

## California State PTA 112<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention President-elect's Speech – Carol Kocivar May 1, 2011, Long Beach, CA

Hello PTA!

I don't know about you but this is what I call a PTA meeting. Let's try something. I've always wanted to do this. When I say PTA, I want you to repeat PTA back to me in your loudest voices.

PTA! PTA! PTA!

Feels good, huh? Now... you only heard the voices in this room. Just imagine ... just imagine ... the power of almost 1 million voices for children.

That's PTA.

Without fame or fanfare – in towns and cities throughout California – a PTA mom or dad spends precious time helping children. From helping with homework at your own kitchen table to creating a literacy or safety program at your school. From meeting with a new PTA president to help plan for a new year to advocating in Sacramento for legislation to support the health, welfare and education of children.

Ordinary people – together – doing extraordinary things.

We know that PTA never sleeps. PTA parents and teachers work 24/7. Ordinary people contributing millions of hours making a better world. We do this not to be somebody but to do something.

Every parent in every generation wants to ensure their children –our children – have a better life.

I was reminded of this as I thought about talking with you today. I almost started off today with a slide show. Let me tell you, I have some really great pictures. But, as a reality check, I frequently get advice from my husband ... just to see what he thinks. When things are really important, I go to him for advice. I ask him almost every morning, "Does this blouse go with the rest of what I am wearing?"

You know, really important things.

So I showed him the pictures. What do you think? His response ... a moment of silence and then, "Carol, I know you love these pictures, but you cannot spend 20 minutes on a slide show of your grandchild."

But as I was looking at these pictures, I saw a quote my daughter has in our new baby's room. The quote:

*"Every child begins the world again."*

– Henry David Thoreau

Every child begins the world again.

We want our children to live in a safe community, to attend quality schools. We want our children to have the skills they need to support themselves and their families. We want our children to be responsible citizens in a democratic society. These are the dreams we have for every child. This is not something we leave to chance, or leave for someone else to do. We know as PTA that every day we can improve the lives of children.

Let me take a moment to share with you the words of a student who recently applied for a PTA scholarship. He was answering the question: In what ways has the PTA influenced your life? This high school senior talked about an arts program the PTA brought to his kindergarten class.

*I haven't become a world-class painter but the lessons I learned have helped me become a more introspective person.*

*In this community, I feel like students feel great pressure to succeed academically. As a high schooler, I see ample opportunities for things that will make us wealthy and materially successful in life.*

*But the PTA cares about something more: They care that we become well-rounded individuals who can look introspectively at the world around us.*

*With that arts program it was never about who got the best grade – everybody got the same grade.*

*It was about who could put the most of themselves into the art ... who could help their friend if they finished early.*

*The PTA cares that we understand each other and that we express ourselves in non-destructive ways.*

*They instilled this moral in us at an early age so we would not overlook it when we became blinded by competition.*



*I still have all my paintings. They serve as a reminder that somebody in this town cared about me and still cares about me now:*

Then he said:

*To PTA. Thank you for caring.*

Every day, in every community, PTA improves the lives of children.

Dr. Martin Luther King once spoke about the fierce urgency of now. The fierce urgency of now. Now, more than ever, the children of California need the PTA.

- In California, 22 percent of children 5 and younger live in poverty.
- And these children from low-income families enter kindergarten frequently more than a year behind in reading and language skills.

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- About 60,000 children in California are in foster care.
- Only 54 percent of California's children who age out of foster care complete high school.

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- In California, students miss an estimated 874,000 school days annually due to dental problems.
- These absences cost local school districts approximately \$29.7 million.
- Childhood obesity is one of the leading health risks facing California today.
- The rate of obesity has tripled in just one generation, leaving today's children the first in modern history with a shorter life expectancy than their parents.
- About 11 percent of school-age children with asthma miss a week or more of school each year.

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- One in three teen drivers has an accident in their first year of driving.
- Car accidents are the number one killer of teenagers.

Now, more than ever, the children of California need the PTA.

- California ranks near last in the nation on almost any measure of education spending – 50th in the ratio of teachers to students.
- We have fewer counselors and librarians and principals and administrators.
- Arts and music have been cut from classrooms throughout the state

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Public education is a public responsibility. No amount of PTA fundraisers can fill the more than \$18 billion in budget cuts our

schools have suffered in the last few years. Budgets are the reflection of our values. They reflect the choices we make as a society.

Whether it is our school district budget, or our city budget, or the budget of the state of California, we need to insist that it protects and invests in the children of California. PTA has an economic recovery plan: invest in children.

You know and I know the world is different today than that moment in 1897 when PTA founded. To paraphrase Madonna, we now live in a digital world. Our children are growing up in a world of iPhones and text messages, of Facebook and foursquare. They are growing up in a world that Einstein envisioned, where imagination, in many ways, is more important than knowledge. We live in an economy driven not by the assembly line of Henry Ford, but driven by new ideas.

Times have changed.

Yes, we still have PTA moms. But we also have PTA dads and grandfathers. We have two-income families and yes, in way too many instances, we have no-income families. And we have children in our schools and our communities living in those families. We have stay-at-home dads and working moms. We have parents who can quote PTA bylaws and parents who have never heard of PTA.

Times have changed.

Going to a meeting now can literally mean clicking on a computer in your pajamas. As times change, for PTA to thrive, we need to ask one very important question, "What do we need to do today to meet the mission we have always had?"

What do we need to do today to meet the mission we have always had?

Not only do we ask that question, but also we listen to the answers – your answers. We know that what worked 50 years ago or 20 years ago – or even 10 years ago – may not work today. Changing how we communicate with parents. Changing our programs and resources for parents. Finding new ways to serve our children does not mean we are changing PTA. Living in a world of high-tech does not mean we forget the importance of the personal touch.

Now more than ever, all children need PTA. Now, more than ever, we need parents to speak up.

- For adequate funding for our schools,
- For a complete curriculum for all students—that includes the arts,
- For smaller class sizes,
- For high quality teachers and administrators,
- For students with special needs,
- For closing the achievement gap,
- For safer schools and communities,
- For healthier children,
- And for greater parent involvement.

Yes, times have changed, but some things never change. PTA's mission is the same as it was more than 100 years ago – to improve the lives of all children. For more than a century, PTA has led the revolution to improve the lives of children.

That revolution created

- Our juvenile justice system

That revolution created

- Child labor laws

That revolution created

- Kindergarten

That revolution created

- Hot lunch programs

That revolution created

- The campaign to get junk food out of our schools

That revolution created

- Parent involvement standards in state and federal law

You know and I know that our victories are not measured by personal financial gain. Our reward is knowing we have helped a child. Let me take a moment to share one of the original purposes of the PTA.

*To bring into closer relation the home and the school, that parents and teachers may cooperate intelligently in the education of children and youth.*

We are the Parent Teacher Association.

As we are texted and Skyped and Tweeted the education reform of the week, let's not forget the importance of parents and teachers working cooperatively and intelligently together. For more than 100 years, we have been the Parent Teacher Association.

*To bring into closer relation the home and the school, that parents and teachers may cooperate intelligently in the education of children and youth.*

This is a critical moment for children and a critical moment for the California State PTA. I am thrilled to be here – at this moment. To listen and, yes, to learn. So that together – together – we will continue to improve the lives of all children.

One more time, repeat after me – even louder than before – so they can hear you in the school board rooms in your community and they can hear you loud and clear in the Legislature in Sacramento. Repeat after me:

PTA! PTA! PTA!