



## PTA 2009 Public Policy Agenda:

Advocating for the education, health, and  
overall well-being of all children

**PTA**<sup>®</sup>  
*everychild.onevoice.*<sup>®</sup>

# ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

Founded in 1897, the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) is comprised of more than five million members, including parents, students, educators, school administrators, and community leaders. With more than 25,000 local units, PTA flourishes in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Department of Defense schools in Europe and the Pacific.

As the oldest and largest volunteer child advocacy association in the United States, PTA's legacy of influencing federal policy to protect the education, health, and overall well-being of children has made an indelible impact in the lives of millions of children and families. PTA continues to be a voice for children within federal policy; in 2009, PTA will focus primarily on three policy priorities:

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

One of PTA's founding principles is its dedication to engaging parents in the education of their children. Since the PTA's inception, it has provided workshops and resources on child development to parent groups and community leaders. In 1911, PTA agreed to work for a separate home education division within the U.S. Bureau of Education. Quite different from the present-day home schooling movement, home education was an international movement that encouraged parents to become knowledgeable on child development and education issues. The U.S. Bureau of Education created the division and named the PTA president as its director until 1919, when the division became a separate government agency. In recent years, PTA has developed the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships as well as assessment tools to measure the success of these standards in schools.

Recognizing the importance of parent involvement in a child's education, PTA has worked to ensure that provisions encouraging parental involvement were included in the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), now known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). PTA looks forward to having the opportunity to strengthen parent involvement and engagement in the upcoming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA-NCLB).

## OPPORTUNITY AND EQUITY FOR ALL CHILDREN

From the outset, PTA has championed the importance of equal opportunity for all children, regardless of socioeconomic background, and addressed associated problems of child labor, childhood diseases, and a judicial system more concerned with punishment than with rehabilitation of juveniles. In the 1920s, PTA supported the establishment of a new organization, the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers, to provide PTA services in states that maintained separate schools by ethnicity. PTA provided training and literature to the newly established organization so that all parents could be advocates for their children. The organizations continued to work collaboratively until the groups formally merged in 1970.

PTA continues to advocate for all children to have the opportunity to grow and achieve through education. To that end, PTA will advocate for adequate funding for schools and for family-focused, strength-based interventions to combat chronic absenteeism, truancy, and juvenile delinquency. As part of its 2009 Public Policy Agenda, PTA will advance its agenda for opportunity and equity for all children with the reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA-NCLB), the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP), and federal appropriations to support student achievement and parent engagement.

## CHILD HEALTH

PTA has been closely involved with federal health policy since its inception, including pivotal roles in the creation of both the U.S. Public Health Service and the Department of Health and Human Services. In 1923, PTA worked to ensure the provision of hot lunches in schools. In the 1940s and 1950s, PTA was involved in the establishment and expansion of the school milk programs. PTA also worked to ensure the original passage of both the National School Lunch Act and the Child Nutrition Act.

More recently, PTA and its coalition partners fought successfully for the inclusion of language mandating the creation of local school wellness policies in the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004. In 2009, PTA will be advocating to improve child health and wellness through the reauthorizations of the Child Nutrition Act and the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

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# PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT PROVISIONS WITHIN ESEA-NCLB

Research indicates that students with involved parents, regardless of family income or background, are more likely to score higher on tests, earn higher grades, enroll in higher-level academic programs, attend school regularly, have better social skills, demonstrate improved behavior, adapt well to school, graduate from high school, and pursue postsecondary education.<sup>1</sup>

Recognizing the importance of parent involvement in a child's education, PTA worked to ensure that provisions encouraging parent involvement were included in the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), now known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). However, there is no central mechanism to translate parent involvement federal policies into general practice in states and local communities. Thus, there is little evidence that the requirements of ESEA-NCLB's parent involvement provisions are being implemented in meaningful ways at the state, district, and school levels.

ESEA-NCLB is now up for reauthorization, which presents opportunities to address these and other challenges in providing families with the support essential for student achievement. PTA's 2009 Public Policy Agenda will focus on the key parent involvement provisions under Section 1118 of Title I and the Department of Education's Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs) program.

## SECTION 1118, TITLE I

Section 1118 of Title I requires school districts and schools receiving Title I funds to: 1) develop written parent involvement policies in partnership with parents to establish district expectations for parent involvement and describe how schools and parents will meet those expectations; 2) build capacity for parent involvement by providing technical assistance to parents to improve their children's academic achievement, educating school personnel on effective parent involvement strategies, integrating parent involvement efforts with other programs, and ensuring that information communicated to parents is in a format and language parents can understand; and 3) inform parents and organizations of the existence and purpose of Parental Information and Resource Centers.

Schools must also provide parents with timely, understandable information on such matters as school programs, curricula, academic assessments, expectations for student performance, and, if requested, flexible opportunities for meetings. Schools are also required to develop written school-parent compacts, in partnership with parents, outlining each party's responsibility in meeting state academic standards and supporting children's learning.

Districts receiving more than \$500,000 in Title I funds must set aside at least 1 percent for parent involvement activities, and distribute at least 95 percent of the reserved funds to participating schools. Districts are also required to ensure schools' compliance with ESEA-NCLB, while state educational agencies are required to review districts' parent involvement policies and practices to ensure they meet ESEA-NCLB requirements.

## PARENTAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCE CENTERS (PIRCs): SUBPART 16, PART D, TITLE V<sup>2</sup>

This subpart authorizes a competitive-based federal grant program for nonprofit organizations and consortia of nonprofits and school districts to establish school-linked or school-based PIRCs that provide parents, organizations, schools, school districts, and state educational agencies with comprehensive training, information, and support for parent involvement from early childhood through adolescence. PIRCs support the implementation of effective parent involvement policies, programs, and activities to improve student academic achievement and strengthen partnerships for meeting the educational needs of children. There are 62 state-wide PIRCs across the country, which together comprise a national network.

PIRCs must serve rural and urban areas, use at least half of their federal grants to serve areas with high concentrations of low-income children, and use at least 30 percent of their grants for early childhood parent programs. From October 2006 to June 2007, PIRCs assisted more than 2.6 million parents, including 1.5 million low-income parents and 645,945 parents with children who are limited-English-proficient (LEP).

Examples of PIRC activities include help parents understand data from accountability systems, supplemental educational services, and public school choice; communicating effectively with school personnel; and engage in developing, implementing and reviewing school improvement plans. PIRCs also develop and disseminate resource materials on effective family involvement programs and convene workshops and conferences for stakeholders.

