

## California State PTA 112<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention National PTA President – Chuck Saylor April 28, 2011, Long Beach, CA

It has been a special pleasure to work with your state president, officers and board of directors. They serve selflessly on your behalf to expand the voice of PTA and reach every caring adult. I can't tell you how much I admire their dedication and hard work on your behalf – and on behalf of our children. I thank them for lending their passion and time.

Like you, I am a member of PTA because I am inspired by our children. It started with wanting to improve education and health for my own children, then the children in my neighborhood and then for my children's school friends. Over time, I wanted to ensure that every child grew up healthy, strong and well-educated.

Each of us is driven by this passion for improving our schools and communities for our children, no matter who they are where they live or their station in life. Every child whether by birth or otherwise is our child. And for them, we want the very best.

We know that it is this passion that gives our PTA its power.

It is how we transform school halls into centers of learning; neighborhoods into thriving communities; and the bright eyes of young boys and girls into our future leaders and builders.

Our passion and work flow from our homes into our schools, into communities, through the economy and across borders to the rest of the world.

This passion is why we are the biggest and most-successful voice for children and families the world has ever known. We take on great challenges with powerful, practical solutions. We rally caring adults together to solve the toughest problems. We create resources where there are none. And we form partnerships between families, schools and communities that sustain and advance the promise we make to every child from birth: Your future will be better, brighter and happier than our past.

In 2009-2010, our voice of millions – volunteered 63 million hours to improve the quality of education and wellness for our children.

This work is worth \$20.25 an hour, according to the IRS – or a total of \$1.3 billion of new resources and economic impact for the benefit of our children.

Through PTA *Reflections*, we gave more than 500,000 students opportunities to amaze their communities and amaze themselves.

We helped 67,000 children and their families become healthier, stronger, and fit for success through *PTA Healthy Lifestyles*.

Through *Take Your Family to School Week* grants, we build stronger family-school partnerships.

In our cities, PTA has helped more than 10,000 families become empowered to help their children succeed in school and address our nation's achievement gaps. With other nonprofits and the United States Department of Defense, our Military Alliance for Parents and Partners is providing shelters from the storms of transition for the children and families of our servicemen

This year, our voice is taking a stronger role in shaping the nation's educational agenda.

With \$2 million in grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation we are informing parents in eight states about the importance of Common Core State Standards in English and math and helping them get states to adopt the standards to ensure that every child gets a high quality education.

Last year, we successfully advocated for the passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Children Act, which adds \$4.5 billion in new resources for improving the nutrition in the food our children eat in school.

This year, we are working on Capitol Hill to strengthen federal family engagement policy and require schools to use our National Standards for Family-School Partnerships for engaging every family.

Our work with First Lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move* campaign will help combat childhood obesity and improve the health of all families.

Our partnerships with caring adults and institutions such as Chef Jamie Oliver and Nickelodeon are helping children and families eat nutritiously and live healthier lives.

We are continuously striving to build new partnerships so that our children can get the very best they deserve. Through our Million Hours of Power, we will rally 350,000 men to volunteer in their children's schools, help their children



improve their academic achievement, and build up their communities on behalf of every family. We now have expanded our PTA MORE Alliance from six organizations to 12, expanding our efforts to engage more men in education.

Since our founding 115 years ago, we have made universal kindergarten, free hot lunch programs, and vaccinations against polio and other deadly diseases a reality.

We have made family engagement in schools a centerpiece of federal education policy. We have successfully supported child labor laws that have kept millions of children in schools and out of sweatshops.

From the Official PTA Kit to [www.PTA.org](http://www.PTA.org), no other association equips its members with high-quality programs, training and other resources for developing leaders, improving student achievement and keeping our children healthy and strong.

All of this is possible because of you ... and every one of your fellow members. Our voice – clear, powerful and transformative – accomplishes great things for all children *including our own*. For all this, we should be proud.

Now, we must speak louder, clearer, stronger. Why? Because now more than ever our children need us to knock down new obstacles that interfere with their success in school and life.

One-third of our fourth-graders read below basic proficiency on the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress, while one-quarter of our eighth-graders read at levels of functional illiteracy. They cannot succeed if they cannot read.

