POSITION STATEMENT

Adopted by the California State PTA Board of Managers February 25, 2023

Media Literacy For Students and Families

Media Literacy refers to the abilities to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate various media messages in a variety of forms. Those abilities encompass a broad set of skills and dispositions that are important for young people and for adults. According to research by Common Sense Education, media literacy requires that people be “learning how to assess the credibility of online sources, understanding how and why media is produced, and reflecting on their responsibilities as thoughtful media creators and consumers.”

California State PTA believes that both adults and students need to learn how to better manage the flood of media messages the internet delivers to us all – every hour of every day. At the same time, we believe it is particularly important for young people to have the tools they need to function well in that environment. Educators and families all have a part to play in this effort.

Experts increasingly agree that schools need to directly teach young people about how to be literate and responsible consumers of information in this new media world. Universities, non-partisan research organizations, and a variety of nonprofit groups have developed materials that can guide such teaching. The California Department of Education is required by law to provide school districts with information about these resources.

Unfortunately, research indicates that, at the local level, the approach to media literacy education is fragmented at best and completely missing at worst. For example, state law does not require media literacy to be incorporated into the curriculum, either as a discrete subject or as a set of skills to be taught in multiple subject areas.

California State PTA believes the State of California can and should do more to encourage and support media literacy through the following actions:

- State policy should be strengthened to better support the infusion of media literacy skills into state curriculum frameworks.
- The California Department of Education should increase its attention to and the visibility of the instructional resources it has reviewed.
- Professional learning standards for teacher preparation and training programs should include media literacy.
- State education leaders should gather information regarding local school districts’ incorporation of media literacy education into their curricula and what obstacles may stand in the way of them doing so.

Local PTA units, councils, and districts should learn more about school district policies regarding media literacy education. That includes joining with families, community members, and
educators to agree on clear definitions of media literacy and its relationship to issues such as safe use of digital media more generally. PTA organizations can also be instrumental by doing the following:

- Encourage school districts to provide centralized, proactive support for the teaching of media literacy across all grade levels and subject areas; provide educators with access to professional development that informs such instruction; and provide parents/guardians with educational opportunities related to their own and their children’s media literacy.
- Raise the visibility of free, research-based resources schools and families can use to strengthen media literacy skills of both students and adults.
- Use association resources to provide training and information that helps all adults become familiar with media literacy concepts and skills.

California State PTA believes that today’s families — including both young people and adults — must develop media literacy skills. Ultimately, our democracy and our quality of life depend on it.