## KEY FACTS

- Parent involvement in a child's education can lead to improvements in the child's academic achievement, behavior, attendance at school, understanding of diverse viewpoints, planning for the future, and emotional and physical well-being.<sup>3</sup>
- Effective parent involvement can be the great equalizer for students, contributing to their increased academic achievement regardless of parents' education level, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background.<sup>4,5</sup>
- Parent involvement can raise student academic achievement so substantially that schools would need to increase spending by more than \$1000 per pupil to gain the same results as with parent involvement.<sup>6</sup>



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### For Congress and the Administration:

- Retain the parent involvement provisions of Section 1118 of Title I and strengthen the provisions by creating incentives on the state, district, and school levels to fully implement the requirements.
- Require GAO to produce a report on the current status, barriers, and successful strategies in state and district implementation of parent involvement provisions under Section 1118.
- Add a statutory definition and framework on effective family engagement in Section 1118 of Title I, aligned with Section 1111 provisions on State Plans and State Reviews. The definition and framework of effective family engagement must include parents of children from birth to adolescence in schools and other community-based settings.
- Require the U.S. Department of Education to establish performance standards, benchmarks, measures, and compliance monitoring procedures that will support states, districts, and schools in the implementation and evaluation of effective family engagement practices and policies. Disseminate and publicize standards to family and parent groups and other stakeholders, and include a public comment period to improve proposed standards.
- Increase local education agencies minimum reservation for parent involvement from one percent to two percent of allocation under subpart 2, Title I.
- Modify the purposes, assurances, and governance of the Parental Information and Resource Centers to align with the new quality framework that supports state-wide leadership, capacity-building, and technical assistance on effective parent involvement strategies and implementation of Section 1118.
- Increase the authorization level of Parental Information and Resource Centers to \$86,000,000; establish a state allocation minimum of \$500,000; and allow a 2-3 year extension for current high-quality grantees to support the research and sustainability of the new quality framework.

- Pilot a local family engagement demonstration program for Title I schools by amending Title V, Section 5566 and establishing a separate program authorization and funding stream outside of the Parental Information and Resource Center authorization.
- Prepare, train, and recruit teachers and principals in effective models of family engagement that increase student achievement by amending Title II.
- Require states to include building state-wide capacity for the implementation of effective family engagement as part of their State Plan and to align with proposed statutory definition and framework in Section 1118.
- Require "school-parent" compacts to support school and family partnerships in the development of recommendations for student attendance, expectations and supports for student behaviors. compacts must include rational disciplinary policies that include the implementation school-wide Positive Behavior Supports and phase-out out-of-school suspension and other disciplinary policies that contribute to the achievement gap.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### For the Administration (short-term):

- Publicize and disseminate the parent involvement provisions within each State Plan required by Title I, Part A, Section 1111, to the public via the U.S. Department of Education's website.
- Publicize and disseminate the results of each state review of local education agencies' progress in carrying out its responsibilities under Section 1118 via the U.S. Department of Education's website.
- Publicize the U.S. Department of Education's findings of the compliance monitoring visits on the parent involvement provisions within Section 1118.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### For the Administration (long-term):

- Establish an Office for School, Family, and Community Engagement within the Office of the Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education.
- Coordinate national research on evidence-based models of effective family engagement and provide technical assistance to replicate models in the field.
- Establish performance standards, benchmarks, measures, and compliance monitoring procedures that will support states, districts, and schools in the implementation and evaluation of effective family engagement practices and policies.
- Establish a Cabinet-level interagency group charged with improving outcomes for children and youth.
- Establish a ParentCorps through a partnership between the Corporation for National and Community Service's AmeriCorps program and the U.S. Department of Education's National Parent Involvement Resource Center program. ParentCorps members would be limited to parents and caregivers of students in Title I schools who would be responsible for developing and implementing effective family engagement policies and programs and school-family compacts.

## RATIONALE

### Parent Engagement Raises Student Achievement and Is Cost Effective.

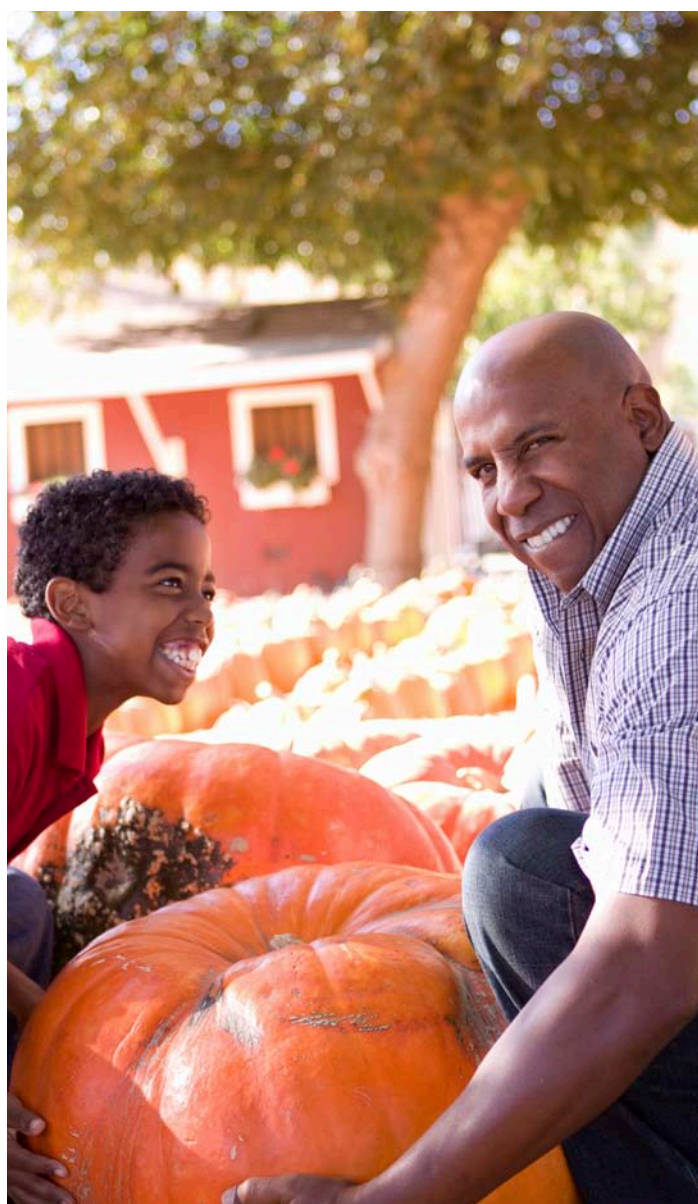
- Despite socio-economic variables, parents' engagement in a child's schooling substantially raises student academic achievement, such that schools would need to increase spending per student by more than \$1,000 to achieve the same results.<sup>7</sup>

