

## **Incoming President Helen Hoffman's Speech**

I am so excited to be here tonight as the newly elected New York State PTA President. I can't wait to begin our PTA journey together. I use the phrase our PTA journey because I will need all of you to walk with me and do the necessary work needed to address the challenges our children and youth are facing today.

Before I tell you about this journey, I want to share a little something about myself. At the beginning of the night, Dana introduced my family. I truly believe in order to dedicate yourself as a leader in PTA you need a supportive family. And I am so truly blessed to have my husband, Dan, and two sons, Danny and Bryan, who are amazingly supportive. Another hat I wear in my personal life is Vice President of my local school board. My husband, Dan has attended almost all of my board of education meeting over the past 17 years. There have been many nights when my husband is making dinner and serving it as I sit on yet another Zoom or conference call. My son Bryan proofreads all of my speeches and articles. AND I want to acknowledge that Bryan typed Section 3A and 3B of the Pick a Reading Partner Toolkit for me when I served as PARP Chair in 2010. My son Danny, and the reason why I began in PTA, has been my biggest cheerleader, always giving me a hug when I need it most. In February we added a new member and support to our family – Kaitlynn, who is Dan's wife.

I am the oldest of five. You met my dad, Dan, 87 years young. It was my dad who was my biggest role model as a volunteer and advocate. I always remember him being an active member in our school and community, he was always a voice for all children.

I am so grateful to have been born into such loving and supportive family - you met my brother Danny and his wife Sue, and my sister Margaret and her husband, Jerry. The Lane kids as we were referred to growing up. Missing from our family tonight is my mom, who I know is standing next to me in spirit and is so proud of me. My brother John, who has been gone for 37 year and my sister Patricia who we lost this past January. Both siblings suffered from mental health and died too young.

I would like to take a few minutes to share my brother's story about mental health, an issue that so many of our children are currently suffering with. My brother John died by suicide at the age of 23. My family believed John suffered with depression. One day he would be the happiest person in the world, and the next day, he could hardly get out of bed. No one really knew how to handle what he was going through. He was 15 years old the first time he tried by taking pills. Between the age of 15 and 23, John tried many times to take his life in various ways. Our family attended counseling to support my brother, but that did not work. John struggled in school and had difficulty keeping a job. He was a very hard worker when he felt good. It was not until the day after John died that my parents found out that his "depression" was caused

by hypoglycemia, which is low blood sugar. You see, if John ate a bowl of Cheerios, he became high as a kite and the happiest person, but as his body absorbed the sugar he crashed into a very deep depression.

As a survivor of a sibling who died by suicide, I can assure you suicide is never the answer to depression or pain. I know there are others in this room who have felt this pain, however, nobody likes to talk about this. And why?

On a recent webinar, I learned that talking about suicide does not plant the seed to suicided, however, it is an opening to a conversation with our children on what they are feeling and dealing with. We need to address suicide and suicidal thoughts. We need to talk about youth depression and anxiety. We need our kids to know, “It’s okay, not to be okay” and “it’s okay, to be okay.” Our children need to express their feelings, and know they are always normal. I think that was my brother’s hardest struggle, he felt he was not normal.

As incoming President, I established a theme and a presidential pin. My theme and pin give us a platform to continue supporting children and advocating for their needs. And now I am going to ask all of you to begin our PTA journey together. Children are the heart of PTA and together we will raise awareness with many hands. And we sprinkle in a green ribbon representing our dedication to mental health.

My theme and platform focus on mental health, but we have so many other areas we must also focus on. NYS PTA cannot do this alone. Here is my pin and theme: “Supporting Kids, Raising Awareness.” I want to thank Mary Sotomayor who created my pin and Caitlin Daley who helped to Zhuzhing it up. Thank you, ladies.

On our journey, I want us to raise awareness to the wonderful things NYS PTA is doing. We need to raise awareness to the amazing programs we have, such as our Reflections program – which yielded 3 Outstanding Interpretation winners this year. Woohoo!!! PARP – thank you to this year’s winner (Rensselaer Park Elementary PTA form Northeastern Region) for giving kids this literacy opportunity and the love of reading. And the many award opportunities that were presented here tonight.

This year NYS PTA took a strong look at the importance of Family Engagement in our schools and community. NYS PTA plans to continue to raise awareness by providing the tools families need to be engaged in their children’s education and lives. We need to support families wherever they are. We need to raise awareness on the importance of leadership development by training new leaders and retaining the ones we have.

We need to address the subject of mental health and support our kids by raising awareness to know – “It’s okay” however they are feeling. Sonya Verrillo created this beautiful presidential bracelet, seen here on the screen. It says NYS PTA – “It’s okay.” A reminder to all to feel whatever you are feeling. If you are interested in purchasing one, please send an email to [pta.office@nyspta.org](mailto:pta.office@nyspta.org).

In closing, I ask you, my PTA friends here tonight, will you take this PTA journey with me and the NYS PTA governance team. Will you be the voice for every child. one voice by Supporting Kids, Raising Awareness? Will you???? It will take a village and I know we can do it! Thank you.