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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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THE NATIONAL PTA: NOT YOUR MOTHER'S PARENT GROUP?

(Washington, D.C. 6/19/01) The concerns of parents over the quality of education being delivered to their children have grown overwhelmingly since hard data became available about our nation's schools in the mid-1980s. Far from content with the state of American education, parents became frustrated by a decline in quality and a lack of responsiveness to their concerns by traditional education leaders.

Once they would have flocked to the PTA. But over the years, the PTA has increasingly become a group targeted to endorse school policy, rather than an outlet for school improvement and parent demands.

Not convinced? As the National PTA convenes this weekend in Baltimore, The Center for Education Reform has assembled some questions to help parents, media representatives and policy makers decide exactly how the PTA contributes to improving our nation's schools.

- 1) It is estimated that more than five million parents are taking advantage of some form of publicly-funded school choice, from charter schools to open enrollment to vouchers to contract schools. In addition, nearly 6 million parents send their children to private schools. With one fifth of the nation's families using some form of education other than the traditional system, why does the PTA as a body representative of parents, so vigorously oppose school choice options that would help children?
- 2) The National PTA opposes allowing states and localities to decide how best to spend scarce federal funds to meet the needs of their students. How many parents were consulted on this policy position and how was it decided?
- 3) Are there any issues that the PTA and NEA and other school employee unions disagree upon? (Note: One of the National PTA's three Washington lobbyists is married to a school employee union lobbyist at the National Education Association, the PTA president is an NEA member, and for 15 years the PTA Washington legislative office was housed in NEA headquarters.)
- 4) When 60 percent of parents (and 69 percent of new teachers) believe that teacher pay should be tied to student academic performance, are there any local or state PTAs advancing the notion that teachers should be paid based on their performance?

(more)

- 5) Why has the National PTA been silent and failed to offer any guidance to parent groups and in policy debates about the role of research-based curricula in schools, particularly with math and reading?
- 6) A wide range of education experts agree that modern textbooks are over-reliant on pictures and graphics, contain less factual information, and often contain errors. Will the National PTA throw its weight behind a movement to improve the quality of modern textbooks by educating parents about textbooks' deficits and demanding changes in the textbook adoption process to allow for local decisions that involve parents?
- 7) As a "parents' representative," how does the PTA defend its opposition to allowing all parents to use tax-favored Education Savings Accounts to purchase additional educational help (i.e., private school, extra tutoring, supplies, etc.).
- 8) Does the National PTA support the involvement of its Ohio affiliate that has joined with school employee unions in a lawsuit challenging charter schools in that state?
- 9) Since 1966, PTA membership has dropped from 12 million to 6.6 million, even as student enrollment has risen from 31 million to 52 million. The last time it raised its dues by 25 cents, membership dropped by 400,000. In the meantime, the number of parents belonging to unaffiliated Parent-Teacher Organizations (PTOs) has risen. How is the PTA addressing these membership losses?
- 10) True or False:

National PTA Director of Public Relations Patty Yoxall has declared: "We want people who are committed to this agenda, and if they're not, that's fine. Go be a PTO and have a nice life."

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The Center for Education Reform is a national, independent, non-profit advocacy organization providing support and guidance to individuals, community and civic groups, policymakers and others who are working to bring fundamental reforms to their schools. For further information, please call (202) 822-9000 or visit our website at <http://edreform.com>.