PTA leaders and advocates from across New York came together Sunday, February 9 & Monday, February 10 in Albany for the 2020 NYS PTA Legislative Summit and Lobby Day to advocate for improving the education and overall well-being of all students. This year NYS PTA focused on four legislative priorities:

- 2.1 billion increase in school aid
- Non-competitive funding for school-based mental health services
- Ban the sale of flavored e-cigarettes, flavored e-liquids, and flavored tobacco products
- Oppose the legalization of recreational marijuana

During the Legislative Summit, attendees participated in trainings to build their advocacy skills and met with experts to hear tips and receive details on these priority issues. Our guest presenters included:

- Shannon Tahoe, Interim Commissioner of Education;
- Bob Lowry, NYS Council of School Superintendents Deputy Director;
- Peter Applebee, NYSUT Manager of Education Finance;
- Dr. Robert Rotunda, NYS School Counselors Association Executive Director; and
- Nick Niedzwiedek, Politico Education Reporter.

NYS PTA recognized Alexis Spence, a high school senior from Bellport, as the first recipient of the Susanne Smoller Commitment to Advocacy Youth Award. Her own experiences at a very young age, helped shape her determination and commitment to improving the lives of others. Alexis began a Mental Health Awareness week at her school to show people they weren’t alone. Through small groups and assemblies they talked and shared about different mental illnesses and the warning signs. Alexis shared “Many people reached out because they now had an idea of what to do or where to go for help. It feels amazing to know that my actions are helping other people stay alive and that it is okay to seek help.”

Bright and early on Lobby Day, NYS PTA members headed off to the State Capitol for nearly 100 scheduled meetings with Senate and Assembly representatives, informing them about our legislative priorities and expectations for change. Some of our PTA advocates even attended the Board of Regents meeting and a press conference opposing the legalization of marijuana.

While the NYS PTA Legislative Summit and Lobby Day may have come to close, our work to improve the lives of children and families has only just begun. Throughout this legislation session, our PTA leaders and advocates will follow-up with additional in-district meetings, phone calls and correspondence to policymakers, making sure legislators hear directly from the people they represent about our priority issues.

Stay tuned for updates on the successes of our 2020 Embrace Advocacy for Every Child efforts!
As I was recounting the events of my week with one of my fellow officers earlier this month, she suggested I share with our members what a week in my life actually looks like. I thought it was a great idea, so here we go...

It was Thursday morning when I woke at 6am. I proceeded to get ready, make breakfast, see Kai off to school and then begin my regular work day—the one I actually get paid for. I had a busy day at work with meetings and conference calls, and after work there really wasn't any time to relax. First, I had to sort out Kai's bookshelf that was harboring way more things than books. Then I had to cook dinner. Next, I could not put off the arduous task of checking over the very long and detailed script for our upcoming Board of Directors meeting, which thankfully our Secretary had so graciously outlined. With just minutes to spare, it was time for the National LegCon webinar outlining the upcoming event in DC in March. Although my bed was calling, I instead had to drive an hour to the airport to pick up my older son. Of course I was late, and he was exhausted from his very early work day to make his flight across the country. I crashed when we arrived home, only to wake Friday morning to another crazy day.

Friday would be an exciting day though, as we would be in for a very special combination birthday treat later in the evening. But first it was the entire morning and work routine that followed. And, of course I was running behind schedule and missed a PTA webinar for an event I would take part in early the next week. Our Executive Director thankfully had my back on this one, and she filled me in later in the day as I raced to the airport. That combination birthday treat was for me and my son. We checked one off the bucket list and saw the Eagles concert in Atlanta, their first in the Hotel California tour.
NYS PTA has been at the forefront of the advocacy efforts to keep tobacco and e-cigarettes out of the hands of our children, but underage vaping and e-cigarette use remains a serious health risk for our children and new products are being designed to target and entice teens to begin use. Many of these products resemble markers, pens, watches, and flash drives and are designed to be hidden. Though we have made great strides to keep these and other tobacco products out of the hands of NY’s kids, the clandestine nature of these devices makes it imperative that parents speak with their teens about vaping and tobacco use -- but these conversations can be difficult. The following links provide a starting point and some tips about beginning these important conversations with your teens.


