



## **The 81st Regular Session of the Texas Legislature**

### **2008-2009 Legislative Priorities**

#### **Improve Indoor Air Quality of 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. 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 has begun to help school districts by allocating \$7.5 million to create a grant program called Texas Clean School Bus Program to fund retrofits for middle-aged buses using advanced filter technology to clean up diesel exhaust.

However, Texas can do more. Revenues already exist for air quality purposes in funds that Texans continue to finance, but much of the money sits 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. Texas PTA supports increasing allocations from these funds and other appropriate sources to clean up the air our children breathe on school buses.

#### **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 eight years old and about 4' 7" 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.

The Texas Legislature had the opportunity to clarify state law so that **ALL** Texans - birth to old age - are safely and securely restrained when traveling in a motor vehicle. The Senate passed a comprehensive bill in 2007, but the House did not. Texas PTA will work to ensure that this year will be the year that Texas passes a law that protects **ALL** Texans.

### **Promote Healthy Lifestyles through Increased Physical Activity, Rigorous Implementation of the Texas Public School Nutrition Policy, Support for Comprehensive Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Programs, and Parent Education**

Texas PTA supports efforts to improve child nutrition and reduce childhood obesity through the implementation of the Texas Department of Agriculture Public School Nutrition Policy, increased physical education and physical activity in Texas schools, and parent education regarding healthy lifestyles.

Research shows healthy eating habits can improve attendance, energy levels, classroom participation, school behavior, test scores and academic success. Students who are physically active are less likely to develop a host of health problems including Type 2 Diabetes and hypertension.

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 is 40<sup>th</sup> in spending for tobacco prevention. Exposure to secondhand smoke is associated with an increased risk for sudden infant death syndrome, asthma, bronchitis, and pneumonia in young children.

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 and active lifestyles.

### **Restrict Use of Cellular Technology by Teens While Driving a Motor Vehicle**

The Texas PTA supports legislation that further restricts the use of wireless communications devices, including cellular phones, by youth under the age of 18 while operating a motor vehicle.

While only seven percent of the nation's motorists, teens account for 14 percent of all fatal accidents. Teen drivers are four times more likely to die on the road than older drivers.

Drivers using cell phones are five times more likely to crash than non-distracted drivers. People are as impaired when they drive and talk on a cell phone as they are when they drive intoxicated.

### **Secure Passage of a Smoke-Free Workplace Law**

Secondhand smoke causes more than one million illnesses in children and youth each year, including 150,000 to 300,000 lower respiratory track infections and 26,000 new cases of asthma. Exposure to second-hand smoke decreases lung efficiency and impairs lung function in children and youth of all ages.

Food service employees, many of them 18 and under, have a 50% higher risk of dying from lung cancer than the general public. These young people deserve to work in a healthy environment, free from second-hand smoke. Just as the state regulates the temperature at which food should be served in restaurants in order to protect consumers, Texas should regulate smoking in workplaces to protect workers.

Texas PTA supports a comprehensive statewide smoke-free law to protect the health of Texas workers, especially our youth, from the dangers of secondhand smoke.

### **Safe Schools**

Texas PTA supports the Crime Stoppers Safe Schools Program and encourages middle and high schools across Texas to participate. The Crime Stoppers Safe Schools Program is a nationally unique law enforcement tool that offers students access to an anonymous tip line for reporting campus crimes. The goal of the program is to make our schools safer by solving and preventing serious crime on our campuses, offering cash rewards to students who provide information that assists in solving and preventing serious crime.

### **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 supports educational choices within public schools and believes that parents should be involved in the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of public school choice plans.

Texas PTA opposes voucher systems or tuition credits for nonpublic school tuition and other education-related expenses, and believes home schools and other nonpublic schools should meet the same educational standards as public schools.

**TX PTA MAY SUPPORT THIS EFFORT AS WELL:  
Secure Funding for Seat Belts on School Buses**

Texas PTA supports funding for the implementation of HB 323, by Hamilton, the seat belts on school buses law. Beginning in September of 2010 school buses purchased for use by school districts are required to be equipped with 3-point seat belts. The same rule will apply to charter buses rented by school districts beginning in 2011.