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Convention Release

April 29, 2011

A parent involvement expert and the National Superintendent of the Year share what they have learned with thousands of PTA members at convention

Speakers Anne T. Henderson and Marc Johnson delivered powerful presentations to more than 3,000 delegates at the 112th Annual California State PTA Convention on Friday, April 29, in Long Beach.

Henderson has tracked the research for 30 years on how engaging families in schools can improve student achievement, especially for students in diverse and low-income communities. Her talk was entitled: "Family Engagement: Why School Reform Can't Happen Without It."

"Your power is what is going to turn around our schools," Henderson told the delegates. "You can't let them forget it."

To help schools truly incorporate meaningful family engagement is a task for which "PTA is the perfect partner," she added.

Such involvement has many measurable positive results, including reduced teacher turnover. Schools that have strong ties with families and the community are 10 times more likely to make substantial improvements in math and reading.

Henderson is a senior consultant with the Community Organizing and Engagement Program at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform in Washington, D.C. She has also worked in civil rights and anti-poverty programs for the federal government and for the New Jersey Department of Education. Her most recent book, ***Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships***, written with Karen Mapp, Vivian Johnson and Don Davies, was published by The New Press in 2007.

Marc Johnson, Sanger Unified School District Superintendent and National Superintendent of the Year, is recognized for restructuring his district's schools into professional learning communities focused on student learning, high quality instruction and teacher collaboration. In a two-year time period the achievement gains were immediate and dramatic. Sanger became one of the first districts in the state of California to exit Program Improvement, its status under the No Child Left Behind Act in 2004.

"Teaching without learning is just presenting," Johnson said during his convention presentation. The Sanger district has enhanced learning by focusing efforts on results, learning and collaboration, he said.

The Sanger district has shown some of the highest overall achievement gains in the state; 13 of its schools have been designated as State Distinguished Schools; 12 schools have been designated as Title I Academic Achieving Schools; two schools have been named National Blue Ribbon Schools and all 13 elementary schools were honored for their outstanding character development programs.