

Free State PTA[®]

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2023 Legislative Agenda

A Note from the Free State PTA President

The Free State PTA invites you to familiarize yourself with our 2023 Legislative Agenda. As the premier child advocacy association in Maryland, we believe that parent and family engagement are core to our advocacy efforts to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children. We stand firmly on supporting all Maryland children, providing them the best education in the safest environment, and making sure that educators as well as schools have the resources necessary to educate, train and instruct in appropriate curriculum. In addition to prioritizing small classroom sizes, using public dollars to fund public schools, supporting the autonomy of local school jurisdictions, protecting school related data, and enforcing adherence to Individualized Education Plans as well as 504 plans, Free State PTA is highlighting mental health, learning gaps, and justice related issues for our Maryland children, schools, and families. Lastly, Free State PTA firmly attests to the importance of parents' and/or guardians' contribution to legislation, education policies and in the administration of schools. Hence, we are eager to work with state legislators, business owners, other nonprofit leaders in addition to other child advocacy organizations, education interest groups as well as government entities to further the mission of PTA.



Marla Posey-Moss, President
Free State PTA

Free State PTA's Principles for Legislative Action

- **Parent, family, student and community involvement in education is crucial.**
- **All children have a right to an excellent equitable education.**
- **Schools must provide a safe environment where all students, teachers and staff can thrive.**

Free State PTA's Advocacy Priorities for the 2023 Legislative Session

- Employ mental health support for school communities.
- Focus on learning recovery, ensuring equitable support for students and families.
- Support for children with special needs, including complying with the American Disabilities Act.
- Support transparency and accountability for educational outcomes and funding for the Blueprint for Maryland's Future
- Support equitable allocation of funding for school construction and projects that address the overcrowding, maintenance deficiency and environmental concerns within buildings, aligning with the goals stated in the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

Free State PTA Legislative Agenda

PARENT, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Free State PTA initiatives include accessible, equitable opportunities for meaningful involvement of parents/guardians, business and community stakeholders in development and review of public policies, educational standards, graduation requirements, in reporting records and environmental and health standards.

Free State PTA supports:

- Policies making strong family involvement a requirement in all appropriate laws and programs. Schools should incorporate parent involvement into all aspects of educational programs and activities.
- Promoting positive standards for family-school partnerships to address six specific types of involvement that are especially beneficial to children's academic success, including: welcoming families into the school community, communicating effectively supporting student success, speaking up for every child, sharing power, and collaborating with community career objectives.

OPERATING AND CAPITAL FUNDING - Free State PTA supports:

Education

- Maximizing student achievement and minimizing the achievement gap by advocating for an extension of programs that reduce summer and Covid-19 related learning loss.
- Improving public funding to equitably ensure high quality educational services for all special populations including Special Education, Gifted and Talented, English Language Learners, Economic Poverty, Homeless population, LGBTQ+, Military Families, Historically Underserved Populations, and other populations with special needs.
- Accountability measures to ensure Blueprint resources are being used effectively and equitably.
- Increased funding for special education or student support in recognition of increasing costs of providing special education services in school.
- Funding enhanced mental health support for staff and students.

Facilities and Construction

- Funding HVAC improvements so that school systems can employ improved ventilation and filtration in order to reduce the concentration of airborne toxins, mold and pathogens.
- Reviewing and modifying state-rated capacity formula and teaching stations as appropriate.
- Sizable increases in funding public school construction, including dedicating a portion of the state surplus funds.

Use of Funds

- School finance reform that focuses on quality in every school from efficient construction to the quality of education, to excellence in delivery and outcomes.
- Public funds for public schools.

SPECIAL NEEDS – Free State PTA supports:

- Capping the number of students assigned to special educators, school psychologists, pupil personnel workers, speech pathologists and school counselors via statute or State regulations.
- Shifting the “burden of proof” in IEP due process cases from parents to school districts.
- Requiring local and state education agencies and institutions of higher education to offer pre-service and post-service training on dyslexia and other literacy learning disabilities.

