

**Washington State PTA
PROPOSED LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY ISSUES
2007-08**

The following proposed priority issues have been submitted for consideration at the 2007 Washington State PTA Legislative Assembly. These proposed issues have been put forward by grassroots PTA members throughout the state, and are voted on by PTA legislative representatives at Legislative Assembly.

The Legislation Committee recommendations noted for each issue represents the opinion of the 2007/08 WSPTA Legislation Committee. A “**do pass**” recommendation refers to the Priority Issue Platform – it is the Committee’s opinion that the issue should be included on the 2007/08 platform. Likewise, a “**do not pass**” recommendation notes the Committee’s belief that the issue should not be included on the platform. It is the opinion of the Committee that all of the below listed issues deserve full discussion and consideration from the delegate body at the WSPTA 2007 Legislative Assembly.

Budget and Revenue Policies

Title: Simple Majority for School Bonds

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that allow the people to vote on simple majority for school bonds run in any election.

Rationale: PTA has supported a 50% plus one voting requirement for school bonds and levies for decades and is working diligently to secure passage of the simple majority amendment. However, the task is not complete as school districts are dependent on local bonds to secure funding for building construction and maintenance. Evidence of the difficulty in obtaining a supermajority approval for bonds is found in the current condition of schools, where overcrowding, poor maintenance, and inadequate technology infrastructure can negatively affect the success of our students.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: State Tax System

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that address the structural deficiencies of our state tax system.

Rationale: For many years research and studies have been conducted that result in the same findings: Washington’s tax system is regressive, unfair, and inadequate to meet the needs of residents. The result is that education, the paramount duty of the State, and the social services needs of children and families, are poorly funded due to the lack of adequate revenue. Support for reforms to the tax structure is required.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Parent and Family Involvement

Title: Family Education Leave

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that allow parents/guardians to access their vacation, paid personal, and/or paid time for personal illness, using the guidelines established under the Family Care Act of 2002, to attend school conferences, meetings, or events for their children. They could access this time when needed without disciplinary action, negative impact to their job performance or impacting their opportunities for other job assignments or advancements.

Rationale: Children who have a parent involved in their school do better academically. The partnership between parent and teacher is imperative to the student's success. Far too often, parents are unable to get the time off when needed to address the issues for the benefit of all involved. Having access to their vacation, paid ill time, or other paid leave time would allow the parent to meet with the teacher, counselor or administrator in a timely fashion as well as minimizing the financial impact to the family and avoiding potentially harmful disciplinary actions that could be taken by their employer. Far too many parents are left with the difficult choice between job AND child. Being able to meet the needs of the children by using their "paid time away from work" when the needs arise benefits the children, the family, the school, and the community.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

The following two issues deal with the release of student information and changes to the No Child Left Behind Act.

***Proviso:** Only one of the two issue proposals will move forward on the WSPTA legislative platform. The issue receiving the greatest number of votes will remain in the prioritized platform of the WSPTA and the issue receiving the least number of votes will be removed.*

Title: NCLB-Eliminate Section 9528 from NCLB

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that urge the U.S. Congress to amend the 2001 No Child Left Behind Bill when it considers renewal of the act in the fall of 2007, by eliminating Section 9528, which requires two things: 1) School districts must release to military recruiters the names, addresses and phone numbers of all high school students (unless they have "opted out" by proactively requesting that their names not be forwarded); and... 2) School districts must provide military recruiters access to secondary school students the same way they provide access for college recruiters.

Rationale: The No Child Left Behind Act has a provision that requires high schools to allow military recruiters equal access to students as other recruiters. It also requires high schools to provide student names, addresses and telephone numbers to military recruiters. The consequence for noncompliance is the loss of federal funding. Concerns have been raised about the lack of student and family knowledge of this provision.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO NOT PASS

Title: Release of Student Information

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that promote student privacy with regard to recruitment in schools: 1) endorse

Representative Honda's Student Privacy Protect Act; 2) encourage the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to provide educational materials to districts which would educate parents about their options with regard to the release of student information.

Rationale: Concerns about student privacy have been raised in the context of recruitment practices. National PTA has endorsed amending current federal law to provide for an "opt-in" policy where interested students and families can choose to request contact from recruiters.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Public Education Policies and Funding

Title: Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that provide identified funding for Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) honors programs

Rationale: In the past Washington State provided funding to support AP and IB honors programs. Several years ago that funding support was eliminated. Currently school districts must fund these programs, including the costs of curriculum, supplementary materials, and exams, from existing general funds, thereby shortchanging other programs and potentially diluting the honors curriculum. In order to meet the challenge of closing the achievement gap more students should have access to AP& IB honors programs. Staff members must be able to access professional development opportunities in order to become skillful in the teaching methods and thereby appropriately deliver the curriculum of these highly regarded honors programs. In addition, students need the financial support necessary to test in the programs, especially low-income students.