### Key Parent Involvement Provisions of the Law Are Not Being Implemented.

- Federal monitoring of Title I implementation has determined that many states, school districts, and schools are not fully implementing the parent involvement provisions as required by ESEA-NCLB. Some common findings include states not reviewing school districts' parent involvement policies and practices to determine if districts have met requirements; schools not notifying parents that their child has been assigned or has been taught for four or more consecutive weeks by an instructor who is not highly qualified; school plans not addressing parent involvement requirements; schools not providing parents with required information about school programs, options, and performance; and states not monitoring or providing technical assistance to districts and schools for effective parent involvement.<sup>8</sup>

### Current Law Needs to Be Aligned with the New Quality Framework for PIRC Technical Assistance and Leadership Centers.

- The Parental Information and Resource Center program has recently undergone a substantial reorganization at the Department of Education to move beyond implementation of individual programs to providing state-wide leadership and building capacity for state educational agencies, school districts, and schools to promote effective parent engagement. This new quality framework includes collaborating with state educational agencies and school districts to foster implementation of Title I parent information requirements; assisting schools and districts to address parent involvement requirements under Title I; providing accurate, timely, and understandable information to stakeholders regarding important ESEA-NCLB provisions; and providing state-wide technical assistance and training.



# FEDERAL FUNDING FOR EDUCATION

According to the Programme for International Student Assessment, the United States ranks near the bottom of 30 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries in math (25th) and science (21st).<sup>9</sup> There are significant differences in academic achievement between students of different ethnic, socioeconomic, and geographic backgrounds in the United States. These “achievement gaps” are found in nearly every measure of achievement, including math and reading test scores, high school graduation rates, and rates of college enrollment and college completion.<sup>10</sup> The achievement gaps are further widened by inequitable distribution of resources in publicly funded schools.

Despite recent increases in funding for U.S. Department of Education programs, not enough resources are allocated to serve all students and families who are eligible for critical elementary and secondary education programs, including Parental Information and Resource Centers, Title I of ESEA-NCLB, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and teacher-quality initiatives.

PTA believes that to ensure that schools and districts can provide a quality education to all children, meet the accountability standards set forth in ESEA-NCLB, and prepare students for employment in our global economy, greater financial support is critical. With state and local government budgets tightening, schools are struggling to continue providing basic educational services. At the same time, demands have been placed on schools to improve student achievement. Without sufficient resources to engage parents, hire qualified teachers, expand compensatory education programs, and address other challenges they face, schools cannot make needed improvements. Additional targeted federal funds are needed to help schools implement specific interventions designed to improve student achievement.

## KEY FACTS

- In Fiscal Year 2008, Department of Education discretionary and mandatory funding – including all K-12, special education, career and technical education, higher education, and departmental administration expenditures – totaled 2.3 percent of the federal budget.<sup>11</sup>
- Increasing a country’s average level of schooling by one year can increase economic growth by 5 to 15 percent.<sup>12</sup>
- During the postwar years from 1948 to 1973, education accounted for 29 percent of the increase in gross domestic product (GDP), and economic innovation accounted for 37 percent. Together, the direct and indirect benefits of increases in education accounted for two-thirds of the increase in U.S. economic growth.<sup>13</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase funding for the Parental Information and Resource Centers (Title V, Part D, Subpart 16 of the Elementary & Secondary Education Act) to \$88.5 million for FY 2010 and such sums for FY 2011 as necessary to keep pace with the rate of inflation and enrollment growth.
- Increase funding for Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act by \$3 billion for FY 2010 and an additional \$3 billion for FY 2011, moving towards doubling Title I funding within five years.
- Increase funding for Individuals with Disabilities Education Act state grants so that the federal government provides for 20 percent of the excess cost of educating children with disabilities (average per pupil expenditure or APPE). For FY 2010, this would require an investment of \$2.3 billion above the FY 2008 and FY 2009 appropriated levels of \$10.95 billion. This must be the first step in reaching the 40 percent of APPE Congress promised to pay when the law was first enacted.
- Restore funding for Individuals with Disabilities Education Act national programs to FY 2003 levels (\$338 million), adjusted for inflation.
- At a minimum, maintain funding for Improving Teacher Quality State Grants at FY 2008 levels (\$2.935 billion), adjusted for inflation.
- Restore funding for Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants to FY 2007 levels (\$60 million), adjusted for inflation.

Increasing a country’s average level of schooling by one year can increase economic growth by about 5 to 15 percent.

## RATIONALE

### **Funding for Parental Information and Resource Centers Should Be Increased. Funding for IDEA National Programs Should Be Restored to Fiscal Year 2003 Levels (\$338 Million), Adjusted for Inflation.**

- The Parental Information and Resource Center (PIRC) funding is the only source of federal funding intended exclusively to help schools and communities meet the requirements of parent involvement mandated in ESEA-NCLB. More than 35 years of research has demonstrated that when parents are involved in their child's education, student achievement increases. The PIRC program has recently undergone a substantial reorganization at the Department of Education, expanding the role of PIRCs to act as state-wide centers for leadership, technical support, and financial support for parent involvement. A substantial increase in funding to \$88.5 million for FY 2010 is needed to effectively implement the expanded and critical role of PIRCs.
- Part D of IDEA programs provides an infrastructure of practice improvements that support the implementation of IDEA. In order to better serve students with disabilities, it is imperative that Congress provide more funding for Part D of IDEA.

### **Funding for Improving Teacher Quality State Grants and Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants Should Be Appropriately Supported.**

- Teachers play an integral role in facilitating student success. The level of professional development available for educators is directly affected by the amount of funding available for teacher quality initiatives. These programs must be adequately funded in order for teachers to be able to meet the goals under ESEA-NCLB. In addition, professional development opportunities like those supported by these funding streams are a key factor in teacher retention.

