

## **Dyslexia and Other Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs)**

### **FLORIDA PTA POSITION**

Florida PTA and its constituent associations support the use of evidence-based instructional approaches for students with dyslexia, currently defined as Structured Literacy, and evidence-based instruction for dysgraphia, dyscalculia and other Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD).

Florida PTA will work with their local school districts to research and to advocate for the adoption of evidence-based approaches, meaningful IEP goals, and educational policies that best serve students with dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia and other Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD).

Florida PTA and its constituent associations support schools in implementing best practices in meeting the needs of students with dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia and other Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) through practices such as early intervention and differentiated instruction and to encourage accommodations and needed assistive technology through 504 Plans and Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in all learning environments.

Florida PTA recognizes that Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) have significant educational implications and encourage local and state education agencies and institutions of higher education to require pre-service and on-going post-service training on dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia and other Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), the warning signs of dyslexia and appropriate instructional approaches as well as the use of early screening for dyslexia and successful approaches to communicating with parents.

## **Dyslexia and Other Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs)**

### **Talking Points**

- The Florida Department of Education includes SLD's as part of the criteria for ESE eligibility, and the definition specifically lists dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia.
- Florida Board of Education rule 6A-6.03018 (2016) - Exceptional Education Eligibility for Students with Specific Learning Disabilities - indicates that evaluations must be conducted for SLD's (and specifically mentions dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia).
- Florida statute 1007.02 – Education Code – Articulation and Access - mentions these conditions as qualifying disabilities.
- HB 7069 added required training for educators as follows: "Provide training to reading coaches, classroom teachers, and school administrators in effective methods of identifying characteristics of conditions such as dyslexia and other causes of diminished phonological processing skills." It's unclear which statute this was added to.

## Early Childhood Education

### FLORIDA PTA POSITION

**PTA supports effective early education development programs that are adequately funded, developmentally appropriate, and coordinate comprehensive services for young children from birth to age five and their families. Early childhood programs should include strong family involvement components.**

**PTA supports federal and state incentives for quality child care and preschool programs that are affordable and accessible, coordinated at all levels (federal, state and local) and ensure quality in teacher training, health and safety standards.**

#### Background

In November 2002, Florida's voters passed a constitutional amendment to offer free, voluntary pre-kindergarten (VPK) programs to every 4 year old in the state. Almost 175,000 4 year old's now participate in this program, costing the state about \$390 million annually. Florida ranks at the top in the nation for access, with almost 175,000 4 year old's now participating in this program. However, there are serious concerns regarding program spending, which is far below average (ranking 35th among 41 states for funding per child). Quality standards also remain very low as Florida continued to meet just 3 of 10 quality standards benchmarks. While Florida has a solid foundation, enhancements to the current model would help Florida more fully deliver on the promise of a high-quality preschool education. The current standards and per pupil reimbursement are inadequate to deliver high-quality programs, as originally promised.

## Early Childhood Education

### Talking Points

High-quality early education programs are proven to:

- Help children enter kindergarten with the skills needed to succeed in school.
- Increase high-school graduation rates and college attendance.
- Reduce teen pregnancy rates, crime, and other social problems.
- Reduce long-term social costs for special education, child welfare, and public assistance.

The achievement gap between low-income children and their more affluent peers is apparent by 18 months of age.

- Early education programs have a particularly strong impact on low income children.
- The good news is that we know that early learning programs significantly narrow this achievement gap.

High-quality early childhood investments provide both short- and long-term economic benefits.

- They are the most effective investments the government can make, even during difficult fiscal times.
- Not investing in at-risk children through early childhood programs poses a profound threat to the future of our economy.
- Fast forward 20 years without adequate investments in early childhood service, and we are left with a less educated workforce that has a lower earning potential, is making fewer tax contributions, and is creating a greater need for spending on preventable social services.

(Early Childhood Education 2014)



## FUNDING

### FLORIDA PTA POSITION

Florida PTA urges the Legislature to fully fund strategies and programs that ensure the health, safety and education of the children of Florida. Adequate public education funding:

- Must position Florida's per pupil expenditures for public elementary and secondary schools at a minimum of 105% of the national average.
- Must guarantee full funding of the statutory District Cost Differential (The District Cost Differential is a factor used to adjust funding to reflect each district's cost of living.)
- Must provide equity for local tax efforts in districts.
- Must fully fund all state mandates: e.g., transportation, technology, class size, Voluntary Pre-K, Capital Outlay, Career Academies/Choice Programs and Required Curriculum.
- Must bring Florida's teachers' salaries, for all teachers, up to the national average and adequately fund compression for career teachers without supplanting current funding.

#### Background

If we do not invest now to educate and care for Florida's children, we will pay later in increased costs for unemployment, incarceration, and welfare. Funding for education and other student needs, such as school construction and technology have not been maintained. Accountability, testing and other state requirements increase the cost of a quality education and the legislature needs to make a commitment to adequately fund the mandates it passes on to school districts. Current Florida average teacher salaries is 46<sup>th</sup> in the nation at \$48,168, which is \$12,309 lower than the national average.