Legislation Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: Assessments for English Language Learners

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that would exempt English language learners from having their WASL scores count until they have successfully passed an English language proficiency assessment approved by the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Legislation should require school districts to prepare a plan to ensure these students are making adequate progress in learning the English language.

Rationale: For English language learners, the WASL is first and foremost a test of their proficiency in English. It is unfair to require students who have not attained a sufficient level of proficiency in English to take such a high-stakes test that is only administered in English. Successful completion of the WASL is currently a requirement for graduation and to receive a Certificate of Academic Achievement. Most districts have English language learners who do not have sufficient proficiency in English to master the complexities of the WASL. These students should be exempt from having their WASL count until they have passed a pre-determined English proficiency exam.

Legislation Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: Conditional Scholarships

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that provide consistent and sufficient funding for conditional college scholarships, which may be forgiven, in exchange for teaching service in Washington State's public K-12 schools. The scholarship shall lead to teacher certification with endorsements in one of the following areas: Special Education, Science, Mathematics, or Bilingual education.

Rationale: There is a significant shortage of qualified educators in several areas of certification, including Special Education, Science, Mathematics, and Bilingual education. Providing financial incentives for new educators or current educators seeking additional endorsements to pursue certification in these identified shortage areas could ease this problem. Two of these areas are or soon will be tested on the WASL. Special education populations continue to increase in our districts as do students requiring bilingual support as they transition to English. These two groups of students represent substantial achievement gaps across the state and a shortage of qualified teachers only contribute to this gap. Clearly, qualified educators teaching within their endorsement area or who are able to engage students using proven instructional strategies (such as are employed in special and bilingual education) will have a bigger impact on student learning and can help close the achievement gap for students.

Legislation Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: De-link WASL as Graduation Requirement

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that restore the WASL system to its original intent, satisfying requirements of both NCLB and Washington law (RCW 28A.655) by providing data that reports on the effectiveness of schools and districts – and specifically limits that authority, stating the goal is not to evaluate the student, but rather to evaluate the system being used to educate the student.

Rationale: The use of the WASL as a graduation requirement has raised many concerns both in students and families as well as in the education community. System concerns include the ability to meet the 2008 deadline, the low passage rates for certain minority populations, and the costs. Compounding those concerns are the technical difficulties that have accompanied the assessments.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO NOT PASS

Title: DREAM Act

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that call on Congress to enact the Development, Relief, and Education of Alien Minors Act and/or the Student Adjustment Act that allow immigrant students to begin the process of becoming legal citizens.

Rationale: Students who have successfully completed high school requirements but who lack legal documentation have been granted the ability to access in-state tuition in Washington State along with a number of other states. While access to in-state tuition has provided these resident students access to higher education, without adjustment of their actual immigration status they still will likely not be able to legally work in this country once they complete their education. These students represent a substantial asset for their communities, and it is in our best interest that once they successfully complete their education they be allowed to work in our communities.

Legislation Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: Foster Youth Supports

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that improve educational outcomes for foster youth by 1) providing incentive grants for schools that maintain a foster youth's enrollment continuity; 2) increasing the number of education advocates for foster youth; 3) improving recruitment; 4) addressing data-sharing issues.

Rationale: Only 30-35% of foster youth aging out of state care do so with a high school diploma or GED. Foster youth make up a portion of the school population in need of considerable attention in order to succeed. This is a very vulnerable population – high special education needs, high drop-out rates, highly transitory. Increased attention to the needs of this at-risk population will be beneficial.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: Funding Inequities

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that eliminate the inequities in education funding formulas to include but not be limited to teacher salaries, levy lids, and levy equalization.

Rationale: There are inherent funding inequities in the existing funding system. The state does not pay teachers the same across the state based on inequitable grandfathering rules. The levy lids are not determined using equity; they are grandfathered lids that were set 30 years ago. The PTA is a statewide organization that keeps kids at the front of the discussion. It is not in the best interest of kids to have some receive less funding than others when there is no logical reason for reduced funding. In those disadvantaged school districts, it makes it more difficult to recruit and keep teachers, and provide programs and services to the kids.

Legislation Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: Highly Capable Programs

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that fund highly capable programs at the 3% level of total district student enrollment as statutorily authorized and provide high quality professional development for teachers of highly capable students.