Southeastern Region is excited to announce Donnelly PTA received a $1000 grant and materials from National PTA to host a Be Internet Awesome (BIA) Event during the week of February 10-14th. Families engaged with each other in important conversations about raising children in an online world. They learned about the five areas of Be Internet Awesome: Smart, Alert, Strong, Kind and Brave!

One lucky family won a Chromebook!
Open the Door to Advocacy … the Tools to Help You Get Started  
By Patrice Rachlin, Resolutions Coordinator

There are many ways to advocate. As a PTA member or PTA unit/council, you can write letters/emails, make phone calls, attend legislative events, participate in Take Action Campaigns, and write resolutions.

Not sure exactly how to start? Decide what issue or topic is important and relevant to you & your PTA. Do your research … look in NYS PTA’s Where We Stand.

This document is where you can find the foundation for NYS PTA advocacy: our resolutions. The document is divided into 15 sections, which include Education, Safety, Financial Support, Health & Nutrition, Juvenile Protection, and more.

Interested in learning NYS PTA’s stance on select issues/topics?

Investigate our Position Papers page. You will find over 20 relevant position papers on varied topics, such as Juvenile Justice, Opiate/Opioid Prevention, Graduation Changes, Student Assessment, Healthy Lifestyles, & much more.

How can you quickly navigate & advocate “hot topics?” Go to NYS PTA’s Take Action Campaigns page. You can sign up for “alerts,” find your legislator, and access state and national campaigns. Let your voice be heard with a simple “click” of a button!

Of course, if you do not find your “cause” in Where We Stand, then you are encouraged to garner your PTA chorus and write a resolution to submit to NYS PTA by April 1st. All the information that you will need is on the Resolutions page.

Please feel free to reach out to me regarding all things “Resolutions” at resolutions@nyspta.org. Happy Advocating … every child, one voice!
A true honor and privilege of my role. We proceeded with the rest of the Summit, as I tried to remain awake and alert. We had a late meeting, as Summit preps us for what is to come the following day—Lobby Day. Bed now? Not so fast, the Executive Committee had some unfinished business. Working in a close net team does not come without its challenges. We are no different than any other Executive team out there. We have different personalities and passions, but one thing we must stay on point for is the children. So we talked through some difficulties and all stumbled off to bed...it’s already Monday.

How exciting, Lobby Day is finally here! Off we go to advocate for all children of NY at the Capitol. I feel a lot like Bill Murray in the movie Groundhog’s Day and today would be no different from the previous 4. One legislative meeting after the other, making sure to convey what our children need and deserve, over and over again. You get really good at it by the last one, and it is really fun! We end the day with a press conference. I spoke to the reasons why NYS PTA is against legalizing recreational marijuana in NY. It was exhilarating to be surrounded by so many other like-minded leaders. But I was definitely feeling the drain when it finally came time to drive home. I wouldn’t be there long though, just enough time to have dinner with an old friend and former NYS PTA leader and dessert with yet another old friend. Both long overdue, and I had an excuse—my night was free from PTA and my boys were together. I drove back to Albany later Monday night, having some great phone catch up time with my girls during the 1.5 hours of dashboard diva. It had to be done, as tomorrow was another early day. And the best part—the hotel bed had experienced 7 hours of human existence.

It is already Tuesday and off to the Capitol for Yonkers Lobby Day. How incredibly impressive the high school students were when they spoke to the inequities of school funding. The noise level and excitement brought out legislators from their offices—it was a total high. During my speech I was able to share how proud I was of all of them and how they all deserve the same opportunities as any other child of NY. I always thought I had a loud voice, until I found myself almost hoarse on the Million Dollar Staircase.

