

The Parent Teacher Association – A Very Brief History

It was 1895 when Alice McLellan Birney asked herself....

“How can the mothers be educated and the nation made to recognize the supreme importance of the child.?”

In 1895, Alice McLellan Birney expressed a deep concern for the miserable condition of children and families. Because she needed more than the ever present enthusiastic support of her family, she enlisted the help of Phoebe Apperson Hearst. Phoebe Hearst, who had become a schoolteacher at age 16 and later married into the affluent Hearst family, became the perfect partner for Alice Birney and her concerns for the plight of children. Together they shared a vision that would “create an unprecedented movement” of dedication and determination to create a better place for countless children.

On February 17, 1897, in Washington D.C., Alice Birney and her dedicated, friend Phoebe Apperson Hearst, realized their dream. It was the beginning of the National Congress of Mothers.

This awakening of concerns for the welfare of children was being followed closely by Selena Sloan Butler, an elementary school teacher in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1911, with the assistance of the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teachers Association, Selena Butler formed the first Colored Parent-Teacher organization at the Yonge Street Elementary school in Atlanta. Through her relentless hard work, the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers was formed in 1926. Selena Butler was elected the first National President.

The National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers did not unite with the National PTA until 1970 because of individual state segregation laws.

In 1894 the first Mothers Club of Crocus Hill was forming in St. Paul. The Mothers Clubs continued growing in numbers for the next few years. In 1914 groups like, the Minnesota Mothers Council were formed with 24 units paying dues of 25 cents per year. The transition from a Mothers Club to a Parent Teacher Association began in September of 1915. .

While continuing to move this organization forward, in 1958 the National PTA formally authorized the use of PTSA to encourage the participation of students as “full and equal members of their PTA or PTSA”, therefore affirming the value of these student voices in decisions “affecting their education, health, and welfare”.

Today, as throughout our history, we welcome many new citizens of to our communities. PTA continues to value the rich culture these children and families bring to our school communities. Although we may have diverse backgrounds, we share similar concerns for the education, health and welfare of our children. PTA recognizes that these families may need special helps to assimilate into our school communities. Therefore, PTA will continue to advocate for every child with one voice.

“The PTA’s first century serves as a prologue to the challenges of the future. The next ten decades will be no less critical. The National PTA will be no less vigilant.”

As we continue the work of the dedicated individuals that began this honorable movement, many parallels in the efforts of parents in the 1800’s and the parent efforts of today become apparent. We still continue to advocate for children and families in many of the same areas of concern.

- Reducing class size
 - Promoting the teaching of the arts
- Increased funding for public education
 - In 1905 the National Congress passed a landmark resolution calling for federal assistance for the education of children in kindergarten classes and elementary schools.
- Early childhood education for all children
 - At the first meeting of the National Congress in 1897 a resolution was passed recommending the establishment of public school kindergarten.
- Concern for the health and nutrition of all children
 - As early as 1898 PTA pushed for sex education to reduce teen pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.
 - In 1912 the PTA began providing hot lunches to children in many schools.
 - National began “Summer Round-up” in 1925, known today as “Kindergarten Round-Up”.
 - During 1926 PTA began promoting the elimination of smoking by minors.
- Parent Involvement
 - At the first meeting of the National Congress in 1897, one of three fundamental initiatives adopted by the membership that has lasted 103 years is as follows: Home-school cooperation as represented by the partnership of parents and teachers.

- Parent involvement is now the law in regards to No Child Left Behind.
- Juvenile Justice
 - In 1900 the National Congress pushed for legislation to form the juvenile court and probation system. It resulted in legislative action the following year.
- Child Labor
 - After Congress failed to secure adequate child labor laws in the 1920's, PTA turned to the state branches to work for child labor standards beginning in 1933. By 1954 most states had passed provisions, thanks to the persistent efforts of the PTA.

The National Parent Teacher Association has advocated for children and families for 103 years. Today the National PTA maintains an office in Washington D.C. to monitor every piece of federal legislation concerning children and families.

PTA has a proud history of important accomplishments. New York PTA, along with National PTA, is committed to strengthen parent involvement in every school in the 21st century. When parents are involved with their children's education student achievement increases, school environments improve, and communities grow stronger.