

The mission of Maryland PTA is to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

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Organized in 1915, the Maryland Congress of Parents and Teachers, Incorporated ("Maryland PTA") is a constituent association of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers ("National PTA"). The mission of the Maryland PTA is to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

The objectives of the Maryland PTA are:

- A. To promote the welfare of children and youth in home, school, places of worship, and throughout the community;
- B. To raise the standards of home life;
- C. To advocate for laws that further the education, physical and mental health, welfare, and safety of children and youth;
- D. To promote the collaboration and engagement of families and educators in the education of children and youth;
- E. To engage the public in united efforts to secure the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social well-being of all children and youth; and
- F. To advocate for fiscal responsibility regarding public tax dollars in public education funding.

These objectives are accomplished through advocacy and education in collaboration with parents, families, teachers, educators, students, and the public.



Dr. Edna Harvin Battle  
President

Maryland PTA has advocated every day on behalf of children in the State and worked to empower families by providing resources to support children's learning and development. Our core values include collaboration, commitment, diversity, respect and accountability. Through strong partnerships, we dedicate ourselves to the success of every child. Maryland PTA values individual contributions and believes we all share in the responsibility of achieving the PTA mission.

With that in mind, Maryland PTA is pleased to present its legislative agenda for the upcoming session of the Maryland General Assembly. The 2020 Maryland PTA Legislative Agenda outlines our policy priorities and positions on proposed legislative items that affect children. We hope our constituent associations will use this Agenda as a guide as they advocate at the local level, and that policy makers will contact Maryland PTA as the primary source to answer questions or need further information on issues involving children. Please contact Maryland PTA at [info@mdpta.org](mailto:info@mdpta.org) or by dialing 410-760-6221 to be connected with the appropriate member of our team who can provide assistance. Together, we can speak for *every child with one voice.*



## Maryland PTA Legislative Priorities

For this legislative session, Maryland PTA has several priorities of interest that affect children in the following areas:

1. Investment in education
2. Strong academic standards
3. School construction and healthy educational environments
4. Safe schools and violence prevention
5. Public health and child nutrition
6. Juvenile justice and delinquency prevention
7. Immigration services and support



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### Investment in Education

Maryland's public education system is currently underfunded by approximately \$2.9 billion. In 2016, Maryland created the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education ("Kirwan Commission"). The Kirwan Commission was charged with, among other things,

- Reviewing and assessing the State's education financing formula and accountability measures for public education;
- Determining how the federal Every Student Succeeds Act would affect education in the State; and,
- Recommending an update of the base funding level and the per pupil weights for students to ensure that all students are adequately prepared for college and to be competitive in the global workforce.

The Kirwan Commission is expected to submit final recommendations to legislators in time for the 2020 legislative session. The final recommendations will address policy initiatives including:

- Early childhood education
- High quality and diverse teachers and leaders
- College and career readiness pathways
- More resources to ensure success for all students
- Governance and accountability

In June 2019, Senate Bill 1030 enacted "The Blueprint for Maryland's Future" as State education policy, based on the interim recommendations of the Kirwan Commission. The bill provided significant funding increases for several programs and establishes the Blueprint for Maryland's Future Fund. The bill provided funding in FY 2020 per the Governor's discretion, and mandates that additional funding be included in the Governor's budgets for FY 2021 and FY 2022. Maryland PTA and other advocacy and educational organizations supported the legislation, particularly the proposed increases in funding for prekindergarten, special education, programs for students living in areas of concentrated poverty, and state support for teacher salary increases.

Senate Bill 1030 was crafted to incentivize passage and full funding by creating the Office of Inspector General contingent on the release of the \$200 million in 2018 income tax funds already residing in the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education Fund (renamed the Blueprint for Maryland's Future Fund). Additionally, Senate Bill 1030 requires any funds restricted in the FY 2020 budget not transferred or released by the Governor must be distributed in FY 2021, in addition to other funds required to be distributed in FY 2021.