It was during this time that I reached out to my colleague, the one who encouraged me to write about my week for all of you. I sent photos and a video of what she was missing that day, as she had to leave after her first ever Lobby Day Monday, and was disappointed she missed seeing a real rally. I wanted her to experience as I was, and with modern technology, she did. You see, this is what is all about—teamwork, mentoring, kids. It is what keeps me going, and I am sure you all know now it is not for money, fame, sleep or my kids! I have been away from my little boy for 6 days now—missing out on what is going on at school, home and at hockey, but I do what I do and sacrifice what I sacrifice in an effort to advocate for all kids. Kai was raised in PTA, as my other 3 children were too, and even though sometimes they do not like it, they get it.

Well it is still Tuesday, and I wait with the Yonkers Council President and our Executive Director for the next several hours in the hearing room. The Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Elementary and Secondary Education began at 9:30am, but we are way down the list to testify. It is now that I am thinking about all the things I could be doing at home and at work, but advocacy is what I am here to do today. So we wait...and wait...and wait. I believe it was around 6pm that we finally had our 5 minutes to speak. Cont’d page 6
A Day in the Life of the NYS PTA President, continued

It was so worth it. Another highlight in the books. And, yes, it was bedtime!

Wednesday morning, the last entry day in my week journal to you. Our Executive Director and I traveled by train this morning to Google’s Headquarters in NYC. The scenery was beautiful on the ride I am told, but we instead chose to work the entire trip down. Debriefing events of the week and planning several events for the future. The process never ends or slows, but it is all worth it. We arrived ahead of schedule, amazingly not chasing our tails for once...and the real reason for that is we took the subway! Thanks to our Past President, the two suburban squirrels, as she cloned us, managed to find our way. Thankfully it wasn’t my first rodeo, having lived in Philly and Chicago, public transit was familiar. Not going to lie, our Executive Director was a virgin. We enjoyed a leisurely stroll to Chelsea Market, but of course with Kyle and I, there would have to be some sort of excitement...wait for it...I almost got hit by a NYC taxi. Of course I had the right of way and yelled back at his blaring horn and screeching tires, oh wait, how silly, pedestrians never have the right of way to a NYC taxi! After all that, we managed to enjoy some of the best pizza I have ever eaten, and the most expensive and smallest gourmet donuts. We were fed and ready. Back to Google I went to present a workshop on Internet Safety, and before I knew it, I was in an Uber headed back to the airport. I arrived back home that night just before 11pm. With Kai fast asleep, I kissed his forehead and blessed him, something I have done every night for every one of my kids since birth, and then I crawled into bed.

So there you have it, a week in the life of your NYS PTA President. Hopefully I did not scare any of you off from striving to lead this great association someday.

I am no different from any of you. I am a real person, with real everyday trials and tribulations. I have kids at the forefront of my mind always. I was born to serve. I strive to keep life simple at 53. I am about to get married in the fall and complete my presidency. My platform was to change today, by garnering the past and embracing tomorrow, to get us over the bridge to a place where the younger volunteer was ready, willing and able to step in and up for kids.

And me, well I plan to do a lot of sleeping! My fiance will be very happy. I was tired all over again after proofing this article. That is why I just do what I do, as thinking about it is exhausting. Come right after Convention in November, I will have ventured into my new life and home. I am confident you will all take this association to places I could only dream of, and one day I will be reading about a week in the life of one of you!

NEW WELLNESS PROGRAM AVAILABLE FOR FREE!

In partnership with Fidelis Care, NYS PTA is offering a FREE Health and Wellness Program called Every Child Healthy! We will assist your unit in hosting a health and wellness fair including healthy treats, offer wellness materials to your students and families, and help your school see that Every Child is Healthy!

Email Donna at dtrikoulis@nyspta.org NOW to reserve your spot for April, May or June! Weeknights or Saturdays available!
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Life360 Member
Recently you may have received a notice for an annual review meeting regarding your child’s IEP or Section 504. The Committee on Special Education (CSE) or Section 504 will convene to discuss your child’s educational needs and update it for next year.

