

CHILDRENS EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS  
Adopted by Convention Delegates APRIL 2025

- WHEREAS, The West Virginia PTA has long been committed to providing improved mental health programs and services to children and youth; and
- WHEREAS, The National PTA, through convention action in 1969, reaffirmed this same commitment; and
- WHEREAS, All children and youth have the right to mental health treatment; therefore be
- RESOLVED, That the West Virginia PTA reaffirms this 1969 resolution on Children's Emotional Health\*; and be it further
- RESOLVED, That the West Virginia PTA and its branches encourage each community to make available mental health programs and services that will meet the needs of all children and youth.

\*CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

- WHEREAS, The West Virginia PTA, its parent association National PTA, and its constituent associations are deeply concerned about the increasing number of children suffering from mental and emotional health and wellness conditions. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, 20% of youth ages 13-18 live with a mental health condition; and
- WHEREAS, Mental illness can negatively impact family life, personal happiness, acceptance of civic responsibility and completion of one's education; 37% of students with a mental health condition, age 14 and older, drop out of school—the highest dropout rate of any disability group; and
- WHEREAS, Schools and other educational agencies are feeling the adverse effects of mental illness on students, families and communities. The National School Boards Association reports "The odds are, therefore, that every classroom in every school has at least one student with a mental health disorder. Of those who have a mental health disorder, only one out of five will receive any treatment." The majority of young people who do receive mental health treatment do so at school; and

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- WHEREAS, Mental illness and disorders affect so many children and teens ages 6 to 17 that 79% of them do not receive mental health care. The average delay between onset of symptoms and intervention is 8-10 years and 90% of youth ages 10-24 that died by suicide had an underlying mental illness; and
- WHEREAS, An environment of acceptance of the reality, prevalence and effects of mental illness in the home, school and community environments is essential to the development of supportive approaches towards those who suffer from mental illness; and therefore be it
- RESOLVED, The West Virginia PTA, its parent association National PTA and its constituent associations strongly encourage efforts to establish comprehensive community mental health providers to offer preventative and treatment services to children and adults and comprehensive school mental health programs that include adequate access to school psychologists, school counselors and school social workers; and be it
- RESOLVED, The West Virginia PTA, its parent association National PTA and its constituent associations advocate for ongoing teacher and administrator training to improve the understanding of child emotional and mental health needs with emphasis on the importance of establishing a school climate conducive to good mental health; and be it
- RESOLVED, The West Virginia PTA, its parent association National PTA and its constituent associations promote educational programs for parents and families to strengthen understanding and supportive home environment; and be it
- RESOLVED, The West Virginia PTA, its parent association National PTA and its constituent associations support efforts to provide education and other supports for school staff and professional development to assist with addressing mental health issues with emphasis on early detection; and be it
- RESOLVED, The West Virginia PTA, its parent association National PTA and its constituent associations support and encourage reducing the stigma of mental illness and build an understanding around children and youth mental health.

## **Background Summary**

Mental health is an essential component of overall health for children, as it significantly impacts their emotional, social, and cognitive development. A child's mental well-being is deeply intertwined with their ability to learn, form relationships, manage stress, and navigate challenges in life. Mental health conditions like anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders can affect a child's ability to thrive, both academically and socially. Untreated, these mental health issues put children at risk for school and social behavior problems, academic issues, increased absenteeism, school dropout, and suicide.

Early childhood is a crucial period for emotional and psychological growth, with experiences during these years shaping brain development and future emotional health. When children face mental health challenges, it can hinder their capacity to form positive relationships, succeed in school, and engage in activities that promote growth and happiness. Without proper support and intervention, mental health problems can persist into adolescence and adulthood, leading to long-term consequences in various areas of life. Addressing mental health concerns early can prevent the escalation of more severe conditions and ensure children have the tools to lead fulfilling, healthy lives.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, 60-70% of teens with mental health conditions do not receive the care they need. Studies suggest that an estimated 90% of children who die by suicide have some form of mental health disorder, with depression, anxiety, and behavior disorders being the most common. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide was the second leading cause of death from adolescents aged 15 to 19. Early identification and intervention for mental health conditions can be critical in preventing suicide in young people. Mental health disorders, suicide ideation, and the suicide rate among adolescents is increasing across the country.

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." This resolution 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.

West Virginia State PTA 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. The West Virginia Education Code does not require schools to have counselors, likely

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resulting in West Virginia having one of the highest student to counselor ratios in the nation. In 2020, Senate Bill 807 was co-sponsored by ten Senators in the West Virginia Legislature which would require every public school in the state to have at least one professional counselor. It also required school counselors to provide developmental, preventive, and remedial guidance and counseling programs as well as provide consultant services to parents, teachers and administrators. Senate Bill 807 did not pass due to no action being taken before lawmakers adjourned.

The funding to address mental health issues in West Virginia 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.