## FUNDING

### Talking Points

- A quality education system is the key to driving Florida's economic engine.
- The Florida Constitution declares that education of children is a fundamental value of the people of the State of Florida. It is the paramount duty of the state to make adequate provisions by law for a uniform, efficient, safe, secure, and high quality system of free public schools that allows students to obtain a high quality education.
- Claims that any budget beats the historic 2007 high point are simply not true. Today's funding is not adjusted for inflation, unfunded digital mandates or the additional students served every year. While overall per student funding was increased in Florida 2019, only \$75 per student was provided to the Base Student Allocation, which districts can use to fund teacher salaries, benefits, and unfunded mandates.
- Florida's school system ranks 38 out of 50 and earned a "D+" in school finance according to Education Week's Quality Counts (September 2019).
- Despite being the third largest state by population with a one trillion dollar economy, Florida is currently 46th in the nation in teacher pay. The average teacher salary in Florida is \$48,168, which is \$12,309 lower than the national average.

(Funding 2014)

## **Gun Safety**

### **NATIONAL PTA POSITION**

PTA recognizes the importance of a safe learning environment in attaining the highest level of student learning and achievement. PTA believes the most effective day-to-day school climate to be gun-free, but defers to local collaborative decision-making to allow for the presence of law enforcement deployed in community-oriented policing. Given the history and tradition of strong support for the safety and protection of children and youth, the PTA supports federal and state restrictions on firearms which:

- require, prior to purchasing a firearm, a waiting period and background check to screen out illegal firearm purchasers such as convicted felons and drug-related offenders
- outlaw military-style semi-automatic assault weapons
- require knowledge of appropriate firearms use and safety practices.

Military-style semi-automatic assault weapons would include those firearms which:

- were originally designed for military or law enforcement purposes; and for fully automatic purposes;
- are designed to be fired in full or semi-automatic mode in combat;
- are designed to accommodate a large capacity combat magazine.

## **Gun Safety**

### **Talking Points**

These and other measures are some of the ways the PTA believes that gun violence can be decreased in order to make our schools and communities safer. We believe we must enact legislation that will reduce gun violence, help protect all children and youth, and to restrict guns to only responsible owners.

- gun safety locks and other safety devices to prevent young children from accidentally discharging a gun
- alternative educational settings for youth who have brought a firearm to school, along with appropriate evaluation and counseling
- restrict Internet gun sales, including kits that can be used to make/modify guns
- enforce federal and state minimum age requirements for handgun purchases
- raise the minimum age to 21 to be allowed to buy a handgun from non-licensed dealers
- allow at least three business days to conduct background checks
- require non-licensed dealers to conduct background checks and fill out proper paperwork so that guns can be traced
- increase penalties for the transfer of handguns or semiautomatic assault weapons to juveniles for use in a crime
- revoke the license of dealers who knowingly sell to minors



## Juvenile Justice

### NATIONAL PTA POSITION

PTA believes that truants and other youth who have not committed criminal offenses should not be incarcerated and instead, should be diverted into community-based, family focused alternatives that address the root behavior. The Florida PTA promotes the use of Civil Citations.

PTA supports efforts to treat youths in the justice system in an age-appropriate manner and provide youths with developmentally appropriate, evidence-based services.

PTA promotes and encourages efforts to have children removed from adult jails in every city and county throughout the nation and encourages the placement of juveniles in appropriate facilities. PTA encourages efforts to ensure equity and competence with regard to race, ethnicity, culture, language, gender and sexual orientation in legal representation before the courts and throughout all judicial systems practices and policies.

### Talking Points

- Youth with non-criminal behaviors, such as truants, should not be locked up and should be provided with community-based, family-focused interventions.
- Placing youth offenders in age appropriate facilities, while providing youth with developmentally appropriate, evidence-based services and supports, reduces recidivism rates and can help ensure their health and well-being.
- Promoting fair, rational and effective juvenile justice policies can reduce overrepresentation and disparate treatment of youth of color in the justice system.

## **Mental Health Support in Schools**

### **FLORIDA PTA POSITION**

Florida PTA and its constituent associations call upon state and local policy makers and school districts to employ evidence based best practice ratios of school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, and school nurses who are most qualified to provide school based mental health services.

Florida PTA also urges the necessary resource and supports be provided to ensure students have access to the proactive continuum of mental health services and they be incorporated with a strong family engagement component.

## **Mental Health Support in Schools**

### **Talking Points**

- Research shows that up to one in five youth experience a mental health disorder, which is described as serious deviations from expected cognitive, social and emotional development such as anxiety, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, alcohol or substance abuse or depression. Research also indicates that most mental health conditions will emerge or begin to manifest symptoms between the ages of two to seventeen.
- The prevalence of mental health illness among children is a critical issue due to the effects on the child, their family and the community. Ample documented evidence confirms that early intervention and prevention can help to address a child's behavioral and mental needs before symptoms exacerbate into more detrimental social, emotional or academic behaviors or activities.
- Increasing the ratio of school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers and school nurses to students to minimally meet research-based best practices, would provide students more individual attention for academic or social guidance, early detection of learning problems and difficulties, and mental health service referrals and support.
- Studies have shown that when mental health prevention and intervention programs are coordinated with families and communities, they are likely to be more effective than stand-alone programs.



