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Legislative News

February 27, 2006

PARENT INVOLVEMENT POLICY BILL

The Parent Involvement Policy bill began as a study bill (HF523), went through committee and was re-assigned as a regular bill, HF2239. HF2239 also went through the Education Committee and is now in the House. Debate has been delayed because four amendments have been proposed which means debate could be lengthy. The bill requires that school boards adopt a parent and guardian involvement policy that, at minimum, does all of the following:

1. Ensures that communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful
2. Promotes and supports parenting skills
3. Recognizes and supports the integral role parents and guardians play in assisting student learning
4. Welcomes parents and guardians in school and seeks their support and assistance
5. Makes parent and guardians full partners in the decisions that affect children and families
6. Utilizes community collaborations productively and community resources prolifically to strengthen schools, families, and student learning

The proposed legislation further requires that the policy adopted shall be published in the student handbook and on the school district's website, if it has one.

Amendments have been proposed to item 5 that would change "full partners" to "partners" or "full participants" or "participants." Another amendment deletes the requirement that the policy be published in the handbook and requires instead that it "be made available to parents." IOWA PTA PREFERS THE ORIGINAL BILL LANGUAGE.

When the bill passes the House it will be sent to the Senate Education Committee for consideration.

PLEASE CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATORS AND ASK THEM TO SUPPORT THIS IMPORTANT LEGISLATION!

FUNDING FOR EDUCATION

Allowable growth refers to the increase in the cost per student that is set by the legislature each year. It is based on a formula that includes state money and local property taxes. Funds are distributed to school districts based on the number of students they have enrolled.

Iowa schools are struggling!

1981-82 Iowa ranked 17th in the nation in per pupil spending.

1991-92 Iowa ranked in the middle

2001-02 Iowa had slipped to 30th

2004-05 Iowa now ranks 37th

Iowa's teacher pay ranking is now 42nd in the nation (AFT 2005) or 41st (NEA 2005) (data is from Iowa Association of School Boards, American Legislative Exchange Council and the Institute for Tomorrow's Workforce)

For more information, visit www.myiowaschools.org

Student fees have increased and students are being asked to provide more and more supplies for schools:
Reams of copy/printer paper
Hand sanitizers and soap
Kleenex and paper towels
... and the list goes on.

It is critical that the legislature increases funding for schools and ALSO fairly distributes the property tax burden across the state. The House passed an allowable growth rate of 4%. The Senate is still considering its recommendation. IOWA PTA SUPPORTS AT LEAST 6 PERCENT ALLOWABLE GROWTH.

Parents are critical in helping legislators understand how this funding situation is affecting our children. PLEASE CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATORS AND ASK THEM TO SUPPORT 6 PERCENT ALLOWABLE GROWTH – DO IT FOR THE CHILDREN!

BEFORE- AND AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Iowa is first in the nation in the number of families with both parents, or the only parent, working. Iowa PTA has joined with other organizations to support quality and affordable before- and after-school programs to help keep our children safe. After-school programs also offer recreational opportunities to keep children healthy and provide academic assistance and enrichment. Most programs in Iowa have been funded through 21st Century Schools and Communities, a federal program. Unfortunately, this funding is drying up. Iowa Community Education Association and the Iowa Afterschool Alliance sponsored a legislative breakfast in February to talk with legislators about the importance of before- and after-school programs. The weather was uncooperative, but the event was well attended nevertheless. The legislature has NOT acted on a bill that would provide grants to school districts for before- and after-school programs. The grant money could be used as matching funds to obtain additional grants from outside sources.

IOWA PTA URGES THE LEGISLATURE TO ASSIST COMMUNITIES IN FUNDING QUALITY, AFFORDABLE BEFORE- AND AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS.

HEALTHY CHILDREN TASK FORCE

The legislature is considering a bill requiring that the Department of Education and the Department of Public Health convene a Healthy Children Task Force to assess current policies and laws affecting the health of children including physical activity, physical education, food and nutrition, and nutrition education. The task force would develop recommendations and issue a report.

IOWA PTA SUPPORTS LEGISLATION TO FORM THE HEALTHY CHILDREN TASK FORCE.

FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES PILOT PROGRAM

Some Iowa schools have participated in a federally-funded program to provide children with fresh fruits and vegetables. Continued funding for this program is uncertain. A bill (HF2061) has been introduced that would establish a pilot program through the Iowa Department of Education. The bill is still in the House Education Subcommittee and must exit the committee before March 3 in order to be considered this year.

IOWA PTA SUPPORTS THE FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES PILOT PROGRAM.

