

## PTA URGES CONGRESS TO PROMOTE THE DIGITAL SAFETY OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH ONLINE

### WHO WE ARE

PTA is a network of millions of families, students, teachers, administrators and business and community leaders devoted to the well-being and educational success of all children. We are the oldest and largest child advocacy association in America, with a presence in every state and 18,000 PTA units across the country and abroad.

### WHAT WE ARE ASKING FOR

Research shows that children and youth in the U.S. are increasingly online, with the vast majority (96%) of teenagers now accessing the internet daily. While the internet can be a space fostering learning, creativity and community, it also presents unique risks for young users without safeguards in place. Today, most Americans (78%) believe it's difficult for parents to keep children safe when they are online. It is critical that national leaders in Congress do their part to protect our children online and promote their safety and well-being on the internet.

### PTA Urges Congress to Pass a Digital Safety Package That Includes COPPA 2.0 (S.1418) and Other Key Protections for Youth

- The U.S. Senate and House of Representatives have held numerous hearings on the topic of data privacy and protection and the impact of social media on children's health and well-being. ***It is time for action.*** It is time for Congress to pass a federal data privacy and security law that establishes strong safeguards to protect children and teens when they use the internet.
- As parents and guardians, we believe any digital safety package that receives consideration by the 118th Congress ***must at a minimum include the Children and Teens' Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA 2.0)***. This legislation provides a desperately needed update of federal law to better protect the personal information of children online. Internet companies would be prevented from collecting any personal data from children under the age of 16 without consent, and parents would be given the opportunity to erase personal information about their children online. The bill would also ban targeted advertising to children and teens and create an office within the Federal Trade Commission focused on enforcing youth privacy and marketing laws. COPPA 2.0 was approved on a bipartisan basis in 2023 by the Senate Commerce Committee and now awaits consideration by the full U.S. Senate, after which it would receive consideration in the U.S. House. Check if your members of Congress are co-sponsoring this bill: [S.1418](#).

- Another piece of legislation that has received much discussion is **the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA, S.1409)**. PTA supports a comprehensive digital safety and data privacy package passing first through the U.S. Senate and then receiving swift consideration and passage by the U.S. House. While we are unable to endorse KOSA as a standalone bill at this time, we encourage lawmakers to include the following provisions from KOSA in any final package:
- Strengthened privacy protections for children and youth on social media and online, including by requiring their accounts be set to the highest privacy and protections by default.
  - Protections for children and youth that prevent them from accessing dangerous content, including establishing intentional and explicit processes to report predatory, discriminatory or dangerous behavior online.
  - Address excessive social media use and encourage healthy screen time by requiring social media companies to offer and maintain features that allow parents and guardians to manage their children’s screen time.
  - Encourage online platforms to develop more transparent privacy policies that use plain language that is understandable and accessible to families.
  - Investments in efforts to increase awareness of the impact of technology, including research on the benefits and harms of social media on children, youth and families.

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### PTA URGES CONGRESS TO STRENGTHEN FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS AND INVEST IN MEANINGFUL FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

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#### WHAT WE ARE ASKING FOR

Family engagement matters for student success—students whose families are engaged tend to have better attendance, fewer behavioral challenges, earn better grades on average and are more likely to graduate. Parents and guardians provide important perspectives on decisions impacting children, families and schools and are key partners in the educational success and well-being of all children. Now more than ever, it is critical that policymakers include parents at the table and prioritize meaningful and inclusive family engagement throughout policy.

### PTA Urges Congress to Strengthen Family Engagement in Future ESEA Reauthorization

- The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is the main law outlining the federal role in education and was last reauthorized almost a decade ago.
- Congress must build upon key provisions included in the law to provide the guidance and tools schools need to meaningfully communicate and collaborate with families. This includes:
  - A larger percent of funding (5%) set aside for family engagement work under Title I.
  - Improved communication with families, including encouraging outreach to harder-to-reach families and improved accessibility of communications.
  - Providing schools and districts with the funding, tools and resources to effectively address barriers to participation.
  - Strengthening the Statewide Family Engagement Centers (SFEC) program to enable a center in every state.
  - Clarity around existing requirements and improved monitoring and accountability.
- The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions and the House Committee on Education & the Workforce will be key to advancing this legislation. Check if your member of Congress serves on these committees: [Senate HELP Committee](#); [House Education & Workforce Committee](#).

