



2007 Legislative Priorities

The 80th Regular Session of the Texas Legislature



Improve indoor air quality of school buses.

Texas PTA is partnering with Environmental Defense, a national environmental advocacy group, to improve the air quality of Texas school buses. The state of Texas is home to over 35,000 school buses that transport children to and from school every day, as well as for field trips and athletic events.

Several studies report that children riding school buses are exposed to high concentrations of fine particles and other toxic substances inside the bus due to the intrusion of the buses' own emissions into the bus cabin. While school buses continue to be the safest way to transport children, the emissions from their diesel engines contribute to a host of health effects, including dizziness, nausea, increased incidence and severity of asthma attacks, and chronic bronchitis.

To clean up Texas' more than 35,000 school buses, the state should help school districts by accelerating their bus "replacement" timelines and by retrofitting middle-aged buses with advanced filter technology to clean up diesel exhaust.

Revenues already collected for air quality purposes are available to clean up buses. Texans are paying this money to the state, but much of it is sitting unspent in the State Treasury. Two funds — the Texas Emissions Reduction Plan (TERP) and one intended to help lower-income Texans clean up old, polluting vehicles — are projected to hold over \$100 million of unappropriated money at the end of 2007. Legislators should use these funds to clean up the air our children breathe.

Promote improved school nutrition laws.

Texas PTA supports improved school nutrition laws to protect the integrity of the school breakfast and lunch program to promote children's health, well-being and academic success. Research shows healthy eating habits can improve attendance, energy levels, classroom participation, school behavior, test scores and academic success.

Because good health is linked to learning ability, it is critical to ensure tomorrow's adults develop healthy bodies and healthy minds through good nutrition.

Expand the smoking cessation and prevention programs statewide.

Texas PTA supports a statewide comprehensive tobacco prevention and cessation program to include school-based and community-based programs, media and enforcement.

Tobacco costs more than \$6.4 billion in health care and lost productivity in Texas each year. Texas ranks 40th in the US in spending for tobacco prevention. Exposure to second-hand smoke is associated with an increased risk for sudden infant death syndrome, asthma, bronchitis and pneumonia in young children.

Texas PTA supports expansion of the successful Texas Prevention Initiative, a Center for Disease Control modeled program in Baytown. At a cost of \$3.00 per capita, the Texas Prevention Initiative has demonstrated results including a \$58 return to the state in health care cost savings for every \$3 spent on the program, a 36 percent reduction in youth smoking and a 26 percent reduction in adult smoking.

Oppose vouchers.

Texas PTA supports our system of public education as the major vehicle for perpetuating the basic values of a democratic system of government. This system must be strengthened and continue to be governed by public officials accountable to the public and supported by adequate funding.

Texas PTA opposes voucher systems or tuition credits for nonpublic school tuition and other education-related expenses.

Strengthen child passenger restraint laws.

Texas PTA supports an upgrade to our current Child Occupant Protection Law governing the use of child safety seat devices. Motor vehicle crashes remain the leading cause of unintentional injury-related death among children ages 14 and under. Each year, nearly 1,600 child occupants ages 14 and under die in motor vehicle crashes and close to 228,000 are injured as occupants in motor vehicles.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the American Academy of Pediatrics, as well as other injury prevention experts tell us that children need to be in booster seats from the time they outgrow a car seat until they're about 8 years old and about 57" tall. Strong occupant protection laws that are consistently enforced are one of the best ways to prevent injuries and save children's lives. It is time to close this significant gap in Texas' child occupant protection law.