

## MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR OUR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Adopted by the Statewide Annual Meeting Delegates June 2020

- WHEREAS, California has seen an increase in mental health issues and suicide among the student population; and
- WHEREAS, California state law requires public school districts to have suicide prevention policies, including staff training, but does not address mental health prevention policies or social emotional learning requirements; and
- WHEREAS, Schools that provide age appropriate mental health education and social emotional learning programs to students have seen decreased rates of mental health issues, faster intervention support, and increased academic performance; and
- WHEREAS, The California Department of Education's Multi-Tiered System of Support model can, with proper funding, provide academic, social emotional, and behavior support, addressing the whole student; and
- WHEREAS, California State PTA resolution Increasing Counselor to Student Ratio in Schools (2000) recognizes the importance of increasing the ratio of counselors to students and that the American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of one counselor to 250 students, California's ratio is one counselor to 760 students (as of 2014-15 ); and
- WHEREAS, The school counselor is often the first point of contact for students with mental health needs and California State Education Code does not require school counselors, and California has one of the highest student to counselor ratios in the nation; and
- WHEREAS, The funding provided to schools is not adequate for full implementation of Multi-Tiered System of Supports, mental health education, mental health awareness staff training, social emotional learning curriculum, and or additional school counselors to provide intervention for students; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED,** That California State PTA and its units, councils, and districts support the requirement of age appropriate social emotional learning and mental health education for all students; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That California State PTA and its units, councils, and districts support the requirement of mental health wellness and social emotional learning policies, including staff training; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That California State PTA and its units, councils, and districts encourage the use of Multi-Tier System of Supports to meet the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of all students; and be it further

**Mental Health Services for Our Children and Youth – continued**

**RESOLVED,** That California State PTA and its units, councils, and districts seek and support legislation to revise the California State Education Code to require school counselors at all levels of education and to provide the necessary additional funding for implementation; and be it further

**RESOLVED,** That California State PTA and its units, councils and districts advocate and support strategies to achieve American Counselor Association recommended 250:1 student to counselor ratio; and be it further

**RESOLVED,** That California State PTA and its units, councils, and districts support legislation, regulations and other measures at all levels of government to allocate funds that are sufficient to address mental health issues in our children and youth.

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**BACKGROUND SUMMARY**

Mental health is a critical part of overall health for children. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, 1 in 6 of U.S. youths ages 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year. Of children ages 9 to 17, 21% have a diagnosable mental or addictive disorder that causes impairment. An estimated 90% of children who die by suicide have a mental health disorder. In 2017, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide was the second leading cause of death among individuals between the ages of 10 and 24. Mental health disorders, suicide ideation, and the suicide rate among adolescents is increasing across the country.

For many adults who have mental disorders, symptoms were present in childhood and adolescence, but often not recognized or addressed. National PTA resolution Children’s Emotional Health and Mental Health Awareness states that “mental illness and disorders affect so many children and teens ages 6 to 17 that 79% of them do not receive mental health care.”

For a young person with symptoms of a mental disorder, the earlier treatment is started, the more effective it can be. Early intervention can help prevent more severe, lasting problems as a child grows up. Untreated, these mental health issues put children at risk for school and social behavior problems, academic issues, increased absenteeism, school dropout, and suicide.

The National PTA resolution referenced above recognizes that “the majority of young people who do receive mental health treatment do so at school.” The average school counselor, if the school has one, is often the first point of contact for addressing students’ social emotional concerns. California State PTA resolution Increasing Counselor to Student Ratio in Schools (2000) recognizes the importance of increasing the ratio of counselors to students and that the American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of one counselor to 250 students. California Education Code does not require schools to have counselors, likely resulting in California having one of the highest student to counselor ratios in the nation.

## **Mental Health Services for Our Children and Youth – continued**

Mental health education brings awareness to students of the importance of their mental health. The California Department of Education’s Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) focuses on aligning initiatives and resources within an educational organization to address the needs of all students. MTSS coordinates academic, behavioral, and social emotional learning in a fully integrated system of support by focusing on the “whole” student. MTSS is designed to intervene quickly and help struggling students early. Social emotional learning helps students learn coping skills and how to deal with their emotions. When a student is mentally healthy, they do better academically.

The funding to address mental health issues in California public schools is inadequate. With proper funding, local public schools can increase the number of school counselors, provide mental health education and awareness for both students and staff, provide social emotional learning curriculum, and address all key aspects for our students’ mental health issues