### **Maryland PTA supports:**

- A high-quality education for the whole child, to include early childhood education, music and creative arts, physical education, and the eight federally mandated core subjects that use technology as a teaching tool to provide educational opportunities for students to meet career objectives.
- Public education funding to support the needs of public schools to initiate or continue to offer high quality educational services to children from early childhood through adulthood.
- Adequate or supplemental funding to correct past inequities in the funding of public education until such time that all jurisdictions have sufficient financial resources to meet the needs of all students.
- Public funding to adequately and equitably ensure high quality educational services for all special needs populations, including those with physical, intellectual, emotional disabilities, gifted and talented or exceptional learners, English Language Learners, and those from impoverished communities.
- Establishment of universal, early childhood (Pre-K) education by the end of the current decade.
- Funding for staff development to ensure high quality instruction for all students, and provides for career ladder for educators and paraprofessionals, and transform teaching into a high status profession.
- Restricting public funds for the support of public schools and not permitting public funds to support private or for-profit schools via appropriations, vouchers, scholarships, or tax credits.
- Provisions to ensure fiscal responsibility and accountability with the spending of public funds appropriated for public education.
- Measures to monitor education spending levels and to prevent State and local spending levels do not fall behind what is appropriate to ensure all children get a world-class education.

### **Strong Academic Standards**

According to the Nation's Report Card, in 2019, fourth graders in Maryland performed significantly poorer in mathematics than fourth graders in 29 other states. Maryland eighth graders performed poorer than 27 other state's eighth graders. In reading, Maryland fourth graders fell behind their peers in 18 states, and eighth graders performed worse than their peers in 10 other states. Since 2013, the academic performance of Maryland students has declined when compared to their peers throughout the nation, especially in reading.

### **Maryland PTA supports:**

- A curriculum framework focused on college and career readiness to provide fundamental knowledge for life in a global economy.
- Activities to inform parents and educators of curriculum requirements and implementation strategies at each grade level and how Maryland's increased academic standards will lead to improved student preparedness.
- Activities that include parents and classroom teachers in planning and evaluating curriculum implementation and outcomes.
- Ensuring students with special needs have access to opportunities that make them college and career-ready, and that parents are closely involved in the process.
- Periodic assessment of students to ensure progress toward preparedness.
- Providing for creative arts education such as music, fine arts, foreign language, as well as technology classes, to supplement the primary curricula and develop well-rounded children.
- Providing for educational choices and opportunities in trades and industries that do not require a college education for success.





- Encouraging educational opportunities and enrichment activities outside of school, such as summer camps, to all students to support academic retention and learning.
- Using assessments by the state, educators, and parents to improve instruction and student achievement.
- Maximizing classroom instruction by looking at various ways to administer standardized testing so that long-term results can be adequately obtained and sustained learning will occur with the fewest instructional interruptions possible.
- No single test be considered the sole determinant of a student's eligibility for high school graduation, college or career future.
- An independent review of the high stakes tests that are administered to all public school students.
- Not ever using standardized multiple-choice tests and school readiness tests with preschool and early elementary children for any purpose.

## School construction and healthy educational environments

Based on the Interagency Commission on School Construction's (ICSC) FY 2019 Annual Maintenance Report, less than half of the State's 24 public schools systems achieved a high percentage of "Good" or "Superior" ratings. Approximately 37.5% of the State's school building portfolio has an average adjusted age between 17 and 27 years old, which is below the statewide average of 30 years for square footage. In other words, the majority of the school buildings in the State were built before 1992. Ten of the State's public school systems have a "not adequate" or "poor" rating for maintenance effectiveness of the school buildings. Between September 2018 and June 2019, ICSC maintenance assessors inspected 231 public schools throughout the State. While maintenance assessors inspected interior walls, windows, and doors of the schools, it unclear from the ICSC Report whether any of the buildings contained lead or other hazardous materials.