### PTA Urges Members of the U.S. House to Co-Sponsor the Bill of Rights for Students and Parents (H.Res.219)

- Over the last few years, there has been increased interest from policymakers in uplifting the parent voice and strengthening family engagement in our nation's education system.
- What is *most* needed are policies that emphasize inclusive and meaningful family engagement and promote safe, welcoming, supportive and inclusive schools for all students and families.
- **The Bill of Rights for Students and Parents Resolution (H.Res.219)** would affirm the commitment of Congress to promoting meaningful and inclusive family involvement in K-12 education, as well as commit to building safe, welcoming, supportive and inclusive schools across the nation. Check if your member of Congress is a co-sponsor: [H.Res.219](#).

### PTA Urges Congress to Fund SFECs at \$25 Million

- Statewide Family Engagement Centers (SFECs) provide technical assistance, partnership development, direct resources and services to help ensure that families across the country are meaningfully supported and engaged in their child's education.
- The program has historically enjoyed bipartisan support and demonstrated success. Check if your member of Congress is already on record supporting the program [here](#).
- The SFEC program currently funds grants in several states (see if your state has an SFEC [here](#)). \$25 million would enable all existing centers to continue and provide new states with the opportunity to engage in this great work.

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### PTA URGES CONGRESS TO FULLY FUND ESSENTIAL PROGRAMS SUPPORTING CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS

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#### WHAT WE ARE ASKING FOR

The long-term success of our nation depends on quality federal investments in our education system and our children. However, the U.S. currently *only invests about 3%* of the regular federal budget on education. Unfortunately, this year many essential federal programs that support children, families and schools are at risk of being underfunded or eliminated by Congress. As parents and guardians, we know the importance of funding education and insist that children and families remain a priority in any appropriations package that Congress develops.

### PTA Urges Congress to Ensure That Programs Supporting Children, Families and Schools Are Fully Funded in FY2024 and FY2025

- Lawmakers in Congress are currently deciding how much money to spend on essential services and programs that support children, families and schools across the country. At a time when our education system and families are strained—impacted by learning loss, mental health, absenteeism, educator staff shortages and more—is the time to *increase, not decrease* federal investments that uplift our nation’s families and schools.
- Any federal funding package that receives consideration by the 118th Congress **must at a minimum fund key programs under the U.S. Department of Education, including:**
  - **At least \$79.4 billion in overall funding for the U.S. Department of Education**, consistent with the Senate Appropriations Committee’s proposal for FY2024.
  - **\$36.5 billion for Title I under the Every Student Succeeds Act** to provide all students, especially those living in low-income households, with the support needed to succeed.
  - **\$2 billion for Title II-A, the Supporting Effective Instruction State grant program** to invest in high-quality teachers, principals and other school leaders.
  - **\$2 billion for Title III under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act** to support English learners in every state and territory.
  - **\$1.48 billion for Title IV-A, Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants** to provide all students access to a well-rounded education.

- **\$25 million for Title IV-E, the Statewide Family Engagement Centers grant program** to uplift the parent voice and strengthen family-school partnerships across the nation. Check if your member of Congress is already on record supporting the program [here](#).
  - **\$16.2 billion for Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Act**, with the ultimate goal of full funding for IDEA programs and services that support students with disabilities.
- Congress must also fund other essential programs and initiatives supporting children, families and schools, **including increased funding to:**
- Promote youth mental health and social-emotional learning.
  - Address school staffing shortages and support the educator pipeline.
  - Expand broadband access and enhance digital infrastructure to ensure equity.
  - Implement strategies for academic recovery, such as summer learning and after-school enrichment programs.
  - Strengthen child nutrition, including through SNAP, WIC and school meal programs.
  - Prevent and address childhood trauma and adverse childhood experiences.
  - Enhance the physical safety of school buildings through investments in emergency planning, infrastructure improvements and physical security measures that do not undermine the learning environment.
  - Expand access to high-quality, affordable childcare and early learning programs.
  - Invest in community and youth violence intervention and prevention work.
  - Improve and modernize school infrastructure.

