

Legislative News

April 2, 2007

LEGISLATIVE “FUNNEL” APPROACHING

April 6 marks the second “funnel date” in the Iowa legislature. It is the final date for Senate bills to be reported out of House committees and House bills out of Senate committees. Some bills of interest to PTA members have already been signed into law while others are still being considered by lawmakers. Contact your legislators and let them know how you feel about these issues.

LEAD TESTING FOR CHILDREN

Lead poisoning is an issue that has been of concern to Iowa PTA for decades. Our current position, adopted in 1992, calls for legislation that establishes and funds programs to test children for the presence of lead in their blood, guides them to treatment if necessary, and performs follow-up inspections of their homes and/or school to identify and eliminate the source of the lead.

The effects of lead poisoning include mental retardation, hearing loss, disorientation, lack of physical balance, behavioral disorders and even death. Testing assists health officials in determining the source of lead contamination and ensures the safety of children currently living in the home and any who may occupy that same home in the future.

A bill, HF158, currently in the legislature would require children to receive a blood test by age six or prior to enrollment in an elementary school. HF158 passed the House and is now in the Senate Human Resources Committee. The current wording allows parents to refuse testing for religious reasons. Iowa PTA supports a compromise amendment that would replace the blood test with a questionnaire that parents or guardians would fill out if they claim the religious exemption. The questionnaire would assist in determining the child’s risk for lead poisoning.

View HF158 at: <http://coolice.legis.state.ia.us/Cool-ICE/default.asp?category=billinfo&Service=Billbook&ga=82&hbill=HF158>

AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

Funding for afterschool programs is still being considered by legislators. Supporters of afterschool programs are currently advocating for \$4 million from the Healthy Iowa Tobacco Trust (HITT) fund.

Please contact your legislators today and urge them to support the proposal for \$4 million in funding for afterschool programs. It is especially important that legislators hear from families that afterschool programs are necessary.

For more information and facts about afterschool programs, go to one or more of the following websites.

National PTA website –

http://www.pta.org/ia_pta_positions_1118176174312.html

Afterschool Alliance website –

www.afterschoolalliance.org
www.afterschoolalliance.org/states/states_facts.cfm?state_abbr=IA

Iowa Afterschool Alliance website –

<http://www.iowaafterschoolalliance.org/>

U.S. Dept. of Education website –

www.ed.gov/pubs/SafeandSmart/intro.html

Welfare Information Network article –

www.financeprojectinfo.org/Publications/afterschoolprogramRN.html

Additional information can be found at:

Harvard Family Research Project –

www.gse.harvard.edu/~hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html

The Finance Project –

www.financeprojectinfo.org/ost/

ANTI-BULLYING

Iowa PTA is pleased to report that the anti-bullying bill was passed by the legislature and has been signed by the governor. This legislation requires school districts to have anti-bullying policies and implement training for staff, students and volunteers on bullying prevention. It also requires that a copy of the policy be made available to all school employees, volunteers, students, and parents or guardians. PTAs can help by assisting the school in its efforts to make parents and guardians aware of the policy. Your PTA may want to plan a program regarding the district's policy and the procedures for reporting and investigating incidences of bullying or harassment.

To view the bill, go to:

<http://coolice.legis.state.ia.us/Cool-ICE/default.asp?Category=billinfo&Service=Billbook&menu=false&hbill=SF61>

TOBACCO TAX INCREASE

An increase in the tobacco tax of one dollar per pack has been passed by the legislature and signed by the governor. Iowa's tobacco tax of \$1.36 per pack of cigarettes takes Iowa from having one of the lowest taxes in the country to 17th in the nation. The bill also included an increase for cigars and moist snuff. The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids estimates there will be a 19.3 percent reduction in youth smoking as a result of the tax hike. Iowa PTA supported the tobacco tax increase on that basis.

FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS

Early in the session, legislators approved 4 percent allowable growth for schools for the 2008-09 school year. Governor Culver signed the bill into law which increases the cost per pupil by \$213 to \$5,546. Iowa PTA continues to support 6 percent allowable growth and believes the current level falls short of providing adequate funding for our schools.

Bills to provide additional funding for schools, outside of allowable growth, are still being considered by the legislature. Some of the possibilities include funding for professional development for teachers, increased pay for teachers, funding for districts to offer pre-school for four-year-olds, and a statewide penny sales tax for school buildings.

Iowa PTA supports funding for public education commensurate with rising costs and the challenges facing public education in providing quality instructional programs for all its students, including public school preschool.

RAISING EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENTS

The Iowa Department of Education (DE) has developed a podcast and slide presentation that provides information about raising student achievement expectations. The presentation outlines the content standards Iowa has in place, related education standards, and how parents and educators can raise the expectations for Iowa students. The podcast and slide presentation may be found at on the website at the following locations:

<http://www.iowa.gov/educate/content/view/912/1085/>

<http://www.iowa.gov/educate/content/view/867/1031/>

<http://www.iowa.gov/educate/content/view/780/791/>

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

ADVOCACY GUIDELINES FOR PTAs:

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

National PTA Legislative Information –

- To receive National PTA's weekly e-newsletter, "This Week in Washington", go to: http://www.pta.org/issues_and_action.html
- To view previous issues of the weekly e-newsletter, go to: http://www.pta.org/ia_newsletters.html

Iowa PTA Legislative Information –

- To subscribe to Iowa PTA "Legislative News", go to: www.iowapta.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=legislative.network
 - To view previous issues of the e-newsletter, go to: www.iowapta.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=updates.main
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