

# **PTA**<sup>®</sup> *in California*

The Official Magazine of the California State PTA

Winter 2023



**Mental Health is  
a PTA Priority**

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# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

"Every day is an opportunity to make someone feel welcome in your school's PTA."



The school year is filled with excitement and possibility for your PTA. Now is your chance to "Make a difference every day with PTA!"

What are you going to do every day to make the families in your community feel valued and welcome? Here are a few tips that may be helpful:

Create a welcoming meeting atmosphere: Assign an officer or two (or your entire PTA board) to greet newcomers at each meeting. Wear name tags so that everyone can get to know each other's names. Avoid using acronyms or jargon. Explain the programs and events you put on at the school in detail everyone can understand so they do not feel like outsiders. Have everyone at the meeting raise a hand to speak. This prevents one or two members from dominating the discussion. Follow up after the meeting. Thank new families for coming and ask if they have any questions or would like to become involved.

Recruit everyone: Consider every interaction with a new family as a chance to talk about what your PTA does and to invite them to get involved, not just to join. Make it easy to get involved. Set up different volunteer opportunities with varying levels of commitment so that everyone can give of their time and

energy in a way that works for them. Try an online volunteer sign-up or management system. Follow up after asking for input or help. Consider having a volunteer coordinator on your board.

Be available: Update your PTA website frequently. Make contact information for your PTA officers and committee chairs easy to find so members can reach out with questions or to get involved. Link your PTA information to the school website. Hang welcome signs and post notices about PTA events where they are easily seen.

Welcome new volunteers and fresh ideas: Use committee assignments to encourage volunteers to ease into larger PTA roles. Provide job descriptions where they can easily be found and read. Provide members a timeline of when new board members and committee chair people are selected so they know when these opportunities for involvement are available. Engage and start with kindergarten and transitional kindergarten (TK) parents each year.

Build diversity: Listen to your community. Do not assume you know what it needs from PTA. Survey families in their home language, if possible, to see what kinds of programs they are interested in and how PTA can support them. Include new voices in the planning

and execution of events. Fresh feedback and input are a gift! Reach out for wide representation from your community. Ask people to invite their friends. Call new families to personally invite them to events or meetings. On forms and paperwork, remember to be inclusive in your language. Ask for the name of parents, caregivers, or guardians. Bring meetings and interactions out into your community. Do not always expect families to come to you.

Use every day as your chance to make somebody feel welcome in your school's PTA!

For a wealth of helpful ideas regarding engaging volunteers, conducting inclusive and welcoming meetings, and making everyone feel like a part of your PTA, look at the California State PTA Leaders' [Website](#).

*Shereen Watter*  
**President**  
**California State PTA**

# ANOTHER LEGISLATIVE WIN FOR CALIFORNIA'S KIDS

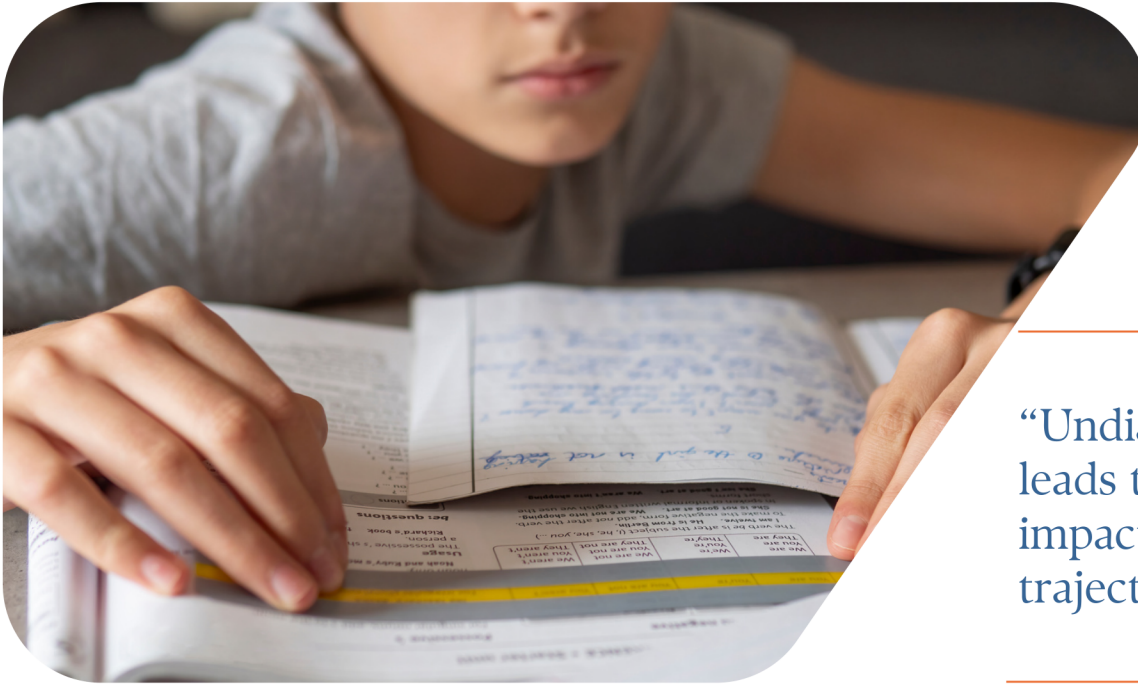
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by Kathleen Fay, Director of  
Legislation & Melanie Lucas,  
Legislative Advocate

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“Undiagnosed dyslexia leads to frustration, impacting life trajectories.”