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## PTA URGES CONGRESS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN IMPACTED BY TRAUMA, SUBSTANCE USE AND MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

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Unfortunately, one out of every five students experience a mental or behavioral health concern each year. And over two-thirds of children will experience a traumatic event by the time they are 16. Research shows a person's exposure to traumatic events in childhood significantly impacts their mental and physical health through adulthood. Congress has the power to help by passing legislation that would assist families impacted by substance use disorder, address childhood trauma, promote youth mental health and empower schools to build welcoming, supportive, and inclusive learning environments for all students.

### PTA Urges Congress to Pass the SUPPORT Act (S.3393, H.R.4531) With Key Provisions Addressing Youth Substance Use and Childhood Trauma

- **The SUPPORT Act** was most recently authorized by Congress in 2018 to address the ongoing opioid crisis and invest essential resources and support to families impacted by substance use disorder. *Many of the key programs under the SUPPORT Act expired in 2023*, including a critical program that connects students in need to trauma support services and mental health care (called the Trauma-Informed Support Services and Mental Health Care for Children and Youth in Education Settings “TISS” Grant Program). The U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives have both introduced legislation reauthorizing the SUPPORT Act and its programs: S.3393 and H.R.4531.
- **PTA urges Congress to include the bipartisan RISE from Trauma Act (S.1426, H.R.4541) and the FACTS Act (S.3701, H.R.5625) in the final version of S.3393 and H.R.4531, the reauthorization of the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act.**
- Both bills are essential to stemming the tide of the opioid crisis and supporting our nation's families. In particular, the RISE from Trauma Act (S.1426, H.R.4541) would strengthen evidence-based trauma-informed care training and resources for educators and first responders, including reauthorizing the vital TISS Program for schools.
- The Fentanyl Awareness for Children and Teens in Schools (FACTS Act, S.3701, H.R.5625) would provide funding to build partnerships and training for schools and communities to better respond to, and prevent, fentanyl and synthetic opioid use by youth.

- PTA also urges Congress to ensure that social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of preK-12 learning environments and is supported through increased federal investments.
- Check if your members of Congress are co-sponsoring these bills:
  - [S.3393](#), [H.R.4531](#) (SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Reauthorization Act)
  - [S.1426](#), [H.R.4541](#) (The RISE from Trauma Act)
  - [S.3701](#), [H.R.5625](#) (Fentanyl Awareness for Children and Teens in Schools Act)

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## PTA URGES CONGRESS TO PROTECT CHILDREN AND YOUTH FROM GUN VIOLENCE

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### WHAT WE ARE ASKING FOR

At PTA, we believe that no parent should fear for the safety of their child every time they leave home, but the reality is that over six in 10 parents today report worrying about school violence. Firearm injury is now the leading cause of death for children under the age of 19, surpassing car accidents, cancer and other diseases. Every year, an estimated 3 million American children witness gun violence, impacting their ability to learn and thrive. This includes the children and families traumatized by gunfire occurring on school grounds—over 1,197 incidents since 2013. School safety is a critical priority for all parents, educators, students and community members, and families can no longer wait—it is past time for our elected representatives to take meaningful action protecting our children from gun violence.

### PTA Urges Congress to Pass Legislation Ensuring the Secure Storage of Firearms to Prevent Access by Children

- Evidence strongly suggests that limiting children’s and teens’ access to firearms limits the risk of injury and death, and that storing firearms locked, unloaded and separate from ammunition can reduce the risk of suicide and unintentional shootings amongst children and teens.
- An estimated 4.6 million children live in homes with at least one loaded and unlocked firearm in the U.S. Research shows that the majority of unintentional firearm-related shootings among children occur in or around the home, and most firearms used in school shootings perpetrated by shooters under the age of 18 were acquired from the home or the homes of relatives or friends.
- In January 2024, the White House [announced](#) executive actions to promote secure storage, and legislation is currently in development to encourage gun owners to store their firearms safely and out of reach of children and teens.
- PTA urges Congress to work on a bipartisan basis to pass secure firearm storage and child access prevention legislation that requires gun owners to store firearms, whether they are loaded or unloaded, in a securely locked container to prevent access by children under the age of 18 and that encourages community collaboration, coordination and education on the importance of secure firearm storage.