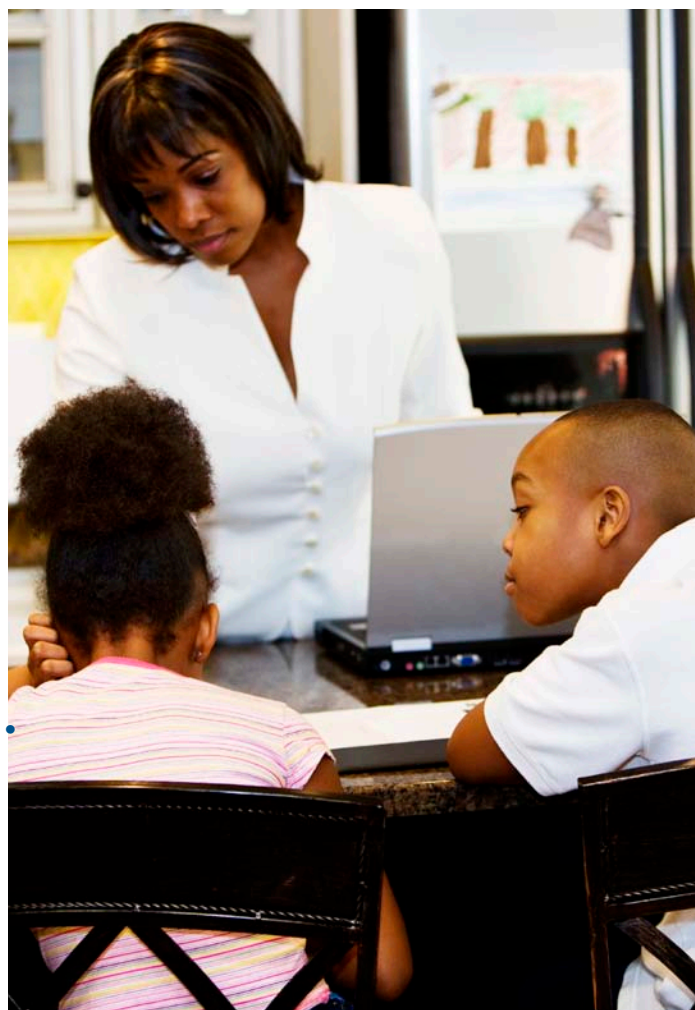
### **Title I Funding Should Be Increased by \$3 Billion Each for the Next Two Fiscal Years.**

- As the cornerstone of ESEA-NCLB, the Title I program provides funds mainly to school districts to help disadvantaged children achieve proficiency and to improve the performance of low-achieving schools. In Fiscal Year 2008, Title I provided \$13.9 billion to more than 90 percent of school districts nationwide. As the primary vehicle for federal involvement in K-12 education, it is critical that adequate funding be appropriated in order to assist schools in meeting the high standards asked of them.

### **IDEA State Grant Funding Should Be Increased to Provide for At Least 20 Percent of the Excess Cost of Educating Children with Disabilities.**

- The assumption underlying IDEA is that, on average, the APPE for children with disabilities is twice the APPE for other children. Congress has determined that the federal government would pay up to 40 percent of this "excess" cost, which is referred to as "full funding." Since 1981, the first year for which full funding was 40 percent of APPE, the federal payment has remained less than half of the federal promise, leaving states and localities to bear the burden of paying the shortfall. This rate should be increased to provide at least 20 percent of the excess cost of educating children with disabilities.

In Fiscal Year 2008, Department of Education discretionary and mandatory funding—including all K-12, special education, career and technical education, higher education, and departmental administration expenditures—totaled 2.3 percent of the federal budget.



# CHRONIC EARLY ABSENTEEISM, TRUANCY, AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSION

Experts estimate that thousands of our youngest students are chronically absent from schools, many missing nearly a month or more of school over the course of a year.<sup>14</sup> This absenteeism places students' academic careers at risk; it has been linked to lower academic performance in later grades,<sup>15</sup> which can affect high school completion and employability as adults.<sup>16</sup> Truancy, which typically occurs in middle and high school grades, is a risk factor for substance abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and school dropout.<sup>17</sup>

At the national level, one out of every ten children is chronically absent during the first two years of schooling, but the rates vary widely depending on the school district and school studied.<sup>18</sup> In one locality, for example, individual schools saw early chronic absenteeism ranging from one percent to over 50 percent of children in grades K-3.<sup>19</sup> Truancy has been reported as a problem in school districts nationwide, with some metropolitan areas reporting thousands of unexcused absences on any given school day.<sup>20</sup>

The United States does not have a uniform mechanism for schools, districts, and states to monitor and report on chronic early absenteeism, though ESEA-NCLB started requiring states to define and report truancy in 2006.<sup>21</sup> Although individual schools frequently track average daily attendance or truancy, most do not do the same for individual students.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, rates of chronically absent students can easily be masked by high overall attendance rates school-wide, and most districts have not developed the capacity necessary to track individual students' attendance.<sup>23</sup>

Students are also being forced out of schools due to districts' over-reliance on out-of-school suspension for violating "zero tolerance" policies, which have been replacing traditional systems of graduated sanctions for rule infractions since the early 1990s. The result has been the near doubling of the number of students suspended from school annually, increasing from 1.7 million to 3.1 million per year, between roughly 1974 and 2003.<sup>24</sup>

Racial disparities in out-of-school suspension have increased as the number of total suspensions has increased. The rate of white students suspended annually for more than one day increased from 3.1 percent to 6.14 percent between 1972 and 2000, while the rate for black students suspended annually for more than one day grew from 6 percent to 13.2 percent. The disparities for minority students with disabilities are even greater. For instance, black students with disabilities are three times as likely as white students with disabilities to be suspended from school, and four times as likely as their white counterparts to receive their education in a correctional facility.<sup>26</sup>



School districts' use of "zero tolerance" policies have led to nearly doubling the number of students suspended from school annually, increasing from 1.7 million to 3.1 million per year, between 1974 and 2003.

