This year PTA will celebrate 120 years of advocating for children. Since 1897, PTA has worked for all children to better their lives through education, health and safety. Our history informs our work as today’s PTA includes a network of millions of families, students, teachers, and community members advocating for all children. Each of our members, volunteer leaders and local associations are part of this important and continuing legacy. It is because of each of our members that the vital work on behalf of all children continues today.
At a time when women did not have the right to vote and activism was not popular, two mothers, Alice McLellan Birney and Phoebe Apperson Hearst, looked at the social conditions around children and decided they would organize to be the voice for all children.

Birney wrote: “In the child and in our treatment of him rests the solution of the problems which confront the state and society today.”

The two women worked beyond the accepted boundaries of their day and embarked on a national campaign to take action to improve the lives of all children. On Feb. 17, 1897, more than 2,000 people attended the first convocation of the National Congress of Mothers in Washington, D.C. mostly mothers, but also fathers, teachers, laborers and legislators and the largest child advocacy association was created. Selena Sloan Butler, a mother and teacher and pioneer in racial relations especially the rights of children, formed the National Congress of Colored Parents to assure all parents and families would be involved. The two organizations worked together and, in 1970, they merged to form what is now the National PTA.

As the largest volunteer child advocacy organization in the nation, PTA is the conscience of the country for children and youth issues. Through advocacy, family and community education, PTA has established programs and called for legislation that improves our children’s lives, such as:

- Creation of Kindergarten Classes
- Child-Labor Laws
- Public-Health Service
- Hot and Healthy Lunch Programs
- Juvenile-Justice System
- Sex Education
- Mandatory Immunization
- Arts in Education
- School Safety

On February 17, we celebrate the legacy and work of our founders—Alice McLellan Birney, Phoebe Apperson Hearst and Selena Sloan Butler—to better the lives of every child in education, health and safety.

This is a time not only to reflect, but to look forward to the work still to be done on behalf of children.

Celeste Bobryk-Ozaki

“What PTA means to me is advocacy in the community for the school. At the unit level, I have been using advocacy as an opportunity to try and bridge the community to the school. It is important for kids to have a great experience at school, but is also important to get families involved in their children’s education – and even beyond!”

For your PTA: Ideas for Founders Day

February 17

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Display pictures and memorabilia describing PTA’s history along with the programs and activities you are doing at your local school. (Visit National PTA’s Historical Photo Archive at pta.org/photoarchive for ideas.)
- Research and draw up your PTA’s historic milestones.
- Observe the inclusiveness of PTA’s founding by organizing a culture festival celebrating your community’s various ethnic and cultural groups.
- Hold a Founders Day Celebration and take up a free-will offering to support the continuing work of PTA.
- Ask local city or town councils, county boards or other government groups to declare February 17 as “PTA Day” in honor of PTA’s 120th birthday.
- Post pictures and comments on social media that show the thriving active association PTA is today.
- Be sure to use #PTA4Kids and send your stories to us at socialmedia@capta.org.