### PTA Urges Congress to Pass the GOSAFE Act (S.3369) and the Assault Weapons Ban (S.25, H.R.698)

- Assault weapons are military-style weapons that are specifically designed to inflict extreme, widespread damage as quickly as possible. Since the federal ban on assault weapons expired 20 years ago, the ease of access to these weapons has led again and again to horrific tragedies in schools and communities across the country.
- Most Americans support commonsense gun safety measures, and studies have found that laws restricting access to these military-style weapons and large-capacity magazines have been effective in reducing gun-related deaths, injuries and fatal mass shootings.
- **PTA calls on members of Congress to co-sponsor two critical pieces of legislation protecting our children and communities: the Gas-Operated Semi-Automatic Firearms Exclusion Act (GOSAFE Act, S.3369) and the Assault Weapons Ban (S.25, H.R.698).**
- **The GOSAFE Act (S.3369)** would restrict access to gas-operated semi-automatic firearms, which includes assault weapons like AR-15s and AK-47s that have been a weapon of choice in mass shootings. Additionally, the GOSAFE Act would authorize grants for gun buy-back programs and require the Attorney General to publish a list of prohibited firearms and exempt firearms. Check if your Senator is a co-sponsor: [S.3369](#).
- **The Assault Weapons Ban (S.25, H.R.698)** already has over 200 co-sponsors and would prevent all new semi-automatic assault weapons and large-capacity ammunition devices from being sold, transferred, or manufactured. Check if your member of Congress is a co-sponsor: [S.25](#), [H.R.698](#).
- Neither of these bills would “take away” guns—firearms that would otherwise be prohibited but are already in a person’s possession would be “grandfathered in” and allowed to stay in a person’s possession. Rather, these bills seek to halt further production and circulation of these types of military-style firearms that have been used time and time again in school shootings, devastating families and communities.

### PTA Urges Congress to Pass the Background Check Expansion Act (S.494) and the Bipartisan Background Checks Act (H.R.715)

- Recent polls show that the majority of Americans, including gun owners themselves, support running background checks on all gun sales.
- **PTA calls on members of Congress to co-sponsor the Background Check Expansion Act (S.494) and the Bipartisan Background Checks Act (H.R.715)**, legislation that would strengthen the background check system and help ensure that firearms no longer pass into prohibited hands under existing federal law.
- Check if your member of Congress is a co-sponsor: [S.494](#) and [H.R.715](#).

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# National PTA PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES for the 118th Congress (2023-2025)

**National PTA will work with the 118th Congress, the U.S. Department of Education and the Biden/Harris Administration to ensure that every child has access to a fair and equitable education.**

*The long-term success of our nation depends on quality federal investments in our education system. National PTA will continue to advocate for increased federal investment in public education to ensure all children have access to adequately funded public schools that improve their overall well-being and allow students to reach their full potential.*

## **PTA Calls on Congress and the Administration to Strengthen Family-School Partnerships and Invest in Meaningful Family Engagement.**

Decades of research shows that family engagement matters for student success—students whose families are engaged are more likely to attend school, avoid discipline problems, achieve at higher levels and graduate. Parents and families have always played an important role in education, are key partners in their children’s educational success and provide important perspectives on decisions impacting their children and schools. However, far too often when policy is considered and legislation is crafted, family engagement is not directly called out as a critical strategy in achieving desired student outcomes. Policymakers can and should support schools in their efforts to meaningfully share power with parents, welcome and communicate effectively with all families and collaborate with families and the community to support student success. PTA believes it is essential that meaningful family engagement strategies are embedded throughout education policy and calls on Congress and the Administration to prioritize family engagement at the outset of all policy discussions.

### **Policies and legislation must:**

- ✓ Provide funding to incentivize and support family engagement initiatives in schools and communities across the country, including increasing funding for the federal Statewide Family Engagement Centers program.
- ✓ Increase awareness of effective family engagement strategies, including expanding research, technical assistance and training for school personnel.
- ✓ Encourage greater transparency with families about decisions impacting their children. This includes proactive, timely and two-way communication in an understandable and accessible format and in a language families can understand.