## KEY FACTS

- The Verde Involving Parents (VIP) program of North Richmond, California, illustrates that school-wide efforts to improve attendance combined with family-focused interventions for chronically absent children can reduce elementary absences by more than 50 percent over four academic years, improve monthly attendance rates from below 89 percent to above 93 percent, return more than \$470,000 in average daily attendance revenue to the district, and dramatically increase test scores.<sup>27</sup>
- Chronic early absenteeism for children has been linked to lower academic performance in later grades and predicts lower levels of academic achievement for low-income children by the end of fifth grade.<sup>28</sup>
- Chronic absenteeism and truancy in middle and high school have highly negative consequences for youth and negative effects on their employability as adults.<sup>29</sup>
- An analysis of data that followed children entering kindergarten in 1998 through fifth grade found that almost 14 percent of kindergartners, 12 percent of first graders, 11 percent of third graders, and 10 percent of fifth graders missed an average of 12 to 18 days during the school year. Over 11 percent of kindergartners, almost 9 percent of first graders, 6 percent of third graders, and 5 percent of fifth graders missed at least 18 days or more of the school year. In total, one-quarter of all kindergarten children missed an average of 12 or more days during the school year.<sup>30</sup>
- Chronic absenteeism can be very high in individual schools even while considerably lower district-wide. In one district where chronic early absenteeism was 13.8 percent overall, its prevalence ranged from 1 percent to 54.5 percent across individual schools.<sup>31</sup>
- In 2006, the ESEA-NCLB began requiring states to define and report on truancy; states are not, however, required to adopt a uniform definition of, or to report on, chronic early absenteeism.<sup>32</sup>
- School districts' use of "zero tolerance" policies have led to the near doubling of the number of students suspended from school annually, increasing from 1.7 million to 3.1 million per year, between 1974 and 2003.<sup>33</sup>

Truancy cases accounted for more than one third (35 percent) of all petitioned status offense cases handled in 2004, followed by runaway/ungovernability (27 percent), liquor possession (19 percent), and curfew (10 percent) offense cases.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop and encourage states to adopt a common definition of chronic absenteeism. Experts suggest defining chronic absenteeism as missing 10 percent or more of the school year, including excused and unexcused absences.<sup>34</sup>
- Assist states in the development of, and schools and districts in the implementation of, a universal student identifier, beginning with pre-kindergarten programs through grade 12.
- Assist states in the development and implementation of integrated data systems in schools and districts, allowing for:
  - a. Improved accuracy and consistency of local data on attendance maintained by individual schools and district-wide; and
  - b. Improved monitoring and reporting on chronic absenteeism by grade school and by school; and
  - c. Use of data to inform implementation of school-wide strategies and to trigger supports and strength-based interventions for students and their families.
- Increase investment for technical assistance, training, and implementation of the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) model of addressing behavioral problems in schools, making it an allowable use of funds under ESEA-NCLB.
- Require "school-parent" compacts to support school and family partnerships in the development of recommendations for student attendance, expectations, and supports for student behavior, and rational disciplinary policies that include the implementation of school-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports and the phase-out of out-of-school suspension and other disciplinary policies that contribute to the achievement gap.
- Provide technical assistance, training, research on evidence-based practices, and incentives to states and localities to implement family-focused, strength-based interventions to prevent and address chronic early absenteeism and truancy.
- Encourage school districts and schools to replace zero tolerance policies and out-of-school suspension with the PBIS model and school-family compacts.
- Invest in Head Start, health care (especially the State Children's Health Insurance Program and Medicaid for children), child care, and other early childhood programs.

## RATIONALE

### States, School Districts and Schools Need the Tools Necessary to Effectively Monitor and Address Chronic Early Absenteeism and Truancy.

- The above recommendations are necessary to ensure school personnel are able to identify individual students in need of family-focused interventions and to link those students to appropriate resources and supports. These tools are also necessary to enable policymakers and administrators to better understand the problem and to develop and implement data-informed strategies for particular schools or populations affected. The specific recommendation of defining chronic absenteeism as 18 days or more out of a 180 day school year is based on research indicating that this level of chronic absence in the first years of school is particularly damaging to future academic performance.<sup>35</sup>

### A Comprehensive Investment in Early Childhood Programs Is Necessary to Address the Complex Factors that Contribute to Chronic Early Absenteeism and Truancy.

- Research suggests contributing factors can include, among others, poor quality education; poverty; lack of stable, affordable housing; unreliable transportation; limited access to health care; teenage or single motherhood; low maternal education; unemployment; food insecurity; and poor maternal health. The federal government can help address these complex problems by increasing investments in health care, child care, and education from the earliest ages through high school. These strategies are in line with a growing national interest in expanding preschool access and creating pre-K through third grade programs.

### Family-Focused, Strength-based Interventions for Chronic Early Absenteeism and Truancy Are Effective.

- Family-focused interventions that are supportive and strength-based (rather than punitive in nature) for chronically absent and truant children and youth can dramatically reduce absences, substantially improve academic achievement, and increase school districts' average daily attendance revenue. The federal government's resources are necessary to help in identifying and replicating evidence-based practices for preventing and reducing chronic early absenteeism and truancy.

Family-focused, strength-based alternatives to detaining children with status offenses are less costly and more effective, while detention frequently leads to interruption of education, children failing to return to school after releases, and future delinquency.

### Zero Tolerance Policies Undermine a Child's Education and Contribute to Achievement Gaps.

- Zero tolerance policies lead to out-of-school suspension and further criminalize students, many of whom need family-focused, evidence-based services so they can stay in school and achieve, rather than being removed from school and placed at risk for future delinquency. Moreover, these policies disproportionately impact minorities, contributing to achievement gaps.

### Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and School-Family Compacts Are Effective in Addressing Student Behavior.

- PBIS has met rigorous, scientifically-validated evaluation standards for effectiveness. The model is already being used in states such as Illinois and utilizes research-validated practices to prevent problem behavior before it starts. The approach includes adult school-wide agreements on how to teach behavior in school, including ways to support students' positive behavior when it occurs. This system complements the use of school-parent compacts, in which both parties work together to lay out clear expectations for a child's attendance, behavior, and homework.



# JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION (JJDP) REAUTHORIZATION

Protecting the rights of children and youth in trouble has long been at the core of PTA's advocacy work. In 1899, for example, PTA convention delegates passed a resolution supporting the extension of juvenile courts and probation systems, relatively new initiatives at the time, to protect children and youth accused of offenses from being locked up with adult criminals.<sup>36</sup>

First passed in 1974 and reauthorized in 2002, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) is the primary federal law regarding juvenile justice reform. The law provides grants to states to help implement juvenile crime prevention and intervention programs. JJDP is up for reauthorization, providing opportunities to improve the law for children and youth. Of particular interest in PTA's 2009 Public Policy Agenda are two critical issues for juvenile justice reform: the Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders (DSO) provision of JJDP, and jail removal and adultification of juveniles.