KEG REGISTRATION

Too often underage drinking results in driving deaths and injuries. Beer kegs encourage binge drinking by providing a lot of alcohol to a large number of kids for a very low cost. Consequently, beer kegs are a popular source of alcohol at teen parties. Thirty-four states have laws that require a keg of beer with two gallons or more capacity to have an identification number affixed to the keg. The seller records the purchaser's social security number or driver's license number. In that way, the keg can be tracked to hold the purchaser responsible if the keg is found at a party where there are underage drinkers. The legislature is considering bills that would require kegs to be registered. There is also legislation to expand the criminal code and civil liability for adults who knowingly provide alcohol to minors or permit consumption by minors.

IOWA PTA SUPPORTS KEG REGISTRATION AND OTHER MEASURES TO REDUCE UNDER-AGE DRINKING.

IOWA SAFE SURFACING INITIATIVE (ISSI)

ISSI is a state-funded program that offsets the costs of new, safe playgrounds around the state. Safety tiles reduce serious injuries in children by 55%, according to a study funded by the State of Iowa. For the last three years, ISSI has received \$500,000 from the Iowa Legislature, and with that, they have helped resurface approximately 50 playgrounds. ISSI is requesting renewed funding as a part of the Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Fund (the RIIF Appropriations Bill). For more information about safety tiles, visit the National Safe Surfacing Initiative website at www.nssi-usa.com

IOWA PTA SUPPORTS FUNDING FOR THE IOWA SAFE SURFACING INITIATIVE.

EXEMPTION FROM HEALTH CARE

Iowa law currently provides parents with a religious defense to felony child endangerment and manslaughter. Iowa is one of only three states with a religious defense to manslaughter when a child is kept from medical treatment. A bill (HF368) in the legislature would give parents the duty to get necessary health care for their children. This bill does NOT affect Iowa's religious exemption from immunizations. HF368 has been assigned to the House Judiciary Committee and must exit the committee before March 3 in order to be considered this year.

IOWA PTA SUPPORTS REMOVING THE RELIGIOUS EXEMPTION FROM HEALTH CARE.

PTA – ADVOCATING FOR CHILDREN FOR 109 YEARS!

PTA's legislative work stems from the 3rd purpose of the PTA: "To secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children and youth." PTA is a nonpartisan organization dealing with issues, not political endorsements. As the largest volunteer child advocacy association in the nation, Iowa PTA and National PTA remind our state and country of its obligations to children and provide parents and families with a powerful voice to speak on behalf of every child.

Personal visits are the most effective way to communicate with lawmakers. Conversations may take place at the capitol, or when legislators are back at home on weekends or between legislative sessions.

Letters and postcards are an easy and effective way of communicating with legislators. Letters should express an opinion in the writer's own words. Avoid form letters; instead modify sample letters or talking points so that you communicate your message in your way. When writing, always include your return address so they know you are a constituent. Handwritten letters or postcards are great – they are personal and it is obvious that they are not form letters.

Use the correct address and salutation (i.e., Dear Senator name, or Dear Representative name, or Dear Governor name). Stick to one issue per letter or group similar issues such as those dealing with child safety, or those dealing with education funding.

Phone calls and e-mails are effective, especially when timing is critical and the lawmaker's support or vote is needed immediately. Some legislators do NOT like email, so it is best to ask them what method of communication they prefer. When using e-mail be sure to include your mailing address in the email, so they know you are a constituent. In fact, it is advisable to state in the SUBJECT LINE of the email that it is being sent by a constituent. When phoning, it is also important to mention that you are from the legislator's district.

Whatever method you use, be sure to thank the legislator for their time and consideration.

National PTA Legislative Information –

- To receive National PTA's weekly e-newsletter, "This Week in Washington", go to: capwiz.com/npta2/mlm/signup
- For information on National PTA issues, go to: http://www.pta.org/ia_issues.html

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),

Between legislative sessions, send mail to the legislator's home address.

To find the mailing address of your representative, go to:

<http://www3.legis.state.ia.us/ga/legislators.do?ch=h>
and click on your representative's name.

To find the mailing address of your senator, go to:

<http://www3.legis.state.ia.us/ga/legislators.do?ch=s>
and click on your senator's 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

Most state legislators are very responsive to e-mail messages which makes this a very simple and effective method for communicating with 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/>

FOR TIPS ON COMMUNICATING WITH LAWMAKERS, VISIT:

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

Thank you for being an advocate for children!

Iowa PTA Legislative Information –

- To subscribe to Iowa PTA "Legislative News", go to: www.iowapta.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=legislative.network
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