Additionally, lead in Maryland schools continues to be a concern. As of September 30, 2019, the Maryland Department of the Environment had received a total of 44,957 first-draw lead sample results from 15 public school systems, 175 nonpublic schools, and five charter schools. Of those samples, 1,740 samples (3.9%) exceeded the Action Level (AL) of 20 parts per billion (ppb) of lead. Of the samples that exceeded the Action Level, 735 (42.2%) were from drinking water outlets and 981 (56.4%) were from non-consumption outlets.

The Interagency Commission on School Construction acknowledges the total cost of ownership of school facilities continues to increase because of the trend of increasing size and expense of facilities. Despite this, Maryland children deserve physical environments that support the effective delivery of education programs and that can be effectively and efficiently maintained. No child should have to learn in schools with inadequate space, leaky roofs, mold and mildew, or inoperable heating, ventilation, and air conditioning.

### **Maryland PTA supports:**

- A school construction bonding bill that assists counties with modernizing and renovating school buildings.
- Reducing or eliminating portable classrooms because they do not provide the safety or facilities that a permanent structure provides.
- Modernizing HVAC systems so that the school environment is properly cooled, heated, and kept mold free.



- The safe and responsible removal of lead from existing uses, including lead in paints, plumbing, and in other building materials.
- Environmental sustainability by supporting efforts to build “green” schools, reducing use of plastic bottles by installing water bottle filling stations, and encouraging natural playing surfaces.
- Reducing all lead exposure to children, including in home, play, and school environments. Areas of concern are lead in paint, drinking water, athletic fields, and artificial play surfaces.
- Evaluating and prioritizing safe routes to schools in any road or pedestrian improvements.
- Eliminating the use of portable structures and limitations on the duration of their use when they are a necessary interim.
- Reviewing and modifying state-rated capacity formula and teaching stations.
- Including effective security features in all school buildings.
- Involving parents and community stakeholders in opportunities for public input and oversight of construction projects.
- Ensuring that school facilities meet the needs of each enrolled student, group or program, and serve the communities as required by public policy.
- Maintaining adequate, safe, and up-to-date school buildings and grounds regardless of the age of the building.
- Using school construction materials that are cost effective, energy efficient, and structurally sound.

## Safe schools and violence prevention

The Maryland School Safety Grant Program (SSGP) provides grants to county school boards to fund school security improvements. Under Education Article §5-317, Annotated Code of Maryland, the Governor must allocate \$10 million annually for the SSGP as of fiscal year 2019. Maryland PTA applauds the funding of reinforced security measures in school buildings. However, additional services should be provided to ensure students have the wrap around services necessary to address the emotional, mental, psychological, and social events that can create an unsafe environment and often lead to violence.

Additionally, schools nationwide are ramping up drills to train students and school personnel on what to do and how to remain safe in case of an active shooter. Unfortunately, teachers and students have been injured during some of the drills. Some students report feeling more traumatized than trained by the active shooter drills.

### Maryland PTA supports:

- Training teachers and staff regarding school safety and violence prevention.
- Training educators and students regarding dealing with violence and how to notice the signs and report them.
- Funding county Departments of Social Services to employ social workers, psychologists, therapists, and other mental health professionals to provide support children, families, and communities in order to prevent violence.
- Providing more law enforcement resources to engage in community policing and deter school violence.
- Common sense proposals to limit youth access to firearms, strengthen background checks, fund gun violence research efforts, and ban assault weapons.





## Public health and child nutrition

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) plays a critical role in addressing hunger and food insecurity in our State. It is the first line of defense against hunger for low-income families. In addition, participation in SNAP links children from struggling families to much-needed, free school meals. SNAP, combined with school breakfast and lunch, helps to ensure that our students are not sitting in classrooms hungry. SNAP reaches 386,137 households with 737,714 individuals in an average month (FY 2016) and more than two in five SNAP households included children.