## THE DETENTION OF STATUS OFFENDERS (DSO) CORE REQUIREMENT

Children arrested for non-criminal behaviors, such as truancy, are in need of family-focused, school and home-based interventions, rather than being securely placed in dangerous, overcrowded juvenile detention centers that expose them to delinquent youth. Congress recognized this in 1974 when it included the Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders (DSO) core requirement in JJDP to ensure that children in need of services would be treated differently than delinquent children.<sup>37</sup>

However, JJDP was amended in 1980 to include the Valid Court Order (VCO) exception, which allowed children with status offenses to be jailed for violating a court order not to commit subsequent status offenses. This has undermined the DSO core requirement, leading to significant numbers of children being held unnecessarily in secure detention when other interventions are more appropriate.

## JAIL REMOVAL AND THE ADULTIFICATION OF JUVENILES

Though the Jail Removal core protection and Sight and Sound core protection keep most children out of adult jails, approximately 7,500 children are held in adult jails before they are tried.<sup>38</sup> The reason for this is because JJDP is not applicable to children under the jurisdiction of adult criminal courts.

In 2006, the average daily number of youths detained in juvenile facilities for a status offense was 4,717.



## KEY FACTS

- More than 400,000 children were arrested or held in limited custody by authorities for status offenses in 2004, representing roughly 18 percent of all juvenile arrests for the year.<sup>39</sup>
- In 2006, the average daily number of youths detained in juvenile facilities for a status offense was 4,717.
- Truancy cases accounted for more than one third (35 percent) of all petitioned status offense cases handled in 2004, followed by runaway/ungovernability (27 percent), liquor possession (19 percent), and curfew (10 percent) offense cases.<sup>40</sup>
- Family-focused, strength-based alternatives to detaining children with status offenses are less costly and more effective, while detention frequently leads to interruption of education, children failing to return to school after release, and future delinquency.<sup>41</sup>
- Boys are slightly more likely to be sent to court for truancy than girls, with 54 percent of all petitioned truancy cases between 1990 and 1999 for boys.<sup>42</sup>
- Almost 40 states allow children prosecuted in adult courts to be held in adult jails prior to their first hearing,<sup>43</sup> despite the fact that youth placed in adult jails are at high risk of assault, abuse, and death.<sup>44</sup>
- In 2005 and 2006, 21 percent and 13 percent, respectively, of inmate-on-inmate sexual violence victims in jails were children under the age of 18; yet only 1 percent of all jail inmates are juveniles.<sup>45</sup>
- Children are 36 times more likely to commit suicide in an adult jail than in a juvenile detention facility.<sup>46</sup>
- Research indicates that 40 percent of adult jails provide no educational services, 89 percent provide no special education services, and 93 percent provide no vocational training.<sup>47</sup>
- Children prosecuted as adults are on average 34 percent more likely to commit crimes again than children retained in the juvenile justice system.<sup>48</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Eliminate the Valid Court Order exception to the Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders Core Requirement of JJDA to ensure that youth who are truant are kept out of secure juvenile corrections facilities.
- Update JJDA to decrease over-reliance on secure detention and to promote effective family-focused, school-based interventions for youth who are truant.
- Require the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to report annually the number of children charged with status offenses and held in secure detention, identifying the associated state and the average length of stay in secure detention by state.
- Ensure Jail Removal and Sight and Sound Separation core protections are extended to all children under 18 years of age who are held pre-trial, regardless of whether they are charged in juvenile or adult court.
- Change the definition of “adult inmate” so that states can place children convicted in adult court into juvenile facilities instead of adult prisons, without risking federal funding.

In 2006, the average daily number of youths detained in juvenile facilities for a status offense was 4,717.



## RATIONALE

### Locking up Children for Noncriminal Acts Increases Their Risk of Victimization, Abuse, and Suicide.<sup>49</sup>

- Detention facilities are overcrowded, understaffed, and breed violence and neglect. Though such conditions are not appropriate for any child to experience, they are particularly inappropriate for children only accused of status offenses, such as truancy, and many children whose behavior stems from previous abuse or neglect.

### Secure Detention Is Costly and Strains Public Resources.

- The annual average cost per detention bed ranges between \$32,000 and \$65,000.<sup>50</sup> The cost to the public is overwhelming given that there are 591 juvenile detention facilities across the country.

### Detaining Children for Noncriminal Behaviors Leads to Interruption of Education Family Functioning and Children Failing to Return to School After Release.<sup>51</sup>

- A Department of Education study found that 43 percent of incarcerated children receiving education services in confinement failed to return to school after release, and another 16 percent that did enroll in schools after release dropped out five months later.<sup>52</sup> Alternative responses, such as family-focused, school-based, or community-based interventions for children with status offenses are less costly and more effective.

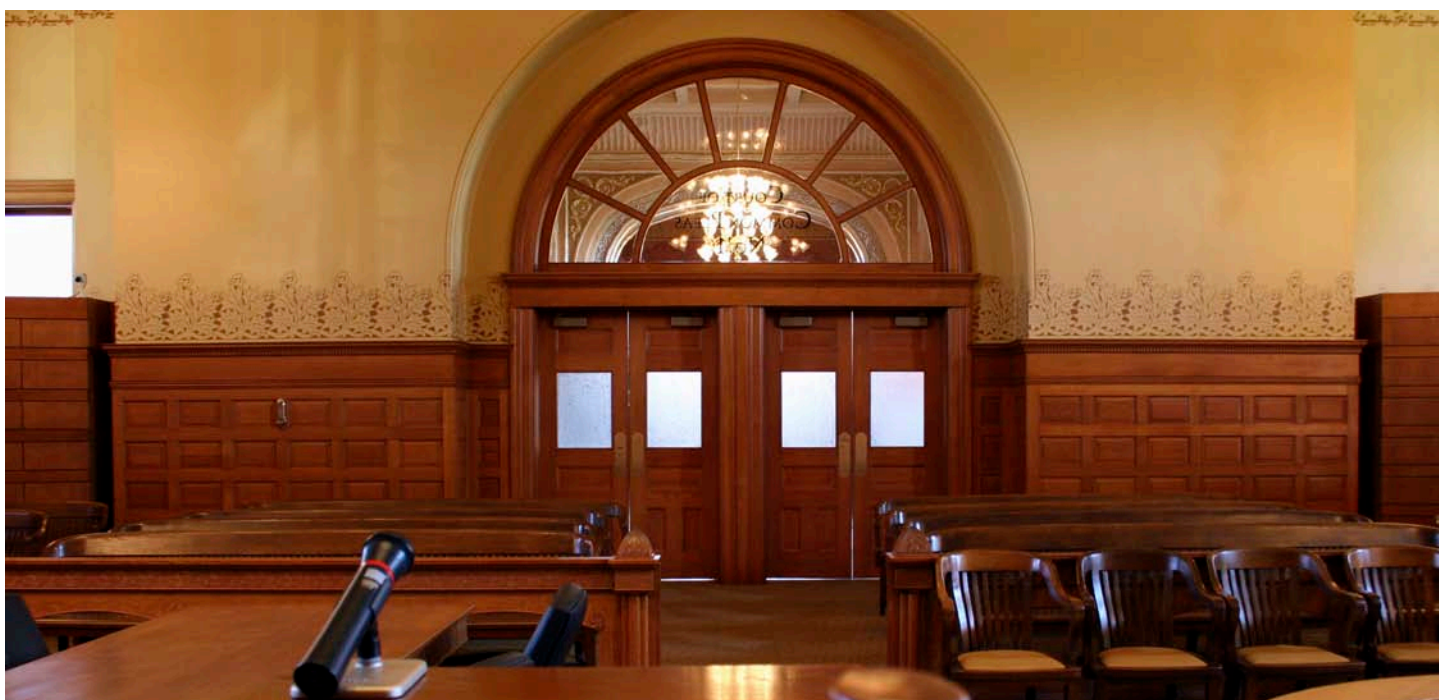
### Children Prosecuted in Adult Courts Are Often Being Prosecuted for Low to Medium Level Offenses, Not Serious Offenses.