SUPPORT FOR HIGHLY MOBILE STUDENT POPULATIONS - Free State PTA supports:

- Allowing school districts to tailor their language instructional programs to meet local needs.
- Programs that assist school districts in ensuring that limited English-speaking students meet the same academic standards as all Maryland students.
- Providing integration services that help meet the needs of immigrant and refugee families in order to foster healthy communities, sustain families and educate children.
- Implementing policies to ensure all people are free of discrimination and have access to equal community resources.
- Mental health and educational support to welcome highly mobile students.
- Resources for military families and their unique needs
- Wrap around services for the student and family homeless population.

IMPROVE QUALITY AND ENSURE EQUITABLE PUBLIC EDUCATION - Free State PTA supports:

- Programs that ensure high quality educational services to children from early childhood through high school graduation, ensuring college and career opportunities that ready people for success in life within a global economy.
- Activities that include parents and classroom teachers in planning and evaluating the implementation of rigorous curricula and its outcomes at the local level.
- Providing communication to families in multiple formats and multiple languages.
- Homework practices that are fully integrated with lessons and learning allowing for student’s appropriate time commitment, provide appropriate opportunity for family engagement and homework that is correctly sequenced with grading and testing.
- Establishment of universal voluntary early childhood (Pre-K) education
- Establishing appropriate virtual learning plans and programs to be executed as need occurs
- Implementing Inclusive curriculum

EFFECTIVE AND COMPASSIONATE JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM - Free State PTA supports:

- Specialized training for law enforcement who interact with minors and youth.
- Protecting the rights of minors by affording them parental or guardian involvement when being pursued by authorities in the investigation of a crime.
- Protecting the identities of minors unless they are convicted as an adult for a crime.
- Compassionate youth justice by advocating for practices that are equitable within the justice system and considers the mental development of youth.

TESTING - Free State PTA supports: Using assessments by the state, educators and parents to improve instruction and student achievement.

- No single test should be considered the sole determinant of a student's high school graduation, college or career future.
- Using assessments and standardized testing to improve instruction and student achievement, maximizing classroom instruction and minimizing instructional interruptions.
- Discouraging standardized multiple-choice tests and from being used when evaluating preschool children.
- Assignments should be made with reasonable, fair, and sufficient time allocation. Objectives should be clearly communicated with students and parents and all necessary materials or sources provided. Sections of resource and study materials should be linked clearly to each individual assessment.
- Articulating to parents the assessment and accountability system in place at their child's school. Parents must be notified through multiple communication efforts of required assessments, their purpose, when they will occur, and when results will be available. Additionally, families shall be notified on how educators will use assessment data and how parents can use the information to support their child's academic growth and achievement
- Effective assessments should be:
 - aligned with fair and adequate pre-assessment reviews
 - pre and post assessment feedback should be timely and well defined
 - Study guides and solutions should be provided so that students have opportunity for practice and rehearse the work so it is fully learned. They should be provided timely and prior to assessments that affect performance evaluations and grading to allow for sufficient time for practice before evaluations.
 - Providing the opportunity for students to re-learn any areas in which they need improvement.
- Correlating state and classroom assessments to curriculum and homework assignments in the classroom.

BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS AND INTERVENTIONS - Free State PTA supports:

- The development of recommendations for reinforcing student attendance, and setting positive expectations for student behaviors, including the use of school wide behavioral evidence-based programs.
- Phasing-out zero-tolerance policies and out-of-school suspensions because these often contribute to achievement gaps.
- Dropout prevention programs that address the diverse needs of students at risk of leaving school without a diploma.
- Evidence-based truancy programs that provide interventions which are non-punitive, support effective family counseling, and provide community-based solutions.
- Developing a uniform school behavior and discipline code based on evidence-based restorative justice practices and trauma informed training to all school staff.

SAFE SCHOOLS AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION - Free State PTA supports:

- Training teachers, students, families and staff regarding school safety and violence prevention, how to notice the signs and report them.
- Recommended staff to student ratios of social workers, psychologists, counselors, therapists, and other mental health professionals that provide support to children, families, and communities in order to prevent violence.
- Common sense proposals to limit youth access to firearms, fix background checks, and implement gun violence research efforts.
- Placing cameras and/or monitoring systems in school buildings in order to assist with monitoring the safety of schools.
- Evidence-based anti-bullying measures that include restorative justice practices, social and emotional learning curriculum, and conflict management programs.
- Empowering parents as well as families to protect their children and minimize inconveniences to a bullied child.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND CHILD NUTRITION - Free State PTA supports:

- Providing school meals with adequate nutrition and fresh, local foods.
- Ensuring children receive nutritional support they need with compassion and dignity, regardless of the ability to pay for school meals.
- Providing adequate time and facilities for handwashing prior to and after lunch.
- Signs and education on hand washing stations “do not drink”
- Providing safe clean drinking water, including filtered water bottle filling stations in all schools and in classrooms that have drinking water stations.
- Educating children about the hazards of vaping.
- Educating parents, students, administrators, teachers and community members about the dangers of consuming alcoholic and non-alcoholic energy drinks.
- Providing a layered approach to airborne diseases, including testing, masking, social distancing, improved ventilation and providing opportunities for vaccination. Mitigation should include the goal of keeping children in classrooms safely.
- Reducing exposures to respiratory irritants and allergens.

Mental Health

- Increased access to mental health services through a navigator system.
- The use of social workers and other mental health professionals in schools in order to provide support to staff and students.
- Implementing evidence based mental health supports for LGBTQ+ youth who are at a higher risk of negative mental health outcomes.

SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE - Free State PTA supports:

- Maintaining or modernizing HVAC systems so that the school environment is properly cooled, heated, kept mold free, and offers mitigation from airborne diseases. Publicly releasing data on HVAC capabilities and performance.
- Reducing exposure to known harmful substances, including lead and PFAS, in home, play, and school environments by testing and remediating in paints, plumbing, drinking water, athletic fields, and play surfaces.
- Implementing shaded outside areas and reducing heat stroke risk by using more natural surfaces as we experience climate change.
- Evaluating and prioritizing safe routes to schools for any road or pedestrian improvements, collaborating with other agencies.
- Eliminating or reducing the use of portable structures and limitations on the duration of their use when they are a necessary interim solution.
- Maintaining adequate, safe, and up-to-date school buildings and grounds regardless of the age of the building.

Environmental Sustainability

- Migrating to electric buses.
- Using renewable energy sources and electrifying schools in order to move to a net zero model.
- Promotion of the Green Schools program.
- Reducing plastic use and promoting healthy environments by using natural playing surfaces, natural grass fields and installing filtered water bottle filling stations.
- Recycling should be promoted in all areas of the school to include recycling of office, classroom, and dining materials.
- Composting programs in schools and developing compost facilities throughout the state.

SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS AND STAFF - Free State PTA supports:

- In-service and pre-service teacher education programs that include elements of effective parent involvement, diversity, and cultural proficiency.
- The use of teacher performance evaluations only when they are accompanied by strong programs of teacher training and improvement that are developed with the consent of professional associations of teachers and school administrators.
- Programs that prepare professional educators to teach a diverse student population of varying ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English language facility, and giftedness, and inclusion of students with special needs in regular classrooms to the maximum extent possible.
- Professional development days as well as teacher preparation and staff development programs.
- Resources to reduce illness, including the availability of tests, access to increased ventilation and filtration in their classrooms and adequate personal protective equipment.
- Dedicated staffing to support learning recovery
- Enhanced mental health services for staff.
- Implementing teacher as well as school employee exit surveys to evaluate schools, school climate and teacher satisfaction in order to improve retention.

- Collaborating with local universities and community colleges in order to address the substitute teacher shortage and to provide enhancement that address learning gaps and recovery.
- Expanding the Maryland teacher career and technical educational program coupled with tuition assistance.



National PTA will work with the 117th Congress, the U.S. Department of Education and the Biden/Harris Administration to ensure that every child has access to a fair and equitable education.

Parents and families have always played an important role in education. However, far too often when policy is considered and legislation is crafted, family engagement is seen as an afterthought or a “check the box” exercise.

National PTA calls on Congress and the Administration to prioritize family engagement at the outset of all policy discussions and to meaningfully embed family engagement throughout education policy.

National PTA **PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES** for the 117th Congress

PTA Calls on Congress and the Administration to Meaningfully Incorporate Policies that Promote Safe, Supportive and Inclusive Practices in Schools for All Students.

PTA firmly believes that all students—including students from historically marginalized populations—have the right to a quality, equitable education in a safe, supportive and inclusive school. PTA believes that the education system should engage in rigorous self-examination to identify and eliminate practices and policies which are systemically racist. PTA supports policies and legislation that ensure equity for every student, are grounded in social justice and support the whole child and family.