SNAP is a vital part of the social safety net, providing benefits to more than 270,000 low-income children in Maryland. When kids consistently get the nutrition they need, they are better able to break the cycle of poverty and grow up strong - for a stronger, more productive Maryland. Additionally, when families get the nutrition they need, fewer face food insecurity, which reduces the health care costs associated with hunger.

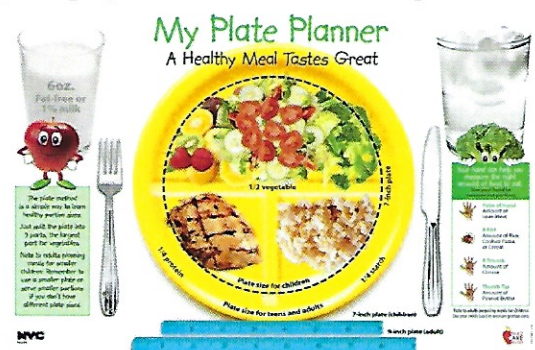
The Federal government is proposing to limit states' authority under SNAP, which would eliminate SNAP benefits for 1.7 million households. Hungry children cannot learn!

The School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program play a vital role in reducing childhood hunger. However, except for in schools that offer universal free meals, school breakfast and lunch are not guaranteed to all students. When a student arrives to the cafeteria without enough cash in hand or funds in their account to cover their meal, they begin to accrue school meal debt. While this happens for a variety of reasons, it is often a sign that a family is struggling financially.

Throughout the U.S., three quarters of school districts have reported the accumulation of unpaid meal debt throughout the school year. Many schools implement practices that stigmatize or shame students in order to motivate parents to repay this debt. Examples found in Maryland include: serving “alternative meals” that consist of a cold cheese sandwich, prohibiting students with unpaid meal debt from participating in extracurricular activities, barring these students from accessing their academic records or report cards, making students wear stickers indicating they can't pay, and employing debt collectors to claim unpaid school meal fees.

These practices are unjust and harmful to students' mental and emotional well-being. In addition, they disproportionately impact the over 380,000 low-income students across the state who rely on school meals every day for the nutrition they need to grow, learn, and thrive. The No Shame at School Act would abolish these harsh practices and require schools to take the necessary steps to ensure that all students who are eligible for free meals receive them. Furthermore, it would permit school systems to claim free and reduced-price school meals retroactively for students who are certified to receive them during the school year, giving schools the ability to reduce their debt burden while protecting students' dignity.

As of November 5, 2019, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed 2,051 lung injury cases associated with use of e-cigarette, or vaping, products were reported by 49 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Thirty-nine (39) people, ranging from 17 to 75 years old, have died from the lung injuries. Maryland has had 23 reported cases. Researchers from the Mayo





Clinic found the lung damage was similar to a chemical burn one might see with exposures to toxic chemical fumes, poisonous gases and toxic agents.

There is compelling evidence that all energy drinks are potentially harmful to youth due to the high levels of caffeine, sugars and other stimulants, which currently lack adequate content labeling to inform consumers. Non-alcoholic energy drinks are a multi-billion dollar industry. The packaging of alcoholic energy drinks mimics non-alcoholic energy drinks, which particularly appeal to youth. Alcoholic drinks with caffeine appeal to young people who consume caffeinated nonalcoholic energy drinks. Thirty-one percent (31%) of 12- to 17-year-olds report regular consumption of non-alcoholic energy drinks. Alcoholic energy drinks are prepackaged beverages containing alcohol, which is a depressant, and stimulants such as caffeine and guarana. Adding stimulants to alcohol reduces a drinker's perception of intoxication and promotes the delusion of drinking and functioning without impairment. In an agreement with a coalition of State Attorneys General, Anheuser Busch and Miller/Coors have discontinued distribution of alcoholic energy drinks. However, other companies continue to produce these beverages.

