
January 29, 2007

PTA ADVOCACY WEEK

February 19-23, 2007

PTA members nationwide are setting aside time during the week of February 19, 2007 to advocate for children. Advocacy lies at the heart of the PTA mission. By communicating our concerns to the people responsible for making decisions, setting policy, and passing laws, we play a role in improving the lives of children and families.

While this session of the Iowa Legislature is only a few weeks old, many bills have already been introduced. Some of them are listed in this update. As the session progresses, we will continue to provide information on children's issues that are being discussed and debated.

PTA Advocacy Week would be an excellent time to contact your legislators about an issue of concern to you. How can lawmakers know your family's needs and priorities unless YOU tell them? It's quick and easy to do and requires little or no money to send an email, mail a postcard, or make a phone call. If you want to make a really BIG impression, visit with your legislator face-to-face, either at the capitol or when he/she is at home attending a public forum or town meeting. It's always best to establish a relationship with your legislators and nothing beats a little personal contact for building a relationship!

PTA Advocacy Week is also a great time to address local issues with your principal, superintendent or your local school board. According to National PTA, "Working with your local PTA to address your concerns can help bring credibility to the issue, as well as build support for your cause. It is very likely that other parents share the same concern, and they may have valuable insight or experience to share."

On the federal level, the new Congress is already addressing a large number of bills. For information on important legislation at the national level, go to: <http://capwiz.com/npta2/issues/?search.x=14&search.y=12>

CONTACTING LAWMAKERS

WRITING TO YOUR LEGISLATORS

During the legislative session, address mail to Iowa Legislators at:

The Honorable (full name of legislator)
Iowa House of Representatives (or Iowa Senate)
State Capitol
Des Moines, IA 50319

Use the correct salutation:

Dear Representative (last name),
Or
Dear Senator (last name),

CALLING YOUR LEGISLATORS

Leave a message for your Representative in the House by calling (515) 281-3221

Leave a message for your Senator by calling (515) 281-3371

E-MAILING YOUR LEGISLATORS

You MUST include your home address in your email, so they know you are a constituent!

Email addresses are created as follows:

firstname.lastname@legis.state.ia.us

DON'T KNOW WHO YOUR LEGISLATORS ARE?

Go to: <http://www.legis.state.ia.us/FindLeg/>

TIPS ON COMMUNICATING WITH LAWMAKERS:

http://www.iowapta.org/pdf/legislative/Advocating_to_Lawmakers.pdf

To get a FREE advocacy workshop for your PTA, contact the Iowa PTA office:

ia_office@pta.org
(515) 225-4197
(800) 475-4782

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

This bill, introduced in the House (HF119), would require school districts to adopt a parent involvement policy and publish that policy in the student handbook or on a website. The parent involvement requirements are based on decades of research and coincide with the definition of parent involvement in the federal program, Title I. However, that policy is only required for parents of students in a program funded by Title I. This bill would expand the policy to involve parents and guardians of all students in all schools.

The parent involvement policy in HF119 is based on National PTA's National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs and Iowa PTA supports this legislation.

Read this bill at: <http://coolice.legis.state.ia.us/Cool-ICE/default.asp?Category=BillInfo&Service=Billbook&ga=82&menu=text&hbill=HF119>

NUTRITIOUS SCHOOL FOODS

Two bills relating to nutritious foods in schools have been introduced in the Senate.

One bill (SF56) addresses guidelines for nutritionally adequate meals served by school districts. The state board of education would be required to adopt rules and to set a goal to have 80 percent of each school district's meals comprised of Iowa-based products within five years. The bill also directs the department of education to create a model of a low-carbohydrate nutrition plan for healthy children. To read this bill, go to: <http://coolice.legis.state.ia.us/Cool-ICE/default.asp?Category=BillInfo&Service=Billbook&ga=82&menu=text&hbill=SF56>

Another bill (SF46) directs school districts to adopt rules that ban the sale of unhealthy food items in middle schools and high schools. The Department of Education would be required to assist school districts in this effort by establishing guidelines for minimum nutritional standards. To read this bill, go to: <http://coolice.legis.state.ia.us/Cool-ICE/default.asp?Category=BillInfo&Service=Billbook&ga=82&menu=text&hbill=SF46>

Iowa PTA supports legislation, programs, and policies at the local, state and national levels that improve the nutrition of foods available to students during the school day. Iowa PTA serves on Iowa's Healthy Children Task Force that was created in a bill passed during last year's legislative session.

AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

Iowa PTA supports the recommendations of the Iowa Afterschool Alliance regarding afterschool programs, which states:

Ranked first in the nation in the percentage of families with both parents (or the only parent in the home) in the workforce, Iowa's parents shoulder a significant burden in ensuring their children are safe and supervised before and after school and during summer and school breaks. Nationally, parents pay an average of 44 percent of the costs of afterschool programs for their children; Iowa parents pay about 66 percent of the costs of afterschool programs (Uncertain Times survey, 2006).

Nearly a quarter of spaces in afterschool programs are paid for by Child Care Assistance (CCA) funds through the Department of Human Services. Families who do not qualify for CCA and who cannot afford the cost of programs often make the grueling choice to have children and youth stay home alone before and/or afterschool and during school breaks.

A few federal programs like the 21st Century Community Learning Centers fund programs in communities for three to five years, but often communities cannot sustain these programs when the grants expire.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AFTERSCHOOL

1. Expand state funding for afterschool programs to meet the general demand for services with an appropriation of 4 million dollars from the healthy Iowans Tobacco Trust Fund.
2. Increase high school graduation rates and youth preparedness for college and the workforce by designating some funds specifically to support development of afterschool programs for older youth.
3. Study ways to expand the quality of afterschool programs in Iowa with a multi-disciplinary work group.
4. Leverage private dollars for afterschool network development.

For more information about the Iowa Afterschool Alliance and these recommendations, visit: www.iowaafterschoolalliance.org

Information about bills related to afterschool programs will be sent to you as it becomes available.

ANTI-BULLYING

Anti-bullying bills have been introduced in the House (HSB12) and the Senate (SSB1048). The bills require school districts to have anti-bullying policies in place by September 1, 2007. The bill further requires that school districts provide training for staff, students and volunteers on bullying prevention. “Harassment” and “bullying” are defined as conduct toward a student based on any actual or perceived trait or characteristic. Such traits and characteristics include, but are not limited to: age, color, creed, national origin, race, religion, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical attributes, physical or mental ability or disability, ancestry, political party preference, socioeconomic status, or familial status.

Iowa PTA supports this legislation. Anti-bullying programs are most effective when they are “systemic” – meaning that everyone including the teachers, students, volunteers and every staff member understands the policy and is trained to react to bullying behavior swiftly and appropriately. The training requirements in this bill are an important aspect of ensuring safe schools for our children. Iowa PTA also supports the expansion of protected traits and characteristics to include all those listed in the paragraph above.

Read the Senate bill at:

<http://coolice.legis.state.ia.us/Cool-ICE/default.asp?Category=BillInfo&Service=Billbook&ga=82&menu=text&hbill=SSB1048>

and the House bill at:

<http://coolice.legis.state.ia.us/Cool-ICE/default.asp?Category=BillInfo&Service=Billbook&ga=82&menu=text&hbill=HSB12>

MYTHS ABOUT SAFE SCHOOLS

MYTH: These policies will expose schools and teachers to additional legal liability.

REALITY: Enacting this legislation will help protect school districts and teachers from potential liability by providing clear direction to educators and school staff about what types of conduct are prohibited and what steps they need to take when bullying and harassment occurs.

MYTH: No other states are adopting these policies.

REALITY: Eight states and the District of Columbia already have comprehensive statewide safe-school laws to protect students from bullying and harassment.

MYTHS ABOUT SAFE SCHOOLS (continued)

MYTH: We have no problem with bullying and harassment in Iowa schools.

