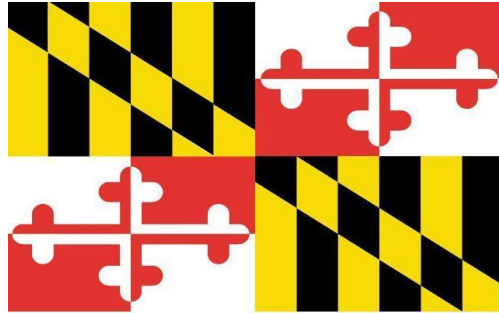


# Free State PTA<sup>®</sup>

*everychild.one voice.*<sup>®</sup>



## 2024 Legislative Agenda

### A Note from the Free State PTA President Gerrod Tyler

In the heart of our vibrant and diverse community, Free State PTA, Maryland's state-wide PTA, stands as a dedicated advocate for the welfare and well-being of our children and their education. The Free State PTA Legislative Agenda is a powerful and purpose-driven commitment to championing the interests of our students, parents, and educators, as we strive to create an environment where every child's potential is a reality. With a rich history of advocating for education, Free State PTA is thrilled to present a comprehensive and forward-thinking legislative agenda that seeks to address the critical issues facing our educational system.

This agenda reflects the culmination of extensive collaboration and thoughtful deliberation among our members, parents, teachers, and community stakeholders. It serves as a roadmap for the coming year, outlining our priorities, initiatives, and the actions we believe will bring about positive change in our schools and communities.

The Free State PTA Legislative Agenda is not just a set of goals; it is a collective vision for the future of education in our state. We are determined to work alongside policymakers, school administrators, and community leaders to turn these priorities into reality. Together, we can make a lasting impact on the lives of our children, empowering them to become successful, engaged citizens of tomorrow. We invite all stakeholders to join us in this important journey towards a brighter and more equitable educational future for all.



## **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 2024 Legislative Session**

- Employ mental health support and safety for school communities.
- Ensure equitable support for students and families.
- Support for children with special needs, including complying with the American Disabilities Act.
- Focus on Parent and Student Engagement opportunities for advocacy at the local, state, and national levels.
- Support transparency and accountability for educational outcomes and funding for the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.
- Support adequate and equitable allocation of funding for school construction and maintenance.
- Implement curricula and programs with fidelity that prepare students for college and careers.

## **Free State PTA Legislative Agenda**

### **PARENT, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT - 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 more funds dedicated to building renovations or replacing old buildings.
- Evaluation of schools for ADA compliance.

#### **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.
- Funding for ADA projects at 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 ensure that Emergent Multilingual Learners have the same academic opportunities 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 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.
- 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.
- Establishing universal voluntary early childhood (Pre-K) education.
- Establishing appropriate virtual learning plans and programs to be executed as need occurs.
- Implementing Inclusive curriculum.
- Providing and encouraging evidence based literacy and math instruction and strategies.

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

- Specialized training for law enforcement and security personnel 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.
  - timely and well defined.
  - supported by study guides and solutions so that students have ample opportunity for practice so that the material is fully learned. There should be opportunities 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, including adequate support systems for struggling students. (parents)

**SAFE SCHOOLS AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION - Free State PTA supports:**

- Training teachers, students, families and staff regarding school safety and violence prevention and 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.
- Distributing information to parents about Maryland's firearm storage law (Jaelynn's law)
- 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 evidence-based 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, including universal meals.
- Providing adequate time and facilities for handwashing prior to and after lunch.
- Providing "do not drink" signs and education on non-potable hand washing stations
- Providing safe clean drinking water, including filtered water bottle filling stations in all schools and in classrooms that have drinking water stations.
- Educating parents, students, administrators, teachers and community members about the hazards of vaping.
- Providing access to life saving devices in schools and instruction to use them properly
- 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.
- Following the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendation of starting school no earlier than 8:30 am.

**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.
- Making playgrounds ADA accessible.

#### **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.
- Implementing food recovery in schools by sharing food surplus

### **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 for instructional support.
- Enhanced mental health services for staff.
- Implementing teacher as well as school employee exit surveys to evaluate schools, school climate and teacher satisfaction.

- Collaborating with local universities and community colleges in order to address the substitute teacher shortage and to provide enhancement that address learning gaps
- Expanding the Maryland teacher career and technical educational program coupled with tuition assistance.
- Paying competitive salaries and wages for support staff.

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