**The Invitation:** Meeting attendees will be listed on the meeting notice. If you feel that there is an additional individual who has knowledge or expertise regarding your child’s needs, you have the right to invite them. Perhaps your child has a medical condition and you would like the school nurse to attend, or maybe you want their home tutor to be a part of the discussion. *Timelines and notification requirements vary depending on whether the additional attendee is a school employee or someone who you have privately retained. Reach out (in writing) to your school district for further information.*

**Trust in Yourself:** It can be intimidating to walk into a room filled with experts, all of whom are there to discuss your child and their vulnerabilities. Keep in mind, you’re an expert too, an expert in your child, and as such are an important part of the Committee. You are all there as equal members of a team with the same goal - to give your child the supports and services they need to thrive. IEP stands for Individualized Education Program, there is nobody in that room who knows the individual better than you do.

**Be Prepared:** Review all paperwork beforehand – evaluations, progress reports, report cards, teacher communication, the current IEP. Write down your questions and concerns. Research different goals on the internet, if your child’s progression is concerning you, perhaps their goals are no longer appropriate. Talk to your child, find out what they do and don’t like about school, what challenges they have, what they enjoy, and what they feel would enhance their learning experience.

**Self-Care:** Don’t be afraid to ask for a minute if you need some time to organize your thoughts. Bringing a support person - a trusted friend or family member who knows you and can tell if you need to take a break for a few minutes – may be helpful.

**Reminder:** Parents of high school students should speak to your child’s guidance counselor to ensure your child is on the path to a diploma.
Almost nine years ago, I saw an email from our K-2 building principal about the need for PTA Officers for the following year. If officers weren’t elected, then the unit wouldn’t be able to provide any of the valuable programs and events that our school community was used to. I was a first-time school parent, with my oldest child just finishing his kindergarten year. I had paid dues to our PTA unit in September but hadn’t really attended meetings or been involved during that time. As the emails continued to come weekly, I sent an email to the current unit president that I was interested in more information. Of course, by that time, the only position that was left to be filled was President! I agreed to be nominated and was quickly elected by the membership.

Now I was a brand-new unit president with NO IDEA what I was to do! Where did I turn? First to the online resources (especially e-Learning courses) provided by our National PTA and New York State PTA. I reached out and connected with my region director and quickly attended any functions that I could to learn more about how to lead. As I started my term, I strived to setup procedures and expectations that aligned with NYS PTA best practices (most of which is found in our NYS PTA Resource Guide) and that could be carried out even after my term was over.

Since that initial term as president, I completed a second term at that same unit, then went on to serve 2 terms as president at our grade 3-5 elementary unit and am now leading a middle school unit. Some of the greatest training that I have received has come from attending our state PTA events: Summer Leadership Conference (July), State Convention (November) and Legislative Summit (February). The Summer Leadership Conference (often referred to as SLC) is often referred to as PTA Summer Camp/University – it’s a jam-packed time filled with training specifically geared to PTA officers & leaders, although they also have great information valuable for ANY PTA member. Our state convention offers more training, but also focuses on celebrating awards and doing the work of the association in electing officers and passing by-laws and resolutions that guide our advocacy work. If you want to see a wonderful example of Roberts Rules of Order come alive, it’s at Convention!

Legislative Summit is a time for members to come together to learn about the issues that are being actively communicated to our state government members… and then share those issues directly with state lawmakers in a Lobby Day at the state capitol the following day. I’ll admit it – the first time I attended Lobby Day, I was petrified! I quickly got used to the topics that we were discussing with lawmakers and at the end of the day I was truly proud of the work that we had accomplished. What I wasn’t expecting was the satisfaction I received far after the Legislative Summit/Lobby Day. As I read the news over the subsequent weeks and months that showed different bills and legislation getting passed or rejected, I realized that our NYS PTA voice MATTERS! We have so much to be proud of!

The reality is that all these great events do have a cost – often both in time and money. Personally, I have found the time investment is SO WORTH IT….it has made me a better leader and advocate for both my children as well as the children in my school, district and state. I would often pay for these events out of my own pocket, but that isn’t viable for many people. Costs associated with attending region, state and national PTA events are a legitimate use of PTA funds. After all, you’re able to receive valuable training and networking with others who are doing the same work that you are doing in your own unit. It’s also a way that units can bring fresh ideas to consider and important information that help to inform members of the greater work on their behalf through PTA. If you don’t already have a line item in your budget to send people to conferences and training, I encourage you to seriously consider adding it. Even an initial amount of $500 can send 1 person to 1 state event, and then have the attendee report back to the unit on what was learned. You’ll find that it may help you attract and keep volunteers who are willing to lead.
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We are happy you are on the team!
By Patty Frazier, Outreach Coordinator and Treasurer

Teamwork makes the dream work, or in the case of PTA, the mission work. With over 250,000 members across the state, we are a powerful team and a voice for all children. As, we all engage in the work of PTA, it is important to take time to recognize those who are championing PTA by sharing their energy and their time.

