

NET ZERO EMISSION SCHOOLS

Adopted by the Statewide Annual Meeting Delegates June 2020

- WHEREAS,** Children are among the populations most affected by climate change: a child born today will experience climate-related health impacts from infancy and adolescence to adulthood and old age--including increased food insecurity and malnutrition, heightened transmission rates of infectious diseases, economic losses from extreme weather events, temperature rise and heatwaves, and negative health effects from heat, air pollution and wildfire smoke--and these impacts are already present and worsening; and
- WHEREAS,** The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that human activities have already caused approximately 1.0°C of global warming above pre-industrial levels, and furthermore that global warming is likely to reach 1.5°C by as early as 2030 if it continues to increase at the current rate; and
- WHEREAS,** Rapid reductions in greenhouse gas emissions across all sectors of our society--particularly CO2 emission reductions to 40-60% below 2010 levels by 2030, and net zero by 2050--are necessary in order to limit global warming to within 1.5°C and thereby significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change; and
- WHEREAS,** School activities such as transporting students, heating buildings and water, and employee commuting contribute to climate change because they create greenhouse gas emissions; however, schools vary widely in terms of the resources, including funding, staffing and expertise that they have available to achieve net zero emissions; now, therefore, be it
- RESOLVED,** That California State PTA and its units, councils and districts support legislation, regulations and/or other measures that would educate communities about the hazards to children and direct schools to inventory their current greenhouse gas emissions, then plan for and implement greenhouse gas emission reductions at the rate required (or faster) to limit global warming to within 1.5°C of average pre-industrial temperatures; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That California State PTA and its units, councils and districts support legislation, regulations and/or other measures to identify resources needed to address financial and other constraints that may hinder the planning and implementation of greenhouse gas emission reductions at schools throughout the state; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That California State PTA and its units, councils, and districts urge legislators and other decision-makers to invest in greenhouse gas emission reductions by schools; however, these investments should NOT be offset by, or at the expense of, reductions in state or local in K-12 education, higher education, nutrition, health care, or other programs that improve the lives and prospects of children and youth; and be it further

RESOLVED, That California State PTA, its units, councils and districts, urge schools to ensure that greenhouse gas emission reduction measures undertaken at school sites serve to reduce the emissions of their broader communities where possible (for example, by making electric vehicle charging infrastructure installed in publicly accessible areas of school sites available for public use outside of school hours).

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BACKGROUND SUMMARY

Our children are most vulnerable to the hazards of climate change. In 2015, California State PTA adopted a resolution entitled “Climate Change is a Children’s Issue,” that urged “school districts to support programs and strategies to make schools more climate-safe and energy efficient models.”

Research published over the ensuing 5 years shows how urgently we must act. Most notable is the 2018 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which projects with high confidence that the risks and impacts of climate change can be significantly reduced if, by 2030, global net CO₂ emissions from human activities decline by about 45% from 2010 levels, and then reach net zero by around 2050. Achieving emission reductions at this scale and speed requires participation from all sectors of our society. As institutions focused on improving the well-being of children, schools have a particular opportunity to participate in and even lead these efforts.

This resolution seeks to engage PTA members, and their communities, in a concerted effort to advocate for and encourage school efforts to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions at the rate required to safeguard the futures of our children and generations to come. California has existing laws, resources and guidance in place to help schools do this, and potential funding is also available. Program examples include the US Department of Education’s Green Ribbon Schools program and the California Air Resource Board’s “Cool California” website. Both facilitate local schools’ ability to inventory their greenhouse gas emissions and then develop emission reduction plans that align with local circumstances and possibilities. Programs like these are a great starting point, but we must make faster and more widespread progress.

In practice, greenhouse gas emission reductions at schools are likely to come from two main areas. First, California’s largest single category of greenhouse gas emissions is fossil fuel combustion to power on-road transportation (cars, buses and trucks). Schools contribute to such emissions both through transporting students (over 250 million school bus miles are traveled annually statewide) and through employee commuting by over 500,000 teachers and other employees. The second area is emissions from the buildings at over 10,000 schools statewide (typically through natural gas combustion for water heating and space heating). Many climate change mitigations involving buildings and transportation are viable today, and in many cases are more cost-effective than ‘business as usual.’

Net Zero Emission Schools – continued

Finally, any realistic effort to address greenhouse gas emissions at schools throughout California must also provide the support needed to address the resource constraints - including funding, staffing, information and expertise - that many schools need to address in order to successfully plan and implement greenhouse gas emission reductions. Some schools have already made notable progress, and highlighting their successes and ‘lessons learned’ can help others who are at earlier stages in their journey to achieving net zero emissions.