



**Position Paper:
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

The New York State Congress of Parents & Teachers, Inc. believes that all children, including very young children, should be given complete and equal access to educational opportunities. The education programs should include the Standards set by the Board of Regents, and the students should be given all the benefits of the NYS Education system.

In order to provide children with an early start to learning, NYS PTA believes that New York State Education Department (NYSED) must ensure that the achievement levels of all children and youth will increase and that each person will become a viable citizen of the community; first the school community and then the community at large. Early education for young children, especially ages 3-8, must include the social/emotional skills, physical skills, as well as academics to ensure that education and life skills include the whole child. It is especially important that parents and guardians be an integral part of the early childhood education program to assist in goal setting; therefore, a parent involvement policy should be part of the required mandates of the Regent's policy on Early Childhood Education.

Enhancing the opportunities for children to read, write, and learn math and science in the early years will increase the skills needed for successful student achievement. This can be effectively accomplished if young children learn to love learning, especially reading.

It is essential to consider the social-emotional component in any plan for early childhood education. The child needs to learn communication skills, how to get along with others, and to learn the necessary and proper school behaviors to become a competent member of society. We therefore recommend that the policy increases the guidance support staff to assist in this aspect of development. We need to teach children how to be comfortable in the education environment, and professionals in psychology and guidance are trained in this area.

NYS PTA believes that all children should be provided with healthy choices. These include nutrition, mental health and physical education programs, and recess opportunities; these need to be a mandated part of this policy.

NYS PTA advocates for full funding for these programs, for professional development of teachers, and for parent-involvement programs in all school districts.

Important Points within the Regents policy:

****Expand initiatives to provide information, training and support to parents and other caregivers of young children from birth to age two.**

NYS PTA not only agrees with this necessary component but encourages that our organization be a part of the training, not only for parents of young children, but also extended to parents of children from birth through age 21. We advocate for a mandated parent-involvement policy to be developed jointly by the NYSED and the NYS PTA that includes training to parents on how to communicate and partner with the schools and the education community at large.

****Establish universal pre-kindergarten statewide in all public school districts.**

NYS PTA wholeheartedly agrees that this component is necessary and that it be a part of the policy. We would like the funds needed to be mandated as part of the state budget in order to provide the best supports for young children. This would include the academic needs, the social-emotional needs, and the physical needs of children. We would like the option of a parent (guardian) opting out for one year, if the child is developmentally not ready for a full-time program. We recommend that a mandated screening be established, that is based upon scientific research, to assist in determining the needs of and goals for each individual child.

****Change compulsory school age from six to five years old.**

NYS PTA believes that there should be consistency for children who are already in a school setting because of special education needs, and having the transition for them at age five into the public setting would be beneficial in transferring supports as needed into their neighborhood school. This would allow parents to transition easily into the needed parent-involvement component of public schools. Research shows that the earlier that a parent is involved in the school environment, the higher the level of student achievement. The funds for schools should be increased in the state budget to cover the costs of an earlier entrance into school. We believe that because the academics are increasing, that the entrance into school at age five would be beneficial. We believe that there should be complete screening to see if the child is developmentally ready for a full time program, and that the “cutoff” date could be changed accordingly.

****Require full day kindergarten for all age eligible children.**

NYS PTA supports the requirement for full-day kindergarten. Many children need a transitional period to adjust to a full day of school, especially those who have never been in school or have been in school only one or two mornings a week. A process needs to be established for these children to enter school initially on a part-time basis, and then transition to full time. Transportation, adequate funding, and highly qualified teachers with support staff need to be included in this full time kindergarten plan.

****Strengthen prekindergarten through grade 3 programs by ensuring the use of research-based strategies in ways that are appropriate to the age and development of children.**

NYS PTA believes in using scientifically-based reading and writing programs and to have data on children’s progress so that parents can help in the strategies of learning. The reports, the programs, and the strategies need to be written in a complete, concise, and easy to access method so that all parents can participate. This should include translation of materials into other languages if needed.

****Increase support to students with disabilities (SWD) through earlier access to inclusive educational settings.**

NYS PTA believes that we should give access to inclusive programs to SWD but that for some cases, the self-contained programs are still needed and should be available. This change into an only inclusive setting should never be an all or nothing approach. The individual child must be viewed as a whole child with strengths and weaknesses, and a full discussion of those factors must be completed before any child is placed into an inclusive setting. The parent must be fully involved in this determination and should be included since they have relevant information on whether their child can be placed in the inclusive setting or needs to be transitioned into the setting at a later time. Tests and assessments should also reflect those individual needs as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the child in the academic, social-emotional and physical environment of the school setting.

****Expand opportunities for meaningful engagement of parents and other caregivers as active participants in their child’s education.**

NYS PTA believes that parents are the first and most enduring teachers for their children. They are their child’s best advocates and supporters and need to be an integral part of the school system. This can be accomplished by having meaningful participation in schools through shared decision making teams and membership on other policy committees.

****Expand collaborative efforts by leveraging the resources of community organizations that offer comprehensive services, including health and nutrition.**

NYS PTA recognizes that many community organizations can and should be available as resources for parents and children in schools. If services can be provided by outside organizations, including screenings for children (i.e. Lighthouse for screening eye disorders, dental groups to screen for problems with teeth, screening for lead poisoning), training seminars on how to be knowledgeable of the total child, more parents would access these fine resources and this would add to the community support for the school district.

****Review alignment of State Standards, curriculum and assessment in prekindergarten through grade 3.**

NYS PTA agrees that curriculum used within the state education system for all grade levels must be aligned with the state standards in order to assure that children are prepared for the required academics, and can be successful students and adults in the community. This alignment will ensure all students have the opportunity to achieve a diploma and go onto higher education and/or the workforce. The education for a child needs to be viewed as a complete process from birth through adulthood.

****Work with institutions of higher education to focus the preparation and training of prekindergarten through grade 3 teachers and administrators on the developmental and academic needs of young children.**

NYS PTA agrees that there should be good preparation and training of all teachers but that it is not necessary to limit teachers to qualify for only pre-K to grade 3; rather that certification include pre-K to grade 6.

****Mobilize the resources of the USNY to support quality early childhood programs for children from birth through grade 3.**

NYS PTA supports the need for librarians and reading specialists to work on early childhood programs in order to develop relevant skills in the young child. We encourage that the Parents as Reading Partners (PARP) and the Reflections Arts in Education programs be included as available resources for early childhood education.

****Establish a stable funding structure to support prekindergarten and full-day kindergarten initiatives across the State.**

NYS PTA supports the full funding of prekindergarten and full-day kindergarten if the programs become part of the mandates for early childhood education. We support the full funding of teacher training, and for parent involvement to support the early childhood programs in the State.

NYS PTA believes that the Regent's revised policy on Early Childhood Education is comprehensive but that the policy must have a meaningful parent involvement piece which includes training, increased communication, and partnerships between the parents and school districts. For every young child, there is a parent or guardian who is working for success of that child, and without that parent, the child does not have the best opportunity to achieve. Every child in NYS needs a good start.

Adopted 8/06