Representatives from the Leatherstocking Region squad were on hand to greet first timers at the NYS PTA Convention this past November. Their warm welcome and colorful booth, complete with goodies, made our new attendees feel like veterans!

Strong membership drive results by their units helped Central Hudson Region post three wins in a row during the Region Membership Olympics held in October through December. The region chose to share the gold medal winnings among twelve of their top performing units. One of the prize recipients was Port Jervis Middle School PTA for almost doubling their state membership goal!

Recently, Orenda Elementary PTA in Northeastern Region celebrated the contributions of two of their Most Valuable Volunteers. These wonderful volunteers received the NYS Honorary Life Membership Award. To make the recognition extra special, their children participated in the presentation ceremony.

For information about the benefits of becoming a PTA unit, contact me at outreach@nyspta.org.

Meet our rookie units!
Welcome to:
Martin L. King Jr. Elementary PTA (Suffolk Region)
South Haven PTA (Suffolk Region)
North Babylon SEPTA (Suffolk Region)
Caroline Street PTA (Northeastern Region)
Early Childhood Program PTA (Westchester-East Putnam Region)

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Take Action!
#WhyPTA | #DoGoodThingsForKids | #TakeActionTuesday

Leadership Award in Honor of Jane Skrzypek

Application due to your Region Director by June 15

NOW Scheduling FREE Traffic Safety Events at schools for April, May and June. Contact Donna at dtrikoulis@nyspta.org TODAY!
Membership: On Our Way to 250k!

We are on our way to 250,000 collective voices to advocate for all children!

However, we still need 8,117 new members to achieve this goal.

Will you help us? Sign up your students and other family members. Spread the word to your friends and coworkers via social media. Ask your local school officials, firefighters, police officers, and other business owners.

Anyone can support your PTA with membership!

Search to Join PTA here: http://nyspta.freesidesystems.net/

MEMBERSHIP AWARDS

Terrific Teacher/Super Staff Awards
Click here for a complete list of award recipients: https://nyspta.org/2020/02/03/membership-awards/

Students Rock Award in February and March 2020
We need more Student Voices in PTA! Contest Details can be found here: https://nyspta.org/home/pta-leaders/awards-and-recognitions/membership-awards/

Men Matter/Male Engagement Award in March 2020
When the whole family gets involved, the potential for student success improves! Contest details can be found here: https://nyspta.org/home/pta-leaders/awards-and-recognitions/membership-awards/

MARCH IS MALE ENGAGEMENT MONTH

Men matter in PTA...Take the PTA Leap!
During the spring of 2017, there were emails circulating my daughter’s school asking if anyone was interested in filling the Vice President position for the PTA. NOT EVER participating in a PTA, let alone participating in anything at her school, it was seriously a leap of faith.

On the evening of the elections, our community suffered a tragic loss with the passing of the newly elected President. After a few days, the immediate Past President reached out to me and asked if I would be willing to step up as President. I had to really wrap my head around all this. Ultimately, I knew it was not only necessary for my school, but for my children and all children. I set an example of team work, humility and just doing the right thing.

Over the past few years, I’ve learned being a man in a predominantly female run organization has a lot of challenges but is also rewarding. To all the dads, uncles, grandfathers and brothers out there, PTA is truly for anyone and everyone!

Kevin Lundell
Male Engagement Specialist, NYS PTA

Men Matter/Male Engagement Award in March 2020
When the whole family gets involved, the potential for student success improves! Contest details can be found here: https://nyspta.org/home/pta-leaders/awards-and-recognitions/membership-awards/

Application due to your Region Director no later than June 15!
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