- Researchers estimate that as many as 200,000 children are prosecuted annually in adult courts, despite the fact that state laws are typically intended to only prosecute the most serious offenders.<sup>53</sup> Regardless, children who are tried in adult courts are frequently there, despite not committing a serious offense.<sup>54</sup> These hardships frequently prove unnecessary, as many children held in adult jails are eventually transferred back to juvenile court or their cases get dismissed.<sup>55</sup>

### Trying Children as Adults Is Ineffective and Damaging to Their Future.

- Children tried as adults have been found to be more likely to re-offend than those not exposed to the adult criminal court system, as they receive little or no education, rehabilitative programming, or mental health services. To compound the problem, children are given an adult criminal record significantly limiting future education and employment opportunities, and they face similar penalties as adults, such as life without parole.<sup>56</sup>

Chronic absenteeism and truancy in middle and high school have highly negative consequences for youth and for their employability as adults.



# CHILD NUTRITION AND WIC REAUTHORIZATION

In the First Session of the 111th Congress, the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act will be up for consideration. The 2009 reauthorization comes at a pivotal time in our nation's understanding of the role of nutrition in the lives of American children.

PTA and its coalition partners fought successfully for the inclusion of language mandating the creation of local school wellness policies in the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004. These wellness policies give parents, students, school nutrition representatives, school board members, school administrators, and the general public the opportunity to formulate local policies that are tailored to the specific needs and capacity of their communities.

In 2004, approximately 47 percent of children between the ages of 6 and 19 were either overweight or obese.<sup>57</sup> In addition, in that same year nearly 18 percent of all households with children were food insecure.<sup>58</sup> The statistics on child obesity and nutrition demonstrate the need for Congress to address the needs of both long-term health and the immediate poverty-related inadequacy in the availability of affordable, nutritious food during the next reauthorization.

PTA is resolved to make the 2009 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization an opportunity to comprehensively address the conditions contributing to childhood obesity and other child health issues, rather than taking a piecemeal approach.

This legislation, which expires on September 30, 2009, covers many essential programs, including the School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs, the Summer Food Service Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

## NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM (NSLP)

Over 30 million students participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) each day, in over 100,000 schools, with nearly 60 percent of participating students receiving a free or reduced-price lunch. NSLP meal pattern requirements are becoming increasingly healthy as they are being updated to meet the recommendations under the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. This is evidenced by the fact that students in the NSLP eat twice as many servings of vegetables at lunch as non-participants according to the USDA's Food and Nutrition Services.

## SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM

Established in 1966 as a pilot project, the School Breakfast Program currently provides breakfast to nearly 10 million students in approximately 82,000 schools nationwide, with over 75 percent of students receiving a free or reduced-price breakfast. Like the NSLP, school breakfast meal patterns are being updated to reflect the recommendations of the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

## SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM AND THE CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM

Created in 1968, the Summer Food Service Program served over 120 million free, nutritious meals in the summer of 2007 to low-income children. The Child and Adult Care Food Program provided nutritious meals and snacks each day to nearly 3 million children and over 85,000 adults, making day care of children and elderly adults more affordable for millions of low-income families.



## KEY FACTS

- According to the data collected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Services, approximately 30.5 million children participated daily in the National School Lunch Program in 2007, and nearly 60 percent of them received their meals for free or at reduced prices.
- According to the School Nutrition Association's 2008 Back to School Nutrition Trends Report, 97.5 percent of school nutrition director respondents expect to experience increased food costs for the 2008-2009 school year.
- According to a 1998 study of the Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, eating breakfast helps children achieve in school and grow up healthy and strong.
- For individuals born in the year 2000, the risk of being diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes at some point in their lifetimes is estimated at 33 percent for boys and 39 percent for girls.<sup>59</sup>
- A 2003 study showed that being overweight and obese account for approximately 9 percent of total U.S. medical spending.<sup>60</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Require policies for the provision of recess, physical education, and regulation of food marketing in schools to be included in local wellness policies.
- Require periodic assessments of the development, notification, implementation, and content of local wellness policies.
- Provide competitive grant funding through the USDA Team Nutrition Network contingent upon the achievement of local wellness policy goals.
- Require the USDA to update the national nutrition standards for school foods sold outside of the school meals programs in order to keep pace with emerging scientific evidence about nutrition.
- Increase reimbursement rates for school meals.
- Authorize non-food assistance grants to allow schools to purchase food preparation equipment and address some of the start-up costs associated with improving kitchen facilities.
- Require the employment of qualified nutrition professionals, or the consultation thereof, at the district level for school food services.
- Increase the promotion of universal meals programs and reduce the administrative and paperwork barriers that limit participation.
- Increase funding for the Department of Defense Fresh Program, or its equivalent, placing an emphasis on the purchase and procurement of local produce wherever possible.
- Require the development of best practices for the processing of USDA commodities in order to align more closely these products with the 2005 Dietary Guidelines.



