

HOT WEATHER STANDARDS IN THE SCHOOL SETTING

Adopted by Convention Delegates 1992

Reviewed by Board of Managers March 2012

- WHEREAS,** The Education Code of the State of California is silent in addressing acceptable temperatures for children in a school setting, in or out of the classroom, and
- WHEREAS,** Research by the American Academy of Pediatrics and others has identified children and adolescents as especially vulnerable to the harmful effects of heat; and
- WHEREAS,** The California Industrial Welfare Commission has established procedures to protect workers in the job setting from being subjected to excessive heat in the workplace; and
- WHEREAS,** The California Department of Social Services has recognized the necessity to set standards or limits by regulating inside temperatures to protect children in day care settings; and
- WHEREAS,** The expansion of year-round schedules throughout California has significantly increased the potential for children to be subjected to extreme heat in the classroom and on the playground and thereby increases the necessity for uniform and consistent measures to be followed by school personnel to ensure the protection of the health of California's school children in hot weather; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA urge the California Department of Education to conduct a thorough review of research relating to extreme heat and its impact on educational performance, and request that the department collect data on students currently attending classes in extreme heat conditions; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA seek and support legislation to amend the California Education Code for K-12 classrooms to require conformance with Title 22 of the Department of Social Services Regulations, which establishes minimum and maximum temperatures (68 degrees to 85 degrees) in licensed day care facilities; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA seek and support legislation to provide funds for air conditioning of schools where temperatures regularly exceed 85 degrees inside the classroom for an extended period of time while school is in session; and be it further

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RESOLVED, That the California State PTA urge its units, councils and districts to work with local boards of education to encourage adoption of policies to mitigate the effects of hot weather on students and staff, and to conduct staff development to help school personnel recognize and treat heat related illness; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the California State PTA urge its units, councils and districts to educate parents and the community regarding the serious threat to the health and well-being of children and staff when subjected to conditions of extreme heat in classrooms and on playgrounds.

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BACKGROUND SUMMARY

In some areas of California, students and teachers are regularly exposed to health-threatening and performance-diminishing heat. It is not uncommon for students to be housed in classrooms where temperatures are above 90 or 100 degrees. Since the growth of year-round schooling in our state will greatly increase the number of days students face extremes of heat, it is time to address the serious health and educational problems that high classroom temperatures have created.

While national and international occupational health standards point to 86 degrees as an upper threshold temperature for light work, the State Education Code sets no upper limit for classroom temperatures. Most workers in California are able to expect “reasonable comfort” in the work place under current statutes, but schoolchildren are not protected by law. Children who attend licensed day care are legally protected from extreme heat, but children of the same age who attend public school are not given the same protection.

Research in both occupational safety and military performance has determined the health risks of extreme heat in the work place. Those who perform strenuous tasks during high temperatures risk, in the worst case, heat stroke, which if not treated in a hospital emergency room, can lead to death or permanent liver damage. Heat exhaustion victims, while not requiring hospitalization, can suffer nausea, vomiting, headaches, weakness, nosebleeds or fainting. Confusion and lethargy often precede full-blown cases of heat-related disorders.

Children are at high risk of developing heat-related disorders. They are the most active group in the population; it being far more natural for children to run and play than to be quiet and still. Children sweat less and produce more metabolic heat than adults in walking or running. They have a greater surface area:mass ratio than adults, which induces a greater heat transfer between the environment and the body. Children do not naturally rehydrate themselves; many often avoid drinking water or do not drink it in sufficient quantity to replenish fluids lost in the heat.

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Students participating in physical education classes or organized sports are the group most at risk. There has been extensive research on the prevention of heat disorder illness among athletes. The information resulting from this research must be made available and prevention and monitoring measures should be implemented in the schools.

Since many of the problems in heat-related disorders develop because of dehydration, a public information campaign should be launched statewide in the educational community to ensure that all are aware of the crucial importance of proper fluid intake during times of extreme heat. This information is simple, but very often neglected. We treat hot days as something to endure, but not as the health-threatening emergencies that they truly can be for susceptible individuals.

Students should be learning and studying with motivation and concentration, not just “coping” with their environment. We cannot risk diminished performance due to student and teacher lethargy, dizziness and general heat discomfort.