates that healthy students are better learners. Universal school meals are critical to student health and well-being and will improve learning outcomes for all students.

Adopted by the delegates of the 2024 Leadership Convention 11/2/2024