

POSITION STATEMENT: WATER ACCESS FOR HEALTHY SCHOOLS

The Norfolk PTA (formally known as the Norfolk Council of PTAs) shares the fundamental belief that safe drinking water is essential to the health of all children. All students should have access to safe drinking water during the school day because of the multiple health benefits of drinking water and as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM), and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

In an effort to mitigate and prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus in Norfolk schools, water fountains have been turned off and access to them has been restricted.

Water availability has been inconsistent. Students have brought water bottles from home. However, given the high number of families in economically-disadvantaged neighborhoods, not every student has been able to afford to bring adequate bottles of water from home each day.

And, in many reported cases, teachers and staff have had to pay for water for students at their own expense. Additionally, schools have requested water donations from the public.

Where we stand:

Norfolk PTA believes that providing safe drinking water during the school day is the responsibility of Norfolk Public Schools.

Norfolk PTA fully supports Norfolk Public Schools providing bottled or portable water to students and staff until such time that the use of water fountains can be restored, touchless water fountains are installed, and/or portable water stations are made available at all buildings without restricted access.

Background:

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, water fountains were turned off in school buildings throughout Norfolk Public Schools (NPS). Therefore, students and staff have limited access to drinking water. NPS complies with federal requirements as part of the National School Lunch Program that make free drinking water available to students at lunch time where the meals are served. Additionally, the Norfolk PTA remains concerned that children also have safe and ready access to water on an as-needed basis outside of meals, especially following physical education and recess.



POSITION STATEMENT: WATER ACCESS FOR HEALTHY SCHOOLS (continued)

How drinking water impacts education and health (from CDC's Healthy Schools training series):

- Hydration improves children's memory and attention.
- Adequate hydration is needed for multiple body processes, including digestion, moving nutrients around the body, and temperature.
- Additionally, drinking water instead of sugary drinks can help prevent weight gain and some chronic diseases.
- Children who primarily drink water or milk have fewer dental cavities than those who drink soda.
- More than one in five children and adolescents do not drink any water during the day.
- Half of school-age children are under-hydrated. Being under-hydrated was more common among boys, younger children ages 6 to 11, and non-Hispanic Black children and adolescents compared with girls, older children, and White children and adolescents respectively.
- Because most school-age youths spend at least 5 hours a day at school, schools have the opportunity to help kids stay hydrated the healthy way by making safe water available at no charge throughout the school day.

Source: CDC Healthy Schools: Water Access training modules. Retrieved from:
<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/npao/wateraccess.htm>

Water and the pandemic

Public health and public education inequities have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Providing access to drinking water helps to relieve the burdens on school nurses – who are already strained with COVID-19 mitigation duties – who must treat students who experience dehydration symptoms, such as headaches and elevated temperatures.

The Norfolk PTA supports Norfolk Public Schools in fulfilling its responsibility to make clean, free drinking water readily available throughout multiple points in school settings to promote the health and safety of all students and staff.