REALITY: Bullying and harassment affects far too many students. According to the Iowa Youth Survey in 2002, 17 percent of students do not feel safe at school. That is over 80,000 students! Specifically, 61 percent of gay and lesbian students do not feel safe at school while 83 percent report being verbally harassed, 34 percent report being physically harassed, and nearly 20 percent report being physically assaulted (Iowa School Climate Survey by Iowa Pride Network, 2005).

MYTH: A policy will not end bullying and harassment.

REALITY: Policies are a first step at changing acceptable student behavior. All students would be put on notice that bullying and harassment are not acceptable in the school. Bullied and harassed students would have a specific grievance process. And, teachers and school staff would have policy support to stop bullying and harassment.

MYTH: We shouldn't carve out “special protections” for certain populations.

REALITY: All students should be protected from bullying and harassment. The inclusion of enumerated, protected classes is necessary to provide guidance to educators on specific groups that have been historically targeted for bullying and harassment and to make sure all students are covered. The specific language reads “trait or characteristic of the student, includes, but is not limited to...” to ensure ALL students are covered.

MYTH: Educators already have the necessary policies to protect students from harassment.

REALITY: School districts are not required to have anti-bullying policies, nor are they required to have comprehensive harassment policies needed to protect all students from harassment. Only 77 Iowa school districts—out of 365 total districts—explicitly protect LGBT students from bullying and harassment. This means that 80 percent of Iowa districts DO NOT protect LGBT students. This lack of clear policy creates an environment in which educators often fail to address bullying and harassment. Teachers should not be expected to enforce policies that do not exist.

MYTH: Iowa is a local control state. We cannot dictate policy to local school boards.

REALITY: The Iowa Legislature already dictates statewide guidelines and policies for local districts to follow. Our state should be able to set a minimum guideline on protecting students from bullying and harassment. Defending a policy where certain students are bullied and harassed contradicts Iowa's commitment to quality education for all.

OTHER ISSUES

Watch future legislative updates for information on other children's issues being discussed in the legislature, such as:

FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS – Iowa PTA supports legislation to provide adequate funding for schools in areas such as allowable growth, teacher pay, professional development, school buildings, technology, quality preschools and support for guidance counselors and media specialists.

CIGARETTE TAX – Iowa PTA supports legislation to increase the cigarette tax because of reported evidence that the increased cost of tobacco products contributes to the reduced use of these products by our youth. To read a current bill, go to: <http://coolice.legis.state.ia.us/Cool-ICE/default.asp?Category=BillInfo&Service=Billbook&ga=82&menu=text&hbill=SSB1055>

SEAT BELT LAWS – Iowa PTA supports laws that require children and youth to wear seat belts until age 18. To read a current bill, go to: <http://coolice.legis.state.ia.us/Cool-ICE/default.asp?Category=BillInfo&Service=Billbook&ga=82&menu=text&hbill=SF34>

RELIGIOUS EXEMPTION TO FELONY CHILD ENDANGERMENT AND MANSLAUGHTER

Iowa PTA supports legislation that would repeal the religious exemption for parents who willfully deprive seriously ill children of medical care. This defense allows parents with religious objections to medical care to deprive children of care regardless of how treatable the child's illness is or the consequences to the child. Iowa is one of only three states in the nation with a religious defense to manslaughter. To read a current bill, go to: <http://coolice.legis.state.ia.us/Cool-ICE/default.asp?Category=BillInfo&Service=Billbook&ga=82&menu=text&hbill=SF35>

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE IN SCHOOLS

This bill requires the pledge of allegiance to be recited at the beginning of each school day. A student who prefers not to recite the pledge is required to maintain a respectful silence. Iowa PTA does not have a position on this legislation, but believes it may be of interest to parents. To read this bill, go to: <http://coolice.legis.state.ia.us/Cool-ICE/default.asp?Category=BillInfo&Service=Billbook&ga=82&menu=text&hbill=HF127>

Thanks to everyone who participated in Iowa PTA's issue survey earlier this month. Results will be available on Iowa PTA's website very soon.

**THANK YOU FOR BEING AN ADVOCATE
FOR CHILDREN!**

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