

**PTA National Representative Speech for State Conventions (Spring 2008)**

**Target Audience:** State PTA leaders and members

**Message Goals:** Empower the membership, drive them to achieve results (e.g., closing the achievement gap); motivate and inspire; reassure audience that PTA has “finger on the pulse” of NCLB reauthorization

**Word Count:** approx. 1,450

**Time:** approx. 10 minutes

There is something amazing about all of us gathering here today. The same idea that inspired parents in 1897 clearly continues to motivate PTA members in 2008. It is an enduring and compelling idea: that you *can* do something to improve not only the life of your child, but of *every* child. Parent involvement and advocacy leads to our students’ academic success and healthier lifestyles, and, for generations now, PTA has been the embodiment of that belief.

Over a century ago—before suffrage, before civil rights, before activism was acceptable—three women found within themselves the courage to reject the limits on what was “acceptable,” and they urged a nation to advocate for its children. These women, Alice McLellan Birney, Phoebe Apperson Hearst, and Selena Sloan Butler, defied cultural taboos and started a movement that resonated with mothers all over the country. Today, the organization they founded welcomes moms and dads, teachers and leaders, citizens and legislators—anyone willing to work for the health and education of our students. If these three women could create such a powerful voice for children in a time of

repression and prejudice, imagine what five million of us can do right now.

Connected, we can influence our nation's education policy and we can replicate local successes in other cities across America. We can close the achievement gap, and give all our students the free, quality public education they need and deserve. Alice, Phoebe, and Selena have already established the foundation necessary to achieve these goals—now we only need to believe in our ability to succeed.

Whether you are in the chorus of voices calling for improvements to No Child Left Behind or you are raising the standards for safety in your child's school, you are a member of PTA, the nation's first and greatest parent involvement group. You are more than passive supporters, you are more than fundraisers, and you are more than local boosters. You are connected to your school, your community, and thousands of other PTA units—but making even more connections is imperative for us to succeed as advocates for children.

There is no question that growing membership is our number one challenge as we strive to remain a relevant resource for families and communities. But some of you may be asking: “What *can* one more member do?” If << *local PTA unit name* >> added one more member, what would become possible? If one

more member joined << *another local PTA unit name* >>, what would that mean for our children? The answer, of course, is “*everything*.” One more member could be the spark that makes an after-school program possible. One more member could be the individual who reaches out to the community to establish partnerships with local businesses. One more member could be the head of a coalition that brings healthier food choices to an entire district. One more member could be the person who climbs the PTA ladder and revolutionizes our organization 20 years from now. Or, one more member could simply begin as one more parent reading regularly to their child. Whoever they are, one more PTA member will always make stronger a school, a nation, and a household.

Membership empowers each of us, and it allows PTA to augment its services and speak for all children with a single, resounding voice. Local members who reach out to their students, communities, and each other—they are the true strength of PTA, and you are the ones who can help us make the new connections that will enable this organization to thrive.

So go out into your towns and neighborhoods and extend an open invitation to community and parent involvement. Welcome leaders committed to youth, but also welcome parents who can only volunteer a little time, minority families previously excluded

by language and culture, and anyone else who is willing to make our children's education a priority. They all have something to offer, and PTA can give them that opportunity to make a difference.

New national programs, like the Emerging Minority Leaders Conference and Community Connections are helping PTA grow and expand into underserved areas, largely because of the great support coming from the local level. By embracing these programs, and even establishing their own local versions, states and cities are directly fulfilling our mission. Together, we are building a more powerful voice for children, we are serving more families, and we are becoming a more inclusive organization that is truly reflective of our school communities. With the help of members, partners, and educators, PTA can make access to quality schools more equitable, ensuring that truly *all* children have a chance to succeed.

So I ask you, "What can *you* do for all children *today*?" And what can *we* do to persuade more parents to join us?

We can reach out to *everyone* in the school community: connecting with parents to encourage more involvement, connecting with teachers to help our students in—and out of—the classroom, and connecting with the leaders who influence our children's health and education.

When we connect with children through our Reflections program, and we see the pride students take in their art work, there is proof that we are helping our kids succeed. When we connect with new families through Take Your Family to School Week, and a parent or a sibling or an aunt feels that warm welcome for the first time, we have served the school community and this organization well. When PTA connects with children and families and communities, it benefits my child, your child, and your neighbor's child. Engaging those around us makes PTA stronger and makes student success easier.

You have proven that this approach works! Just recently, << *insert recent victories/accomplishments of relevant state* >> ! You, the members of << *state name* >> PTA, are making a difference! << *state name* >>'s children are benefiting from the hard work and commitment of PTA parents, and I am so proud of you! What you contribute in the name of bettering education cannot be summed up with a program's name or tally of donated hours – it is the invaluable work which improves the lives of the next generation. I am confident in saying that << *state name* >> PTA is connecting and moving forward!

To help you build on that success, last year PTA published the *new* National Standards for Family-School Partnerships. The new Standards provide inspiration and ideas for everyone, in

simple language, based on the latest education research. They offer more evidence that family and community involvement are what drives success—not race, nor class, nor parents’ scholastic experience. The new Standards affirm that *you* are the difference between a student’s potential and their greatest achievement. As the Standards become more integrated into PTA’s culture, I believe that there is no limit to what parents, schools, and communities can accomplish when working together.

Every time your PTA offers a program or gets parents involved in the school, you have an opportunity to improve children’s education *and* grow our membership. Each one of you has the ability to drive student success and make PTA a stronger voice for the entire school community. Whenever children are given the chance to develop and learn, whenever PTA becomes larger and more inclusive, then we are realizing our vision. Then we will be doing the work that *no* other organization is doing.

Will students in << *state name* >> have art and physical activity and involved families in their education? They will if they’re PTA. Will local teachers and parents and community members work together on behalf of students? They will if they’re PTA. Will students be healthy and achieve more and be excited to learn and grow? They will if they’re PTA.

PTA has the tools and resources necessary to empower parents, so now it's up to us to reach out and connect to schools, to the community, and to each other. The groundwork has been laid for great work to be done. We have new National Standards. We have a galvanizing strategic plan. We have passionate advocates for children all over this country. We only need to connect them. We *will* increase and retain our membership! We *will* value and be inclusive of our diversity! We *will* do all that is necessary to help our students achieve success!

PTA will grow stronger every time you connect with someone new, here, today. We will soon welcome new members as you go home and connect with someone else in your school. But our mission won't be complete until we've made *EVERY* child's potential a reality. So stay connected, << insert state name >>! We have important work to do!