

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION

(Adopted by Convention Delegates May 2000)

Reviewed by Board of Managers April 2010

- WHEREAS,** The California State PTA recognizes the importance of a child's early years in developing social skills, self-confidence and readiness for academic learning, and the key role that parents/families play in early child development and the successful transition of their young children into the academic learning environment; and
- WHEREAS,** Decades of research show that using developmentally appropriate strategies with infants and young children contributes to creativity, better language skills and higher levels of cognitive functioning; that high quality preschool programs can accelerate the development of all children, particularly low-income children; and that children who attend developmentally appropriate classrooms in the early grades continue to benefit in subsequent years; and
- WHEREAS,** Today's Kindergartens are becoming more narrowly focused on academic goals, and many parents and Kindergarten teachers are concerned that a significant number of children are entering school unready for the tasks that await them; and
- WHEREAS,** The National Education Goals Panel* found that strengthening achievement requires not only getting children ready for school, but also getting schools ready for the particular children they serve; and
- WHEREAS,** Young children learn in ways and at rates that are different from older children and to make them successful students schools must tailor assessments and educational programming to the children's unique needs; and
- WHEREAS,** A key to success for early childhood programs and the transition into elementary school is meaningful parent/family involvement in which parents/families are valued partners with the school in reaching mutual goals and objectives for the children; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA and its units, councils and districts encourage parents/families, schools and others who work with infants and young children to recognize and use developmentally appropriate activities and strategies that are designed to meet the unique needs of each child; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA and its units, councils and districts assist in providing information to parents/families about the developmental and educational needs of infants and young children and how they can participate most effectively in fostering the successful development of their children; and be it further

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RESOLVED, That the California State PTA and its units, councils and districts support efforts to ensure that all children will have opportunities, including access to high-quality developmentally appropriate preschool programs, to develop the readiness skills they need to become successful academic learners; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the California State PTA and its units, councils and districts urge school staff and school districts to provide the learning environments and experiences for young children that will help every child grow in competence and meet high expectations.

**The National Education Goals Panel was formed for the development and implementation of Goals 2000.*

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BACKGROUND SUMMARY

Research over the past few decades has convincingly demonstrated that a young child's environment has a decisive impact on his or her cognitive and emotional development. The years from birth to five are critically important in shaping a child's capacity and enthusiasm for learning. How children are nurtured—talked with, played with, responded to, allowed to explore, and encouraged to express themselves—is formative for subsequent learning and their development into adults. In order for parents to succeed as their child's first teacher, they should have access to the training and support they need.

Early Kindergartens emphasized socialization rather than academic tasks, but a growing body of research indicates that today's Kindergartens are becoming more narrowly focused on academic goals. Kindergarten teachers concerned that a significant number of children are entering school unready for an academic learning environment are calling for raising the age of entry to five years old by September 1. Many parents, particularly those with higher socioeconomic status, are delaying entry of their children for an additional year. Typically these are children under age five. Most states now require a child to be five years old on or before September 1 to enter Kindergarten. Twelve states place the cut-off date during September or early October, and only seven other states have cut-off dates as late as December or January 1.

Experts agree that age alone is not the only factor in school readiness. Research has shown that early enriched care characteristic of high quality preschool programs can have long-lasting positive effects on cognitive and emotional development and academic achievement, including decreases in special education placements and in involvement in the juvenile justice system. Conversely, poor early environments, including neglect or care in cognitively sterile environments, can have lasting negative effects on brain development.

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Although not all parents will need or want to send their children to preschool, many parents are desperately looking for quality preschool programs. It is estimated that half of the 1.6 million California children aged five years and younger are in child care outside the family. Unfortunately, numerous research studies indicate that many of these care settings are mediocre or poor in quality and that a majority of young children spend their day in settings that compromise their long-term development. Access to high quality preschool for all children aged three to five years would assure equal opportunity for every child to receive the necessary preparation to be ready to learn in the primary grades.

While readiness of each child is important, it is imperative to insist on “ready schools” that are committed to the success of every child and provide a learning environment that is appropriate for the child’s level of development. Some studies indicate that despite the importance and availability of effective teaching-learning approaches for young students, many schools are not effectively utilizing this approach. Activities to assist young children in transitioning from home or preschool to elementary school are also important, but remain the exception rather than the rule in our schools. Because early experiences play such an important role in preparing children for success in school and because the family’s influence is fundamental in children’s early years, it is critical to link the subsequent steps in a child’s education to earlier experiences and to involve parents in these linking activities.