ROLE OF RELIGION IN PUBLICLY FUNDED EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL SERVICES

National PTA supports instruction about religion, in the context of literature, philosophy, and history as well as in the comparative study of religions. National PTA believes that public schools shall not, however, engage in religious instruction, whether it is instruction in specific religious practices, or imposing religious values in curriculum. National PTA opposes programs, whether they are taught by public school employees or third parties engaged by the schools, that include religious worship, instruction, or indoctrination. The responsibility for a child’s religious upbringing rests exclusively in the home and with the religious instructors designated by the family.

National PTA supports the right of children to pray individually or in groups, to read religious texts, and to discuss their religious views with their peers, so long as they are not disruptive. National PTA believes the right to engage in voluntary worship or religious study or conversation, however, does not include the right to have a captive audience or to compel other students to participate. National PTA opposes mandatory or organized prayer or religious worship at official public school functions, whether led by a school official or student.

National PTA opposes voluntary student religious activities that are led by teachers in their official capacity, because these may appear coercive to impressionable children. In keeping with Supreme Court decisions, National PTA supports moments of silence provided that their intent and implementation not favor religious over secular practices, and that policies to protect against coercion or harassment of students based on their decisions to engage in or refrain from prayer or any other permitted activity be implemented.

National PTA supports policies that foster parent involvement including decision-making, however, no one parent should be allowed to determine the curriculum or services that shall be available to children other than his or her own. If a parent determines that particular lessons substantially contradict his or her values or beliefs, and there is no compelling interest in requiring attendance, National PTA supports allowing his or her child to be excused from those specific lessons, with no negative academic consequences.

National PTA also supports the rights of children and youth to decline to participate in curriculum or activities that conflict with their moral or religious beliefs, with no negative academic consequences. National PTA further supports federal, state, and local policies that prohibit teasing, harassment, or bullying based on decisions to participate or not participate in lessons, programs, or practices where those decisions are motivated by moral or religious beliefs.
Role of Religion in Publicly Funded Educational and Social Services

Adopted: by the 2001 Board of Directors

National PTA supports equal access to school facilities and believes that all student clubs should be permitted to meet at school, and to have equal access to campus media to announce their meetings. If the school generally makes its facilities available to private groups, it must make them available on the same terms to all organizations. In cases of religious clubs or organizations, schools must avoid all appearances of official endorsement of the entity or its purposes. National PTA opposes policies that undermine local control of facility access policies.

National PTA supports the use of public funds for social and education services that are available to all people, and opposes the use of public funds to support institutions that may deny service to applicants, particularly where that denial of service may be based on discriminatory factors. National PTA further believes that all recipients of public funds should be held to identical standards of accountability.

National PTA believes that the autonomy of religious organizations depends on freedom from government intrusion, and that accountability would require an unconstitutional intrusion in the administration of religious organization.

Finally, National PTA opposes government funding of pervasively sectarian organizations and other organizations and programs that discriminate based on religion in employment or delivery of services (including by making religious instruction, worship, or proselytization part of their services or programs).

Adopted: by the 2001 Board of Directors