

THE Center for Education Reform



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MEMORANDUM

TO : Education Reporters
FROM: Lissette S. Bishins, Director of Communications
RE: : Important Questions to Ask the National PTA
DATE: June 23, 2000

As the *National Parent Teacher Association* convenes this weekend in Chicago, IL, reporters are often faced with a barrage of interesting but often competing view points from which to craft a story.

The Center for Education Reform is once again providing you with some concrete ways to determine whether the PTA leaders are doing what they say and saying what they mean. What follows are ten questions that you should ask in crafting your reports on the changing face of parent-teacher leaders

The Center for Education Reform is a national, independent, non-profit advocacy organization founded in 1993 to provide 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 www.edreform.com.



QUESTIONS TO ASK THE LEADERSHIP OF THE NATIONAL PARENT TEACHER ASSOCIATION

1. More and more studies show how charter schools improve all public schools because they now must view parents and the community as consumers of education. What does the PTA do to accommodate charter parents and to support the charter movement?
2. States such as Maryland and school districts such as the Dallas Independent School District have recently signed contracts with companies such as the Edison Schools to handle their educational program. To what extent does the PTA work with the parents and teachers in these schools, and what is the PTA's position on contracting schools as a model for school improvement?
3. Many reading and writing programs in America's schools have been under attack for failing to provide rigor. These so-called "fuzzy" programs are the subject of much discussion among parents. Why is the PTA silent on these important issues?
4. The results of international tests indicate that our students rank among the worst in the industrialized world. What can the PTA do to raise education standards and to increase the accountability in public schools, and what should parents expect from educators with regard to improving public education?
5. The number of states using high-stakes testing is on the rise. Does the PTA support high-stakes testing and the use of test results to measure schools? How best can parents use the results of high stakes-tests to identify and help children in need, give credit to successful schools, and demand accountability for failing schools?
6. Recently, a mother in Potomac, MD commenting on her child's preparation for the MSPAP said, "I was shocked at the growth...It was a painful process, and I didn't like the pressure. But he learned." Has the PTA reached out to parents to reassure them that through practice and hard work, their children can achieve much in a high-stakes environment?
7. How does the PTA explain its opposition to school choice when there are parents whose children have been helped by choice?
8. The Florida choice program allows parents to opt out of failing schools. Yet the PTA opposes this program. Does the PTA advocate that parents keep their children in schools that do not meet state standards? Why or why not?
9. Are there any local or state PTAs advancing the notion that teachers should be paid based on their performance? Is it fair to ask that teachers prove their value-added to be retained and rewarded?
10. Does the National PTA support uniform pay scales and collective-bargaining agreements? What evidence does the PTA offer that suggests that collective bargaining helps kids?