In 2000, America's 15-year-olds were ranked internationally 18th in math and 14th in science. By 2009, our 15-year-olds fell to 25th in math and 23rd in science. Our children are now trailing many of their peers in the rest of the world.

This year, 1.3 million young men and women will drop out of school and into poverty, prison and despair. That is one child every 26 seconds – 150 children every hour.

Half of all young black and Latino men will drop out of school. In fact, young men of all ages and races are falling behind: One-quarter of high school seniors from college-educated homes read below basic proficiency.

When one child lands in prison and poverty because our education system has failed them, it is a tragedy. When a million children a year fall into despair because we are not providing them the high-quality education they deserve, it is an embarrassment for our nation and ourselves. If we continue to deny our children the resources they need, we are condemning ourselves to futures of despair.

Meanwhile our children are less-healthy than they should be, not getting enough exercise and eating more fat and sugar than they need.

The percentage of children, age 6-to-11, who are considered obese has increased by 284 percent in the past three decades,

according to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey.

Every year, 18,700 of our children, age 10-19, are diagnosed with Type I and Type 2 diabetes.

Our children are now suffering from the kinds of diseases that used to crop up in middle age. In the past 30 years, the percentage of children diagnosed with heart disease has increased from 1 percent to 5 percent.

We have children who cannot pass simple cardiovascular fitness tests. Researchers found that as many as 60 percent of students in one school in Austin, Texas, failed a basic test of cardiovascular health – 60 percent!

These challenges are as great for our children now as polio, child labor and racial equality for children of earlier generations. In many ways, they are even greater.

Our children will eventually compete for jobs with people from India, China and Brazil. The landscape of our country is more diverse than ever. In our southern and western states, the majority of our children are from recent immigrant homes; and in our African-American communities, single parents and grandparents account for two out of every five family households with children under age 18.

And 5.7 million of our children are either homeless or live in extreme levels of poverty.

America cannot succeed if half our children land in prison and poverty.

Our children need effective advocates for their wellness and academic success. They need caring adults skilled at building alliances that support improving public education.

Most of all, they need an army of passionate defenders working tirelessly on their behalf in schools, communities, statehouses and Capitol Hill.

Our children need PTA. We have the tools to take on these challenges. If we diversify our membership and embrace a bolder vision of what PTA can do, we will transform the lives of our children, revitalize our communities, and keep America in its place as the leading nation on earth.

We must welcome unparalleled diversity. This means truly and fully embracing Standard One of our National Standards for Family-School Partnerships: *Welcome all families and other caring adults into our schools and communities.*

Our work is successful only when we build strong partnerships with schools, communities and institutions. We must nurture these partnerships and develop new ones in order to address our most-pressing education and health issues.

We must expect – and demand – our elected leaders to improve education for all children. Caring adults and institutions are ready to do their part. So must our political leaders. When PTA speaks, they listen.

Reach out to those in your community. More than ever, our churches, chambers of commerce and social service groups realize the importance of improving education and health for children.

Build your local and state PTA into a network of resources. Share best practices with your colleagues. Become a source of knowledge for minority leadership groups and other organizations who work with children.

Create more specialized and community-based PTAs. This can help schools without PTAs become connected to one another and help engage all parents, no matter their background.

Connect with principals and other administrators at your schools. Let them know that PTAs are the most effective way to engage parents in their schools because of who we are and what we do – each and every day all across this nation.

Engage more men in a meaningful way. When you get one man to volunteer to take on a PTA activity, he will bring his energy, his dedication – and three of his friends with him. They stand ready to help – we only need to ask.

As PTA members, we know that our work is more than just fundraisers. What we do is transformative. When PTA engages more parents in education, our kids will succeed in school and in life.

Our boys and girls then become happy, healthy, well-educated builders of neighborhoods, transformers of communities, leaders of our nation and nurturers of children and families.

We must take on the challenges that face our children's futures. We shall provide for our children what they truly deserve. We will bring millions more into our voice. And we will do whatever it takes.

Today is a new day to rededicate our energies, our passion and our talents to doing what matters most: ensuring brighter futures for every child.

Thank you for accepting this legacy – for dedicating yourself to our timeless, mission. Thank you for being part of our voice.