## Protection for LGBTQ Individuals

### NATIONAL PTA POSITION

That National PTA encourage state, local units, and councils to review school policies in regard to bullying and support revisions and amendments to those policies that specifically address the topics of sexual orientation and gender identification/expression as they relate to harassment and bullying .

That National PTA and its constituent associations seek and support legislation that creates a safe, supportive and accepting environment in schools, specifically with training for educators and other school related professionals to support all students, updated health education standards that deal with the issues of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression .

That National PTA work with the Department of Education to encourage states to incorporate standards regarding age-appropriate, medically accurate and culturally sensitive information on LGBTQ issues into existing health and other appropriate curricula.

**Background:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) students are more likely than their peers to be bullied, feel unsafe in school and skip school due to safety concerns. Within this climate of hostility, one in six LGBTQ youth report being physically assaulted within the past year because of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. Additionally, LGBTQ students are two to four times more likely to commit suicide than their non-LGBTQ peers. While more thorough studies are needed regarding the risks of suicide among transgender youth, one study of 55 transgender youth found that approximately 25% reported suicide attempts. Additionally, the National Transgender Discrimination Survey found that 41% reported attempting suicide compared to 1.6% of the general population. The rate rose to 55% of transgender individuals who were harassed or bullied in school. It is clear that there is a most urgent need for explicit protection for these youth under federal law to create safe and affirming learning environments.

## Protection for LGBTQ Individuals

### Talking Points

- National PTA and its constituent associations have long believed that every child deserves to go to school excited to learn in a safe and nurturing environment, without the fear of bullying, violence or discrimination.
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) students are more likely than their peers to be bullied, physically assaulted and feel unsafe in school because of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Federal statutes currently address discrimination on the protected classes of race, color, sex, religion, disability and national origin, but do not explicitly include sexual orientation or gender identity. State laws and local policies across the country also are often contradictory. As a result, educators and administrators lack the tools they need to address and prevent the bullying, harassment and discrimination of LGBTQ students.
- PTA was compelled to take action for these marginalized students by adopting a resolution during its 2016 Annual Convention & Expo to advocate for and support federal legislation that specifically protects LGBTQ youth as well as encourage states and school districts to incorporate inclusive policies and practices that create and maintain safe learning environments for all students.
- Enumeration is essential to protecting as many students as possible from bullying, harassment and discrimination. The strength of an enumerated law or policy is that it underscores those students who research shows are most likely to be bullied and harassed and least likely to be protected under non-enumerated anti-bullying laws and policies.
- Enumeration provides teachers and school personnel with the tools they need to implement anti-bullying and harassment policies, making it easier for them to prevent bullying and intervene when incidents occur. The National School Climate survey shows that LGBTQ students in schools with enumerated policies were more than twice as likely to report that teachers intervened regularly compared to students in schools with generic anti-bullying policies, and more than three times as likely compared to students in schools with no policy at all.
- LGBTQ students in schools with an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum feel more connected to their school community.

## School Choice

### FLORIDA PTA POSITION

- PTA supports educational choices within public schools and believes that parents should be involved in the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of public school choice plans.
- PTA opposes any private school choice proposal and/or voucher system that diverts public funds to private or sectarian schools.
- PTA believes home schools and other non-public schools should meet the same educational standards as public schools.

### Background

Charter Schools or "Schools of Choice" became part of U.S. school reform vernacular. Originally called the "small schools movement," the intent of this effort was to explore best practices for education outside the constraints of bureaucracy. Over the past 16 years, charter schools have grown exponentially in Florida, from 30 charters in 1998 to more than 650 in 2014/2015.

### School Choice

#### Talking Points

PTA supports public school choice and acknowledges public charter schools as one of many avenues to improving student achievement. Florida PTA supports the creation of charter schools based on a set of principles that are designed to keep the integrity of public schools intact. Charter schools (including full-time virtual schools) must:

- Establish a level playing field in areas of fiscal responsibility, accountability and student enrollment.
- Adhere to all federal and state laws that protect the health and safety of children, prohibit discrimination, ensure access for all children, and comply with the Freedom of Information and Open Meetings Act.
- Be supported by specifically allocated public funds in amounts that do not exceed and do not divert funding from non-charter public schools.
- Be free of both tuition charges and fees that exceed state or federal laws.
- Be legally organized as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization not affiliated with non-public sectarian, religious, or home-based school organizations.
- Provide all education stakeholders, including parents, with absolute transparency concerning both non-public funding sources and any external organizations with which the charter school enters into fee-for-service contracts.
- Require funding to follow the student when transferring between charter and the traditional public school during the school year.
- Work collaboratively with parents to ensure meaningful family engagement in student learning and school success.
- Involve parents in decision-making processes.
- Ensure staff are certified for their positions.

(Charter Schools 2014)