Policies and legislation must:

- ✓ Support every student’s mental health and provide and connect students with necessary behavioral and mental health resources at school and in their community.
- ✓ Encourage schools to use positive behavioral interventions and supports that are effective, fair and consistently implemented. Such practices may include restorative justice and trauma-informed care.
- ✓ Promote social emotional learning, including resources for families to support this critical practice at home.

PTA Calls on Congress and the Administration to Increase Federal Investment in Public Education.

The long-term success of our nation depends on quality federal investments in our education system. PTA has long advocated to ensure children have access to adequately-funded public schools that improve their overall well-being and allow students to reach their fullest potential. The federal

government plays a critical role in ensuring a high-quality public education for every student through meaningful investments which support states, districts and schools.

Policies and legislation must:

- ✓ Ensure that schools have adequate funding during the COVID-19 pandemic to address a myriad of immediate and pressing needs.
- ✓ Increase funding for the Statewide Family Engagement Centers (SFECs) by 50%.
- ✓ Fully fund the promised 40% of the extra cost for services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- ✓ Increase funding for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) including tripling funding for Title I and funding Title IV-A, the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), at its authorized level of \$1.6 billion.

PTA Calls on Congress and the Administration to Invest in School Infrastructure.

There are over 130,000 public K-12 school facilities serving our nation’s teachers and children across the country. PTA believes that every student—regardless of their family income—must have access to a safe, welcoming and high-quality public school. Given state budget shortfalls and the need for economic recovery, now is the time for the federal government to invest in school infrastructure.

Policies and legislation must:

- ✓ Address health hazards including poor air quality, substandard heating and cooling equipment, unsafe drinking water supply and lead contamination.



National PTA PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES for the 117th Congress



- ✓ Enhance digital infrastructure to ensure equity.
- ✓ Redesign schools to meet community needs such as school-based health clinics, after school and summer learning opportunities, and career technical education facilities for children and adults.
- ✓ Modernize schools, including making them green, so their energy consumption and carbon footprints are reduced.

PTA Calls on Congress to Address the Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act.

Healthy children learn better and are more productive—both in and out of the classroom. Strong nutritional standards in our nation’s schools are essential to combating the concerning obesity rates among children. Providing our nation’s youth with healthy food options and nutrition education is key to their long-term health and success.

Policies and legislation must:

- ✓ Boost child health by including robust school meal requirements on milk, whole grains, fruits and vegetables, calorie limits, and limits on sugar and sodium.
- ✓ Require schools to make nutrition information more readily available and enhance opportunities for parents to participate in the development of local school wellness policies.
- ✓ Ensure all students have access to school meal programs.
- ✓ Deliver technical assistance and resources to schools that are not meeting the nutrition standards.
- ✓ Establish guidelines to provide adequate time during the school day for students to eat and to recreate.

PTA Calls on Congress to Support Sensible Solutions to Gun Violence.

No parent should have to fear for the safety of their child every time they leave home. Unfortunately, far too often, lives are lost or changed forever due to gun violence. PTA calls on Congress and the Administration to immediately address the many factors that contribute to the rampant gun violence in the United States.

Policies and legislation must:

- ✓ Fund research on the causes and effects of gun violence on youth and communities, as well as evidence-based strategies to reduce gun violence.
- ✓ Establish education programs to teach students, parents and community members about gun safety and violence prevention.
- ✓ Require a waiting period and a comprehensive background check for all individuals prior to purchasing a firearm.
- ✓ Restrict internet gun sales, including kits that can be used to make and modify guns.
- ✓ Ban access to military-style semi-automatic assault weapons.



For additional information on National PTA's Public Policy Agenda, visit [PTA.org/PolicyAgenda](https://www.pta.org/PolicyAgenda) or contact the Government Affairs staff at GovtAffairs@PTA.org.

About National PTA

National PTA® comprises millions of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and the promotion of family engagement in schools. PTA is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit association that prides itself on being a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families and communities, and a strong advocate for public education. Membership in PTA is open to anyone who wants to be involved and make a difference for the education, health and welfare of children and youth. For more information, visit [PTA.org](https://www.pta.org).