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## RATIONALE

### Local Wellness Policies Should Be Expanded and Enforced.

- Wellness policies give parents, students, school nutrition representatives, school board members, school administrators, and the general public the opportunity to formulate local policies that are tailored to the specific needs and capacity of their communities. All of these contributors can play a critical part in the promotion of student health and the prevention of childhood obesity, poor nutrition, and physical inactivity. PTA continues to encourage the involvement of parents in school wellness councils and other committees working to improve school meals programs. Not only is it the right of parents to be involved in the major decisions affecting their children's health and well-being, but parent involvement has the additional benefit of engaging, and in many cases educating, parents and the surrounding community about the importance of healthy nutrition in the daily lives of their families.



### Competitive Foods Sold in Schools Must Also Be Forced to Meet Updated Nutrition Standards.

- School meals must meet detailed nutrition standards set by Congress and be updated regularly by the USDA in order for a school food service program to receive federal subsidies. The meals are typically balanced and contain recommended amounts of vitamins and minerals. In contrast, the nutrition standards for foods sold outside the meal programs have not been updated since 1979. Such foods include those sold in vending machines, cafeteria a la carte menus, and school stores. The only nutritional criteria for school foods sold outside of meals are that “foods of minimal nutritional value” (FMNV) may not be sold in the food service area during meal times. FMNV are foods that provide less than 5 percent of the Reference Daily Intake for eight specified nutrients per serving. Many low-nutrition foods are not considered FMNV despite their high contents of calories, saturated fat, salt, or added sugars, and can be sold anywhere on school campuses at anytime during the school day. For more than 50 years, school meals have been regulated at the federal level. Each year, the federal government invests billions – nearly \$11 billion in fiscal year 2007 – in school lunches and breakfasts. Selling low-nutrition foods in schools undermines that investment.

### School Meal Reimbursement Rates Are Inadequate at Current Levels.

- In order to improve the nutritional content of school meals, USDA initiated the “School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children” in 1995. Since that time, the nutritional content of school lunches and breakfasts has improved. Unfortunately, many school meals still contain elevated levels of saturated fat and sodium. In addition, the availability of fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grain offerings remains at a lower level than that called for in the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. One major challenge to the increased availability of nutritious school meals is the increased cost associated with the improvement. Even without changing the nutritional content of the meals, cost increases related to food, labor, and energy have become increasingly burdensome. While the mean cost of providing school lunches is often reported to be below the reimbursement rate, full costs require support from the school district general fund, raising the full costs above the reimbursement rate. According to a 2007 report by the School Nutrition Association, over 78 percent of school districts surveyed have experienced increased costs while implementing enhanced nutrition standards. Additional funding streams, like non-food assistance grants to allow purchasing of food preparation equipment and enhanced nutritional requirements during commodities processing, relieve this burden on those that feed our nation's children everyday.

According to the School Nutrition Association's 2008 Back to School Nutrition Trends Report, 97.5 percent of school nutrition director respondents expect to experience increased food costs for the 2008-2009 school year.

# STATE CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM

Created in 1997, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) makes health care available to over 6 million children of low-income families that do not qualify for Medicaid and some individuals who either have not been offered or are unable to afford private coverage.<sup>61</sup> Each state's SCHIP spending is matched by the federal government with an enhanced match rate. However, SCHIP is a block grant with a capped allotment unlike an entitlement program like Medicaid. Therefore, there is a limited amount of federal funding distributed to the states annually for SCHIP.<sup>62</sup>

In a time of increasing numbers of uninsured Americans due to the rising costs of health care and dwindling employer-based coverage, SCHIP has been invaluable to low-income children. In fact, the combined effect of Medicaid and SCHIP has reduced by one third the total number of uninsured low-income children in America.<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately, despite this progress, in 2006 the Census Bureau reported that nearly nine million children still were without health insurance.<sup>64</sup>

Despite widespread consensus both in Congress and the general public that SCHIP should have been expanded when the program was up for reauthorization in 2007, SCHIP was extended through March 31, 2009, with only enough funding to avoid forcing states to cut current enrollment levels due to protracted disagreements with the Bush Administration.

Compared to insured children, uninsured children are over three times more likely to have not seen a doctor in the past year.



## KEY FACTS

- At least 8.7 million Americans under the age of 18 were without health insurance in 2006.<sup>65</sup>
- Compared to insured children, uninsured children are over 13 times more likely to have no usual source of health care.<sup>66</sup>
- Compared to insured children, uninsured children are over three times more likely to have not seen a doctor in the past year.<sup>67</sup>
- Compared to insured children, uninsured children are almost five times as likely to have a minimum of one unmet or delayed health care need.<sup>68</sup>
- Nearly 13,000 children were placed into the juvenile justice or child welfare systems in the United States solely for the purpose of access to mental health services in 2001.<sup>69</sup>
- In 2007, 72 percent of Americans polled supported Congressional plans to increase SCHIP spending in order to provide health insurance to more children.<sup>70</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase SCHIP funding through reauthorization prior to expiration on April 1, 2009, providing coverage to additional eligible, uninsured children.
- Strengthen SCHIP during the reauthorization process by including additional types of coverage, measures to ensure efficacy of the program, and protections for equitable access.

## RATIONALE

### **SCHIP Should Be Expanded In Order To Reduce the Overall Number of Uninsured Children in America.**

- As noted above, at least 8.7 million children in the United States were without health insurance in 2006. Over the last decade, health care costs have drastically increased and employer-based coverage has dwindled significantly. In addition, the current prolonged economic woes with which we are faced are driving up unemployment and depleting the middle class. The logical conclusion is that there will be an increase in the number of American families unable to afford health care coverage, yet not eligible for Medicaid.

### **SCHIP Should Be Strengthened In Order To Address Equitable Access and Overall Efficacy of the Program.**

- While PTA fully endorses SCHIP and recognizes the tremendous value of the program, there are a variety of measures that can be employed in order to improve the program for the future. Among the improvements that PTA believes would benefit SCHIP participants are mental health parity, initiatives and measures to address child health quality, and the inclusion of dental coverage. Additionally, the overall efficacy of SCHIP could benefit by funding state efforts for outreach and enrollment, simplified or “express lane” eligibility, and increased state flexibility. Finally, PTA believes it is essential to ensure equity in the program by permitting the immediate enrollment of legal immigrant children and providing incentives for the reduction of racial and ethnic disparities in both coverage and quality of care.



At least 8.7 million Americans under the age of 18 were without health insurance in 2006.

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