

# 2009 Ohio PTA Convention Legislation Report

This is an exciting time for child and family advocates both in Columbus and Washington, D.C.

- We have a new U. S. President who is striving to attack health care reform and address some of the key issues of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) during its reauthorization.
- The State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) has been expanded providing health insurance to more children. Even with this expansion there are still children who do not have health insurance or access to health services due to the increase of families losing their jobs and insurance.
- Recently, National PTA CEO, Byron Garrett, testified in Washington in support of the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act, impacting what children eat and drink in schools through the School Lunch and Breakfast programs and also policies centered on recess and physical education. Ohio PTA recently signed onto a letter with National PTA in support of reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act. One of the key components in his testimony centered deals with the beverages sold during and after school in our school cafeterias. This is the same topic we have attempted to address here in Ohio without success even though we did gain support from several of our partners and some of our schools have seriously looked at the beverages sold through their wellness policies. Provisions in NCLB will change with reauthorization but at this time truly not able to give any concrete examples. PTA will continue to advocate for effective parent involvement provisions included in any reauthorization efforts.

Ohio PTA has also signed onto a letter with National PTA dealing with the introduction of S. 568, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Reauthorization Act of 2009 (JJDPRA), which has protected youth for over 30 years. The requested action focuses on prevention and intervention, improving conditions in juvenile facilities, allowing states to continue to serve youth tried in adult court in juvenile facilities, and providing comprehensive services and support for youth

In Columbus, Governor Strickland is a true advocate for public education and issues involving children and families. Implementing comprehensive reform of complex issues such as school funding, education and health care is not easy.

As of this past week in the 128<sup>th</sup> General Assembly there have been 122 bills introduced in the Ohio House of Representatives and 93 bills introduced in the Ohio Senate. Ohio PTAs positions are based on the resolutions adopted by delegates at the annual convention. As a result some of these bills introduced are supported by the Ohio PTA, others Ohio PTA opposes, some that Ohio PTA may monitor the final details have yet to be determined, and some that Ohio PTA will not be able to take a position on even though it may be a key issues affecting children and their families. These are the issues on which the Ohio PTA does not have a resolution.

One of the most notable bills is House Bill 1, which is the biennial budget bill. It contains components of the Governor's Education Reform package as well as increased accountability for charter schools that are failing. Additional items include funding changes, academic standards, replacing OGT with multi factorial and/or end of course exams (ACT Plus), number and type of performance indicators, all day

kindergarten, expanding the learning day and year, teacher licensure and training criteria, and the inclusion of family and community engagement teams in all of schools. Several of the components within House Bill 1 are supported by the Ohio PTA, such as those which promote parent involvement, provide alternative forms of assessment for children and increase the accountability of our charter schools not succeeding in meeting the needs of the children being served. Other components Ohio PTA is monitoring but does not have a position on are lengthening the learning day and many of the teacher related provisions. Ohio PTA will continue to monitor this key piece of legislation and will be seeking members; assistance in contacting legislators in the coming weeks as changes continue to be made by both the House and Senate.

Ohio PTA has been actively involved in House Bill 26, which would ban corporal punishment in Ohio's schools. This bill is sponsored by Representative Brian Williams. Similar legislation was introduced last session, but did not make it through both the Senate and the House. Ohio PTA has asked its members to contact their legislators in support of this legislation, as there is expected to be a vote in the House on April 29. Ohio PTA believes there are alternative forms of effective discipline other than paddling. There are only a few school districts in Ohio that still allow paddling in schools.

House Bill 60 is another piece of legislation that Ohio PTA supports. It addresses the issue of school vending machines and beverage nutrition standards. This legislation has similar provisions as those addressed by National PTA.

There are several bills that Ohio PTA opposes such as Senate Bill 6, which provides vouchers to special education students. Ohio PTA opposes diverting funds from public schools and is concerned about the feasibility and effectiveness of these vouchers. This legislation has the potential to remove the rights afforded to special education parents through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of representation in decision-making for their children. Proponents feel that parents need to be given an option when children are not being effectively serviced by a local district,

Ohio PTA is monitoring legislative issues dealing with:

- Dating Violence
- School funding and lottery profits
- Sex offenders
- Offenses for discharging firearms
- Health standards
- College students living on campus and meningitis/hepatitis vaccines

The Ed Choice Scholarship Program is not a new piece of legislation but an update on one passed in 2005 that Ohio PTA opposed. Under Ohio's Educational Choice (EdChoice) Scholarship Program, founded in 2005, there will be 80,000 students eligible for the 2009-2010 school year. Students who are enrolled in a public school that has been declared in Academic Watch and/or Academic Emergency for two out of the last three years are eligible. Currently there are 313 private schools registered for this program. This past year, 9,654 students were granted these scholarships (enrollment was capped at 14,000). The scholarship amount is \$5,300, which may or may not cover the tuition charged by one of the private schools. Ohio PTA's concern with this program is the lack of evaluation of the students who are participating. It is not known whether test scores have improved demonstrating that the education provided is meeting their needs.

Please visit the Ohio PTA Web site and take advantage of the new service from Cap Wiz. Through this tool, Ohio PTA can update legislation, link to additional information, and write sample letters linking members to legislators. Members are urged to sign up for the Ohio PTA legislation listserv receive advocacy alerts. The Ohio PTA Advocacy Team is here to help members understand the importance of advocating for Ohio's children and is looking for new members to join their ranks.