PTA Founders Day
Celebrating over 100 years of child advocacy

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PTA Mission
The mission of the PTA is threefold:
• To support and speak on behalf of children and youth in the schools, in the community and before governmental bodies and other organizations that make decisions affecting children;
• To assist parents in developing the skills they need to raise and protect their children; and
• To encourage parent and public involvement in the public schools of this nation.

From 1897 to today, the mission of PTA has always centered on child advocacy.

PTA is the oldest and largest volunteer association working exclusively on behalf of all children and youth.

While the issues have evolved, our focus on children’s advocacy remains as important as ever.

PTA was founded in 1897. Life was very difficult for our children then:
• Few children's education went beyond the 5th grade.
• Children (most often immigrant children) worked in industrial jobs, factories, often doing dangerous work.
• Children had little recreation.
• Millions of children died of childhood diseases.
“Each day that you fail to advocate,
Each day that you ignore an act of discrimination,
Each day you accept another injustice,
You accept a society that is going to kill your children.”

- William L.E. Dussault

In 1897 Alice McLellan Birney, a woman who was deeply moved by the plight of children, developed a relationship with a woman by the name of Phoebe Apperson Hearst. Phoebe was a well-known philanthropist of the time, wealthy and well-connected. These women knew there was no stronger bond than that between a mother and a child, and they believed it was the responsibility of mothers to eliminate the threats that endangered their children. Now remember, women weren’t even allowed to vote in 1897. It did not seem likely that they would be able to wield any political power. However, these women, decided to call a meeting of mothers to discuss their concerns and try to find a solution to the problems facing their children. They enlisted the help of family and friends - remember, no emails, phones had just been invented, no t.v., no mass media - basically by word of mouth - they sent out a universal call for action, to gather all the mothers together at a meeting in Washington, D.C. to discuss what they could do to help children. More than 2,000 people responded (so many people, they had to move the meeting to another site). Mothers, yes, but also fathers, teachers, laborers and legislators, all with a commitment to children. The National Congress of Mothers was born, organized to meet a profound challenge, to better the lives of children. From the first meeting of the National Congress of Mothers grew a groundswell of support. Problems were identified and strategies devised to resolve them. Parent education study groups were established, home-school cooperatives were formed, and efforts began to utilize the services of all agencies concerned with child welfare.

From PTA’s founders to today’s members, anyone with a passion for children will understand this quote.

Our founders would not accept the conditions children faced – they acted!
Although the National Congress of Mothers appealed to everyone, regardless of race, color or condition, schools were segregated at the time. To address the needs of African American students, Selena Sloan Butler founded the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers in 1926. She encouraged parents and teachers of color to form a union with the primary purpose of uniting home and school into a planned program for child welfare. Mrs. Butler lived to enjoy and participate actively in the work of this organization for more than thirty years.

After working 50 years apart, the National Congress of Mothers, later known as the National Congress of Parents and Teachers and the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers united in 1970 to expand their outreach. Today, the vision of PTA’s founders - Alice McLellan Birney, Phoebe Apperson Hearst and Selena Sloan Butler lives on.

PTA is “Building Bridges for Children” – In the beginning, now and in the future.

Through consistent hard work, sometimes after decades of perseverance, the dreams of our Founders became reality: child labor laws, a public health service, hot lunch programs, a juvenile justice system, and mandatory immunization were accepted as national norms.
AND NOW – PTA is still a driving force

- Juvenile justice system
- Mandatory immunizations
- Seat belts
- Bicycle helmets
- And so much more...

For those of you who might think PTA is all about being room moms or fundraising, understand that PTA is first and foremost a child advocacy organization. For more than 100 years, National PTA has promoted the education, health and safety of children and families in communities, school systems and to governmental bodies. This is the heart and soul of PTA.

Our PTA Founders’ Vision Lives On

Today, the vision of PTA’s founders - Alice McLellan Birney, Phoebe Apperson Hearst and Selena Sloan Butler lives on.

Like our Founders, stay informed on children’s issues

Parents who are knowledgeable about issues that affect schools, student achievement, children and their families can more effectively participate in the decision making process beyond the local school level. They are more equipped to participate in school district decisions and advocacy for children and youth in the community, as well as in the state Legislature and United States Congress, where school policies and legislation are ultimately determined.

Information Sources

- Your PTA meetings, newsletters, email communications and website
- PTA Council or Region newsletter, website
- Florida PTA Bulletin, website at www.floridapta.org, legislative alerts and state office at (800) 373-5782
- National PTA Our Children magazine, website at www.pta.org, This Week in Washington and national office at (800) 307-4PTA
- School district administration office, School Board and Superintendent, school board meetings, school district website
- Your Legislators’ offices
- Florida Legislature website - Online Sunshine with links to House and Senate
- The media – newspapers, television, and online
Remember – You Can’t be Heard, Unless You Speak Up!

Jack Levine, founder of 4Generations Institute, has been an advocate for children and a friend to PTA for many, many years. Jack describes PTA members as Powerful, Tenacious Advocates. He previously served as President of Voices for Florida’s Children for 25 years.

For more information on celebrating PTA Founder’s Day, go to www.pta.org (National PTA)
There is only one child in all the world, and his name is All Children.

– Carl Sandburg

Notes:

Never lose sight of our Founder’s vision. Won’t you join them in standing for children, speaking for them and loving them?