## **PTA Calls on Congress and the Administration to Enhance School and Community Safety and Prioritize the Protection of Children and Youth.**

School safety is a critical priority for all parents, educators, students and community members. Students and educators have a right to attend schools that are safe and conducive to learning and achievement, yet schools often experience critical incidents such as suicide, natural disasters or a mass casualty event that can have a devastating impact and long-term harm on whole school communities. PTA believes efforts to address school and community safety must involve all stakeholders, especially students, parents and families and urges consideration of a variety of factors including the physical and psychological safety of students while maintaining a positive school climate for all children to learn, grow and reach their potential.

### **Policies and legislation must:**

- ✓ Support sensible solutions to gun violence, including promoting the safe and secure storage of firearms, strengthening the federal background check system, investing in evidence-based community violence interventions and addressing youth access to firearms, especially assault or military-style weapons.
- ✓ Promote the inclusion of safety education in the curriculum at all levels of public schools and incorporate an age-appropriate violence prevention component into existing courses of study.
- ✓ Enhance the physical safety of school buildings, address environmental health hazards and invest in disaster preparedness through emergency planning, infrastructure improvements and physical security measures without undermining the school environment or causing psychological harm through trainings, lock downs or responses to false threats of violence, also known as “swatting.”
- ✓ Prioritize restorative justice, positive school discipline and alternative dispute resolution techniques over the detention, exclusion or incarceration of youth, including providing training for school personnel on safe de-escalation techniques, trauma-informed care and positive behavioral



# National PTA PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES for the 118th Congress (2023-2025)

**As our families, children and schools rebuild after the COVID-19 pandemic, National PTA will work with federal policymakers to support successful strategies for academic recovery, including new and innovative approaches such as summer learning and after-school enrichment programs.**

interventions and supports, while intentionally eliminating any discipline practices that may historically or currently target youth of color and contribute to a school-to-prison pipeline.

- ✓ Foster the development of full-service community schools, strengthen community partnerships and encourage the adoption of a whole-child approach that responds to the mental, physical, behavioral, developmental and academic needs of all students.

## **PTA Calls on Congress and the Administration to Help Schools Create a Welcoming, Supportive and Inclusive Learning Environment for All Students.**

Every student can reach their full potential when the school environment is one in which they are accepted, truly valued and can authentically be themselves. PTA firmly believes that all students—including students from historically marginalized communities—have the right to a high-quality, equitable education in a welcoming, supportive and inclusive school. PTA advocates for policies and legislation that ensure equity for every student, promote a positive school climate and support the whole child and family to prepare all students with social and emotional skills to succeed in adulthood.

### **Policies and legislation must:**

- ✓ Promote positive behavioral interventions that are conducive to learning and discourage the use of disciplinary practices that are harmful, overly punitive or disproportionately applied to certain students based on their disability, race, religion or other protected characteristic.
- ✓ Support every student's mental health, teach essential life skills and provide and connect students with necessary behavioral and mental health resources at school and in their community.
- ✓ Encourage the development of inclusive curricula and materials that are historically accurate, age and developmentally appropriate and provide a means for students to explore diverse concepts, cultures and perspectives.

- ✓ Provide the foundation for all children to learn and thrive, including basic necessities like access to clean air, water and healthy nutrition in all communities.
- ✓ Ensure equal access to education programs and activities for all children and youth and strengthen protections against discrimination in the school setting.

## **PTA Calls on Congress and the Administration to Promote a Safe and Positive Online Experience for Children and Youth and Expand Access to Technology that Fosters Learning and Well-Being.**

A founding principle of PTA's mission is to promote the safety and well-being of all children and youth. PTA believes that technology can enhance the learning experience and foster creativity and connectedness among students, educators and families. However, technology can also give rise to digital environments that could be harmful to children and youth. PTA supports efforts to ensure a safe and positive digital experience for all children and families, fostering learning and healthy lifestyles for all children and equipping them with the technological literacy and access to thrive in an increasingly digital world.

### **Policies and legislation must:**

- ✓ Strengthen online privacy protections for children and youth.
- ✓ Expand broadband access and enhance digital infrastructure to ensure equity.
- ✓ Increase awareness, including research, of the impact of technology on children and strengthen digital literacy skills for children and families.
- ✓ Address threats to the safety and well-being of children that can happen online, such as cyberbullying, exploitation, criminal activity and violence.

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