

## **HEALTHY LIFESTYLES FOR ALL CHILDREN**

Adopted by Convention Delegates May 2004

- WHEREAS, The California State PTA since its founding has been committed to good nutrition as an essential ingredient in every child's health and readiness to learn; and
- WHEREAS, An increasing body of research links children's and adolescents' health and nutrition to academic performance; and
- WHEREAS, Sales of low-nutrition, high-fat and/or highly sweetened foods and beverages on K-12 school campuses have increased; and
- WHEREAS, Childhood obesity has soared, and 26 percent of children statewide and 50 percent in some California school districts are overweight or obese; and
- WHEREAS, Life-threatening obesity-related health conditions in children have sharply increased, including asthma, Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular and coronary artery disease, certain cancers, and gallbladder disease, and 70 to 80 percent of obese adolescents remain obese as adults; and
- WHEREAS, Overweight and physical inactivity account for 300,000 premature preventable deaths per year in the United States, and cost California an estimated \$24.6 billion annually; and
- WHEREAS, Childhood and adolescent obesity has become a public-health crisis so severe that it calls for changes in culture and policy, including working to ensure that food served and sold to children at school promotes good health and nutrition; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA urge its units, councils and districts to encourage school districts and individual schools to improve the nutritional content and quality of foods and beverages provided or sold to students on campus, and to encourage the sale of nutritious foods and beverages during and before school hours; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA support legislation, regulation, and other state and local actions that promote the sale of healthy and nutritious food and beverages on school campuses; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA and its units, councils and districts support actions by state and local governments and local educational agencies that will provide for high-quality daily physical education programs for all children in kindergarten through grade 12; and be it further

**RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA encourage and support nutrition and health education for parents, students, teachers and community members that addresses the issue of overweight and obese children as well as healthy nutrition and regular exercise for all children; and be it further

**RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA encourage alternatives to selling low-nutrition, high fat and/or highly sweetened foods and beverages when school organizations elect to fundraise.

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Action by PTA Organizations  
Second District PTA

Position  
Approve

## **BACKGROUND SUMMARY**

“If doctors announced that nearly a fifth of our nation’s children were exhibiting signs of, say, typhoid, there’d be panic on Main Street. But for the past 10 years, public-health officials have been warning of another problem every bit as life-threatening and even more difficult to treat: childhood obesity.” That’s how Newsweek magazine describes the health crisis that threatens to make the current generation of children the first in modern history to expect a shorter life span than their parents’ generation.

PTA has made children’s health and nutrition a priority for decades. The California State PTA adopted positions in 1974 and 1991 calling for improved nutrition in school meals. But those statements did not anticipate the rise of snack-bar, “a la carte” and vending-machine food sales on school campuses. A daily diet high in empty calories is wreaking devastating consequences on children’s health. The low-nutrition, high-fat and/or highly sweetened foods and beverages readily available in schools contribute significantly to the problem, as does lack of exercise.

A recent study by WestEd adds to the body of research linking students’ academic performance to their health and well-being, including nutrition and physical fitness. “Nutritious eating in conjunction with regular physical activity is fundamental to the academic success of children,” stated a California School Boards Association report, *Linkages Between Student Health and Academic Achievement*, in 2003. “Research shows that healthy, well-nourished children are more ready to learn and can take better advantage of educational opportunities. ... Numerous studies have linked poor nutrition with lasting effects on children’s cognitive development and school performance.”

The consequences of obesity and poor nutrition cost society significant amounts of money, resulting in a net loss not only in children’s health and well-being but also in dollars. Obesity costs the United States about \$117 billion annually, \$24.6 billion of that in California.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) urges increased emphasis on prevention. “The dramatic increase in the prevalence of childhood overweight and its resultant comorbidities are associated with significant health and financial burdens, warranting strong and comprehensive prevention efforts,” the AAP notes in “Prevention of Pediatric Overweight and Obesity,” an August 2003 policy statement. “...Prevention is one of the hallmarks of pediatric practice and includes such diverse activities as newborn screenings, immunizations, and promotion of car safety seats and bicycle helmets.” This year, the AAP applied that principle when it called for eliminating soda sales from schools.

Mounting evidence makes it clear that the public-health crisis is too great to combat with mere willpower. And what kids eat at school has a significant impact. “We contend that the school food environment and its influence on dietary behavior extend beyond the school lunchroom,” write the authors of *The Association of the School Food Environment with Dietary Behaviors of Young Adolescents*, a study published in the July 2003 **American Journal of Public Health**. “Students are exposed to food throughout the school day, and this repeated exposure, especially to less healthful foods and less healthful food choices, is likely to influence food selection outside the school as well.”