### **Maryland PTA supports:**

- Providing school meals with adequate nutrition and fresh, local foods.
- Ensuring children receive nutritional and financial support they need with compassion and dignity.
- Providing adequate time and facilities for good hygiene prior to and after lunch, such as for adequate hand washing (not just hand sanitizer).
- Providing safe clean drinking water and allow students to have water for drinking in class when possible.
- Educating children about the hazards of vaping.
- Banning the sale of electronic cigarettes to persons under the age of 21.
- Mandatory reporting of lung illnesses to the Maryland Health Department and CDC.
- Educating parents, students, administrators, teachers and community members about the dangers of consuming alcoholic and non-alcoholic energy drinks.
- Requiring that alcoholic energy drink manufacturers provide prominent alcohol content percentage on the label, as well as health and safety warnings indicating the dangers of combining alcohol with caffeinated beverages.
- Banning the sale of all kinds of energy drinks in all K-12 schools.

### Juvenile justice and delinquency prevention

September 2019 marked the 45th anniversary of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP), the nation's first comprehensive law designed to prevent children and youth from entering the juvenile justice system and to protect those currently in the system. Juvenile justice and delinquency prevention has historically been one of PTA's key public policy priorities, and the National PTA continues to advocate for improvements to the juvenile justice system in the United States. Part of that improvement signifies protecting minors from false convictions or incarcerations, which may have occurred out of malevolence, poor counsel, misguidedness, tampering of evidence, language barriers, or just a plain lack of advocacy or support. Understanding the brain development of youth and how traumatic an experience can be when interacting with law enforcement officers is enough to warrant the need to have parents advocate when youth are questioned by law enforcement.





The March 2013 American Academy of Child Adolescence and Psychiatry policy statement regarding Interviewing and Interrogating Juvenile Suspects states adolescents use their brains in a fundamentally different manner than adults. They are more likely to act on impulse, without fully considering the consequences of their decisions or actions. Additionally, the Supreme Court has recognized that there is a heightened risk that juvenile suspects will falsely confess when pressured by police during the interrogation process. Research also demonstrates that when in police custody, many juveniles do not fully understand or appreciate their rights, options, or alternatives. Accordingly, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry believes that juveniles should have an attorney present during questioning by police or other law enforcement agencies.

**Maryland PTA supports:**

- Legislation, policies, and practices that acknowledge the value of having parents or guardians present when their child is questioned by law enforcement.
- Dropout prevention programs that address the diverse needs of students at risk of leaving school without a diploma.
- Dropout re-engagement programs that provide accessible and adequate services such as assessments and educational path counseling so that youth can complete their secondary education as well as to provide guidance for post-secondary education.
- Evidence-based truancy programs that provide interventions, which are non-punitive, support effective family counseling, and provide community-based solutions.
- Specialized training for school-based law enforcement and calls to develop a uniform school discipline code.
- Support family involvement for juveniles who are in custody or in the juvenile justice system, by making family involvement easier and more accessible.
- Quality instructional materials and books within correctional facilities for youth.
- Family to be able to provide additional books if they are not available by Department of Juvenile Services.
- Limiting records access to only staff who need the information.

Immigration services and support

According to the American Immigration Council, Maryland has a large immigrant community. Roughly 15% of all Maryland residents were born in another country, while 11% are native-born Americans who have at least one immigrant parent. Immigrants support Maryland’s economy across sectors, for example, a quarter of all Maryland healthcare practitioners and nearly 42% of the State’s building maintenance workers and groundskeepers are immigrants. The Center for Immigration Studies lists Baltimore, Montgomery County, and Prince George’s County as “sanctuary jurisdictions.” As workers, business owners, taxpayers, and neighbors, immigrants are an integral part of Maryland’s communities and make contributions that benefit all Marylanders.

**Maryland PTA supports:**

- Allowing school districts to tailor their language instructional programs to meet local needs.
- Programs that assist school districts in ensuring that limited English-speaking students meet the same academic standards as all Maryland students.
- Providing healthcare and other services to help immigrant families sustain their families and educate their children.
- Implementing policies to prevent unlawful discrimination against immigrants.

