

## SUPPORT FOR THE CIVIC MISSION OF SCHOOLS

Adopted by Convention Delegates May 12, 2006

- WHEREAS,** The Preamble to the California State PTA Legislation Platform recognizes the importance of understanding the rights and obligations of civic responsibility, and the California State PTA supports legislation to give students the skills they need to become effective citizens and parents; and
- WHEREAS,** Americans believe that education young people for civic responsibility should be a primary purpose of public education; and
- WHEREAS,** Civic engagement on the part of Americans has declined, and 18-24 year-olds are less likely to vote than citizens age 25 and older; and
- WHEREAS,** The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports that barely one-fourth of students at upper elementary and secondary levels are proficient in civics and government, and other studies show that a majority of students are not well prepared to be effective citizens and are disengaged from civic and political life; and
- WHEREAS,** Research demonstrates that schools are an effective place to provide systemic and sustained instruction in, and opportunities for, the application of democratic principles; and
- WHEREAS,** The voluntary National Standards for Civics and Government and the California history-social science framework goals call for the integration of knowledge and cultural understanding, democratic understanding, civic values, and social participation at every grade level, however, to meet the civic mission of schools educators need the resources, skills and commitment to incorporate civic education into classroom instruction and to provide students with sequential instruction in civics in grades K-12; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA, and its units, councils and districts work to make civic learning a priority in school reform by urging the Legislature, the State Board of Education and local school governing boards to examine current practices and to strengthen the emphasis on the principles and practices of democracy, including effective implementation of civic education standards and increased collaboration between schools and communities to promote rights and obligations of responsible citizenship; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA, and its units, councils and districts collect and disseminate information to all students, parents, teachers and community members regarding full participation in, and respect for, the democratic process; and be it further

- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA, and its units, councils and districts be active in registering and encouraging eligible young people to vote; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA continue to actively support efforts to promote the fulfillment of the civic mission of schools and to help students to attain the knowledge and skills they need to become effective citizens and parents; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA send copies of the resolution to state PTA Congresses belonging to the National PTA, and prepare a resolution on the civic mission of schools to submit for consideration at the 2007 National PTA convention.

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## **BACKGROUND SUMMARY**

There has been growing concern over the past few years about the number of Americans who are increasingly disengaged from civic life and political institutions. This disengagement includes lack of involvement in electoral processes such as voting and being informed about public issues. The trend is particularly noticeable among young Americans, exemplified by studies that show citizens under the age of 25 are less likely to vote than older Americans. While the rate of youth voting increased by 11 percent in the 2004 presidential election, it is too soon to know if this is a trend or a spike in electoral participation. The concern about civic disengagement, particularly among young people, has led to the establishment of the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, a civic awareness project of the Constitutional Rights Foundation in collaboration with the Center for Civic Education and the Alliance for Representative Democracy, and to a number of resolutions proposed or adopted by such diverse and civic-minded groups as the California State Legislature, the National Council of State Legislatures, the League of Women Voters of California, organizations of the U.S. Courts, and the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Research demonstrates good programs in civics and government produce good results and are a solution to the deficiencies in civics education identified by the NAEP study and cited by others. This resolution would promote PTA's involvement in the promotion of civic education in public schools and would work toward ensuring that students who graduate from high school in California are prepared to participate in the democratic process.

PTA believes civics and government should not be incidental to the education of American students, but should be a primary purpose of education, essential to the well-being of American constitutional democracy. While most secondary students complete only a single semester course in government/civics during their senior year in high school, considered by many to be too little too late, civics and government should be an integrative and interdisciplinary subject taught systematically from kindergarten through grade 12, either as separate units and courses or as identifiable units of courses in other subjects. These units and courses must include instruction in the skills, principles and values for full participation in and commitment to our democratic society.