Rationale: The State is failing to maximize one of its most precious resources – the gifts, talents and high interests of many of its students. In a broad range of intellectual and artistic endeavors, these youngsters are not challenged to do their best work. This problem is especially severe among economically disadvantaged and minority students, who have access to fewer advanced educational opportunities and whose talents often go unnoticed. Without support for Highly Capable Education Programs, districts statewide cannot identify and serve children desperately in need of an educational program that allows them to continually improve their learning with consistent quality and appropriately trained teachers. Failure to provide support may put this cohort of students at risk academically, socially, and intellectually.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: K-12 Education Funding

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that establish an updated definition of basic education and a basic education funding formula that reflects current education practices and requirements. The redefinition and funding formula must fulfill the State's obligation to fully fund education as its paramount duty by providing ample opportunities for all students to achieve higher learning levels consistent with standards-based education reform. The funding system must ensure accountability by generating consistent and transparent accounting processes.

Rationale: Legislation was adopted during the 2007 session to review the basic education definition and the funding surrounding basic education. However, the review must result in reforms that provide full funding for basic education as required under the State's constitution. And, the reforms must recognize that the education system has changed and needs to continue to change for our students to meet the challenges of the future.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: Math and Science Education

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that strengthen science and math education in Washington State including but not limited to 1) enhanced pre-K through college education in mathematics and the sciences through a balanced instructional program to support students including but not limited to basic computational and procedural skills, algorithms, formulas and definitions, conceptual understanding, and problem solving; 2) advanced professional development and ongoing assistance for math and science teachers; 3) support of community involvement in the selection of math and science curricula; and 4) encouragement of family collaboration in teaching math and science.

Rationale: Math and science proficiency is important to meet the future needs of our economy and national security. It is important to have a balanced approach to meet the math and science needs of all students in our school system.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: Quality Teaching

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that support quality teaching through 1) enhanced professional development for teachers; 2) ample resources for the retention and recruitment of the most proficient teachers; 3) assistance and collaboration through family and community involvement; and 4) reasonable and respectful evaluation and support strategies for teachers.

Rationale: There is a direct relationship between the quality of the teacher and the success of students. Supporting quality teachers is an important undertaking and often quality teachers will leave the profession because of the lack of adequate compensation. Research also shows that professional development opportunities, adequate compensation, and mentoring or coaching programs for beginning teachers can both attract quality teachers to the profession and provide stability in the school faculties.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: Social Studies Education

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that provide increased emphasis on, and funding for social studies education in Washington State by 1) refining the first drafts and re-piloting the Classroom-based assessment (CBA); 2) increasing funding for professional development; and 3) developing an accountability system to assure compliance.

Rationale: Education for responsible citizenship must be a priority to sustain our constitutional democracy. It is essential for residents of the State to be knowledgeable about government, law, and politics. Students have a more accessible world before them and good preparation will result in good citizens of the State and the world.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: Special Education Funding

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate or support legislation and/or policies that provide for full funding of the actual cost for all of the required services for special education services, as defined by individual education plans required under federal law.

Rationale: Funding the actual costs of required special education services is the legal obligation of the state and federal government and they should be fulfilling that obligation. Currently, because the state is not meeting its obligation, local districts are required to spend millions of dollars in local levy funds to back-fill the state's basic education responsibility, which unnecessarily increases the local property tax burden. Local levy dollars should be used for enhancements and enrichment activities, not basic education that the state fails to adequately fund.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: Student Support Services

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that support student success in school by adequately funding K-12 school counselors, school librarians and school nurses.

Rationale: Students in today's society face greater challenges and risks than in any preceding generation. The opportunity for these students to seek support from trained professionals about the many issues they face is critical to their success. As schools face more and more budget challenges, services that support students are being cut. School librarians are essential to students learning how to manage all the information they are presented with daily. Inadequate funding has reduced the number of school nurses when student health issues are on the rise. And, school counselors who play a vital role in supporting students achieving higher standard, are carrying caseloads of more than 500 students each. The ASCA recommends a student ratio of 1 to 250 to maximize student achievement. These services are an important part of ensuring successful and healthy students in the education system of Washington.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: WASL Appeals Process

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that provide an appeals process for WASL scores at all grade levels and at any proficiency level, replacing the current policy that limits appeals to only 10th grade WASLs.

Rationale: Current rules forbid appeals of WASL test scores for students in grades 3-8. The lack of a remedy when scores are inaccurate can have a detrimental impact on a child. For example, the child could be placed in a remediation program or barred from participating in gifted programs. Having an appeal process in place will provide recourse.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: Washington State Assessment System

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that improve the Washington State assessment system to make it more effective, efficient and focused on student learning, while preserving high standards and meeting No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements.

Rationale: The current WASL is not an individual diagnostic tool nor does it provide for comparisons between Washington and other states or Washington and other countries. It is important for parents and students that assessments be meaningful.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: World Language and International Competencies for all Children

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that substantially increase world language and international sign language study in all grades; but especially in grades P through 5 where it has not been previously available; and support teaching and learning about world economy, cultures, geography and history in all grades.

