

# 2009 Virginia PTA Proposed Legislative Program (PLP)



**THE PLP** is the next step in the PTA legislation process. Members should be given the opportunity to review and vote on the Policy Statement that will result in the Legislation Program.

**LEGISLATIVE ACTION ITEMS (LAI)** are requests for the introduction, passage, or defeat of specific legislation by the General Assembly and/or regulations by the Board of Education or other appropriate agencies.

**POLICY STATEMENTS (PS)** are statements of the Virginia PTA/PTSA on general issues and may be used as the basis for addressing issues before the General Assembly, Virginia Board of Education or other appropriate agencies.

## **LEGISLATION ACTION ITEM #1**

**Virginia PTA seeks legislation that will strengthen current restrictions on smoking to prohibit smoking indoors in commercial establishments that are open to and frequented by the public.**

### **Rationale:**

The U.S. Surgeon General's June 2006 report on *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke* concludes that secondhand smoke exposure causes disease and premature death in adults and children who do not smoke. Secondhand smoke contains over 200 poisons, 70 of which are known carcinogens. Because it is unfiltered, smoke from the end of a cigarette is more lethal than that actually inhaled by a smoker. The report expressly states that: "because their bodies are developing, infants and children are especially vulnerable to the poisons in second hand smoke." Such exposure leads to a documented increase in the incidences of acute respiratory illness, ear infections, asthma and sudden infant death syndrome.

## **LEGISLATIVE ACTION ITEM #2**

**Virginia PTA seeks legislation that funds the expansion and integration of Arts Education into all core curricula subjects beyond the Visual Arts Standards of Learning (SOL).**

### **Rationale:**

Virginia PTA believes that the arts, music, dance, drama, and visual arts are central to learning. Infusion of the arts in elementary and secondary education curricula is key to the development of students. We support programs that promote public awareness of the arts and arts education and the integration of the arts in school curriculum requirements -- without cutting funding from existing programs -- as part of the K - 12 curriculum at all schools.

Research has shown that "arts education increases interest in academic learning, cognitive and basic skills development, and the development of academic achievement skills" (R.R. Konrad, *Empathy, Arts, and Social Studies*, 2000).

Despite these findings and the inclusion of arts as one of the "core academic subjects" in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), many schools faced with tightening budgets fail to fund arts programs. Schools that provide little or no arts education are denying students the opportunity to master skills that will best prepare them for the highly competitive labor market of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Arts education is a fundamental component of comprehensive learning for grades K-12.

The report from the Center for Education Policy concludes that, since the enactment of NCLB, instructional time for art and music has been reduced by 22 percent. This at a time when parents, employers, and civic leaders are demanding improvements to the learning environment that will make our schools places where all learners will access a complete education and opportunities to succeed. These demands cannot be met without comprehensive arts education in our nation's schools.

### **LEGISLATION ACTION ITEM #3**

**Virginia PTA seeks legislation supporting the removal of toys and educational aids found to be unsafe as identified by the Consumer Product Safety Commission from all public schools and child care centers. We support the development of standards and regulations to aid in keeping unsafe toys and other unsafe products out of public schools and child day care centers. Furthermore, the Virginia PTA seeks legislation that would influence retailers to remove recalled products from their inventories in an expeditious manner.**

#### **Rationale:**

Lead, which accumulates in a child's body over time, can cause permanent, irreversible injuries such as growth and behavioral problems, learning disabilities, and death. According to the National Safety Council's most recent data (2005), there are more than 400,000 children younger than six (6) years old with unacceptable levels of lead in their blood. Children's playthings should not contribute to this disturbing statistic.

Seventeen (17) percent of the children's products tested had levels of lead above the 600 parts per million federal standard that would trigger a recall of lead paint. (Ecology Center) According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, last year 73,000 kids went to the Emergency Room because of toy-related injuries. There are more than 9 million toys under recall worldwide from major manufacturers today.

The millions of dangerous toys reaching the marketplace before their hazards are identified highlight the inadequacy of safety protocols. Toy industry self-regulation and voluntary safety standards, which are inadequate and often not adhered to, have failed to produce safe children's products. No adequate protocols exist to address known hazards. No testing is required to identify lead in toys despite the millions of individual toys and pieces of children's jewelry that have been recalled for excessive lead content.

Consumers have a right to expect that toys they select for their children be designed with safety as a priority.

### **POLICY STATEMENT #1**

**Virginia PTA supports the expansion and improvement of activities that will prepare teachers to incorporate the arts into the curriculum of academic subjects to supplement and engage students in learning.**

#### **Rationale:**

Educators should be provided opportunities to acquire the skills to incorporate the arts into their courses of study through resources such as higher education and local school division training. Arts education not only cultivates imagination, self-expression, and creativity, but also plays a vital role in the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. It promotes visual literacy, which enables students to analyze and interpret the meaning of complex visual imagery that is prevalent in the media and popular culture. Additionally, the arts provide a point of departure for learning in other disciplines, including social studies, history, literature, science, and math.