

SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND RAILROAD SAFETY REQUIREMENTS

Adopted by Convention Delegates May 1990
 Reviewed by Board of Managers November 2020

- WHEREAS, The third Object of PTA is “To secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children and youth;” and
- WHEREAS, The *Statement of PTA Principles* states, “We believe that all children and youth should have an education that develops safe habits and attitudes, and should live in an environment free from avoidable physical hazards;” and
- WHEREAS, Plank #10 of its *Legislation Platform* states that the California State PTA will support legislation “To prevent, control or eliminate hazards to the health, safety and well-being of all children and youth;” and
- WHEREAS, The Public Utilities Commission of the State of California has regulations for construction of walkways adjacent to railroad tracks and regulations governing clearances on railroads, there are no regulations pertaining to the proximity of railroads to school buildings; and
- WHEREAS, The California Education Code has established safety requirements regarding fires and earthquakes, there are no safety requirements regarding the proximity of school buildings to railroads; and
- WHEREAS, The California Uniform Building Code has established stringent requirements for safe construction of schools, it lacks any distance requirements for school location relative to railroads; and
- WHEREAS, The School Site Approval and Selection Guide issued by the State of California states 25 factors affecting the selection of school sites, not one addresses railroad safety or derailment possibilities, exposure to toxins in the event of an accident or to railroad noise levels; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA seek and support legislation requiring school buildings to be placed at least 300 feet from a railroad, where feasible; and that the cost of relocating these portable buildings be funded by the State of California; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA request the Office of the State Architect in the State Department of General Services, the State Board of Education, the State Department of Education and the State Allocation Board to immediately adopt regulations and procedures to implement such legislation upon its passage; and be it further

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RESOLVED, That the California State PTA urge its units, councils and districts to work with their school districts to relocate, as quickly as it is feasible, any existing moveable buildings that are within 300 feet of a railroad; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the California State PTA urge its units, councils and districts to work with their local school districts in the site selection process for future schools to ensure that no school building, permanent or temporary, is located closer than 300 feet from any railroad; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the California State PTA submit this resolution to the National PTA for consideration at the 1990 National PTA Convention.

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BACKGROUND SUMMARY

The California Education Code has numerous safety provisions regarding fire, earthquakes, safety gates, school eye safety, storage of lab chemicals, etc. The State of California issues a *School Site Selection and Approval Guide* for all school districts to follow when considering a potential site. In this guide there are regulations pertaining to proximity to airports, high tension or power lines, traffic, toxic substances and geologic concerns. But there are no regulations regarding safety precautions for school facilities located in close proximity to a railroad, and the resultant problems of noise pollution or potential exposure to toxic substances in the event of train derailment.

A prospective school site is reviewed by a representative of the State Department of Education School Site Selection Division according to criteria consisting of twenty-five factors which include location, environment, size, shape, soil condition, sub-surface condition, educational adaptability, community use, undesirable elements, political implications, master-planning factors, etc. The Office of the State Architect can approve or disapprove the site, but the local school district can overrule the decision.

The statutes of the State of California are silent about any requirements pertaining to locating school facilities in proximity to railroads. None of the various state or local agencies with responsibilities for school facility placement have regulations considering safety or noise pollution problems in relation to railroads, other than informal advice that placement of the school buildings should be a minimum distance of 300 feet or more from a railroad.

Schools placed in close proximity to railroads create a dangerous situation for all concerned. In the case of a derailment, there is the physical danger from such an accident as well as potential exposure to toxic substances. On a daily basis, the noise factor can cause severe disruption to the learning environment. The California State PTA and its constituent groups, as advocates for children, must be ever ready to lobby state and local policy makers for that which we believe is best for all children and youth.