Rationale: As citizens of Washington State, we participate in a globally interdependent world. One of every three Washington State jobs is impacted by international trade, making our state one of the most trade-dependent in the country. Yet students can graduate from Washington high schools without ever having studied a language other than English. Public schools in Washington State (and throughout the United States) are behind other countries in their offering of world languages and international curriculum in public schools. If our students are to compete in a global economy, they must have language skills and a broad knowledge of international cultures, history, geography and economies.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Health and Well-Being of Children and Youth

Title: Children's Health

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate or support legislation and/or policies that promote children's health in the areas of health care access, both physical and mental health care, appropriate physical education and recess opportunities, nutrition programs that include education for children and families and review of school meals, and programs on substance abuse.

Rationale: PTA is committed to improving the well-being of children in our State and these policies will improve the whole child success we promote.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: School Recess

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that support policies which require regular recess periods, supervised unstructured breaks, throughout the school day; and ensure and support additional research on the effects of recess on the developmental domains (social, emotional, physical, and cognitive), and on the effect of recess on academic achievement; develop policies and resources necessary to support an awareness of the importance of recess and of active, free play in the development of children; and support research and professional development that facilitate every educator's and school staff member's skills in observation and assessment of the developmental growth of children through the play process.

Rationale: Time is the missing element in our national debate about learning and the need for higher standards for all students. Schools are captive of the clock and calendar, and statewide, the trend is growing to maximize instructional time at the expense of recess. During the last 20 years, there have been major changes in the economic, political and social environments in which children are being raised. Beginning in kindergarten, increasing emphasis is put on programming children for global competitiveness in order to propel them into an economically viable future. However, Washington State law requires the number of instructional hours that school must provide, and defines that recess qualifies as part of those instructional hours. Legislation should require that districts create policy with community input to safeguard recess for elementary school children to ensure breaks for free play and physical activity.

Legislation Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Safe and Nurturing Environment for Children and Youth

Title: Comprehensive School Behavioral Systems

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that provide funding and require schools to develop comprehensive positive behavioral systems to address problem behavior at both student and community levels.

Rationale: Bullying and other anti-social behaviors affect students in both general and special education throughout the State. This issue is particularly relevant for students with disabilities and other minority groups as students engage in poor behavior as a result of various special needs. Many school districts appear ill equipped to handle these behaviors and resort to ineffective disciplinary measures.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate or support legislation and/or policies that provide information and skills to parents and children on the prevention and intervention of child physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect.

Rationale: Children and parents need the tools to be able to identify and prevent all types of child abuse and neglect. Current law provides some direction, but its permissive language does not guarantee that programming and curricula will actually be offered in all school communities.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: Sex Offender Monitoring

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that require electronically monitoring: 1) all Level III sex offenders for the duration of the registration requirements; 2) all sex offenders who have been convicted of failure to register; and 3) all sex offenders who register as transient or homeless for the duration of their transient and/or homeless status.

Rationale: It is important that convicted sex offenders who are released back into the community are registered with law enforcement and also important that law enforcement officials have the tools they need to protect the public from those released that may attempt to re-offend. State law can be improved to enhance awareness and to provide child protection.

Legislation Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: School Construction and Renovation

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that provide for state-level remodel and new construction funding of school facilities based on the development of state standards, review process, timeline, dedicated source of funding and auditing procedures for these projects.

Rationale: School districts throughout Washington State are faced with record high enrollments, new demands for technology, and the health and safety hazards of deteriorating facilities. Children learn best in adequate, up-to-code; well-maintained facilities. The state needs to develop baseline standards for building remodel, replacement, and new construction and identify a dedicated funding source. Then, the state needs to figure out how to fund these projects by finding a dedicated source of funding. Using this method will ensure that there will be a minimum building standard enjoyed by all students. Increased state funding would give districts a larger portion of local funds to spend in areas critical to meet district education needs which in turn would alleviate the need for PTA fundraising to supplement basic costs.

Legislation Committee Recommendation: DO PASS

Title: School Traffic Safety

Issue Statement: The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that mandate the creation of posted school speed zones on any highway, road, or street adjacent to a public school and shall require counties and incorporated cities/towns to post standardized advance warning signs that must include the word "School".

Rationale: Student fatalities and injuries have occurred when students, private vehicles, and school buses have been involved in accidents at schools. Current law allows for inconsistent use of school traffic warning signs and speed limits that create confusion among drivers and pedestrians. Students, parents, and educators are concerned about the risk of personal injury due to unsafe traffic conditions around schools. Creating and maintaining safe access to schools and safe learning environments is critical to the success of the education system.

Legislative Committee Recommendation: DO PASS