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Everyone knows someone with a dyslexia story.

Sometimes it's an older person who always thought they just couldn't learn to read...until a lucky visit with a perceptive librarian revealed a learning disorder that could be addressed and overcome, opening up a whole new world of literacy.

Or it may be the tale of a young person who struggled all through high school, puzzled as to why they couldn't keep up with the rest of the class until – finally! – recognition and a diagnosis came along that explained the problem and offered strategies to decode and prevail over those mysteriously disordered marks on the page.

And yet other times, it can be the story of successful political leaders who quietly learned ways to cope with a surprisingly common learning disorder, eventually rising to become a powerful state senator or even the state's governor – as is the case here in California!

The International Dyslexia Association estimates that approximately 10% to 15% of Americans have symptoms of dyslexia, making it the most common form of learning disability. But due to inadequate screening, only about 5% of people with dyslexia are aware that they have it.

Dyslexia is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language (speech sounds) that is often unexpected in relation to a child's other cognitive abilities and effective classroom instruction. It is the leading cause of illiteracy, affecting 30 million adults in the U.S. Most other states (40 of them) already screen their students for dyslexia.

An unidentified reading disability can lead to frustration with school, eventually causing the student to drop out. That's why California State Senator

Anthony J. Portantino (D – La Cañada Flintridge) introduced Senate Bill (SB) 691, a measure that would require elementary schools to screen students for dyslexia. It is also why California State PTA supported the bill.

Screening children early for dyslexia can help to identify at-risk children so that schools and families can get them the resources they need and implement learning programs for them. Students must first learn to read so that later they can read to learn. Properly treating those at risk for dyslexia better enables children to thrive in school and throughout their career.

“Sadly, students with dyslexia far too often go unidentified, untreated and their trouble with reading negatively impacts them throughout their life,” stated Senator Portantino. “While some dyslexics overcome their challenges, far too many bright students [with dyslexia] have lower graduation rates, are less likely to attend college, and go on to have much higher incarceration rates than those who do not have it. By

r accurately screening students at risk for dyslexia early in their school experience, we can help them succeed.”

The issue is personal for Senator Portantino, as he struggled with dyslexia and other learning disabilities during his own time in school and continues to face these challenges every day. Governor Gavin Newsom has also faced difficulties with dyslexia since his youth, learning to quickly memorize text as a coping mechanism. He still struggles with reading and public speaking today. ([In this video](#), Newsom talks with 13-year-old Ryan, who also has dyslexia, about their similar challenges.)

Sometimes, advocacy efforts take a different path than expected. Rather than wait for passage of SB 691 to put laws into place to screen kids for dyslexia, the Governor and the State Legislature used the budget process. The enacted California’s 2023-24 State Budget includes requirements for local education agencies (LEAs) – including school districts, charter schools and county offices of education – to begin screening students in kindergarten through second grade for risk of

reading difficulties, including dyslexia, by the 2025-26 school year. To support this effort, the Budget provides \$1 million in one-time Proposition 98 General Fund monies to convene an independent panel of experts to create a list of approved screening instruments for LEAs to use. Thus, the goals of SB 691 were incorporated and signed into this year’s Budget in the Education Omnibus Budget Trailer Bill (SB 114) – a big win for California’s kids.

To further address literacy issues, the Budget provides additional one-time funding that includes:

- \$250 million to build upon the existing Literacy Coaches and Reading Specialists Grant Program. The program funds high-poverty schools to train (using evidence-based practices) and hire literacy coaches and reading specialists for one-on-one and small group intervention for struggling readers
- \$1 million to create a Literacy Roadmap to help educators navigate literacy resources provided by the state and effectively and efficiently use them in their classrooms.

Senator Portantino stated, “I am extremely grateful that Governor Newsom included dyslexia risk screening in the budget. It’s critical that we are addressing and prioritizing dyslexia risk and early literacy to ensure that our children have the best education outcomes. Screening and early identification will assist students who need necessary support and help educators improve learning outcomes so students can close academic achievement gaps.

“I was proud to collaborate with education experts, activists, professional athletes, and parents on this important issue. I appreciate the leadership of Decoding Dyslexia CA, EdVoice, and the California PTA for their tireless advocacy on the importance of early identification and intervention through screening and I am deeply appreciative of our Governor Newsom who prioritized literacy and made this important change to our education system.”



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“Early dyslexia screening helps students succeed and overcome life-long challenges.”

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CALIFORNIA STATE PTA

# Convention 24

MAY 3 - 5, 2024 | ONTARIO, CA

See you in Ontario!



# SCREENING FOR RISK OF READING DIFFICULTIES

## SPECIFIC MEASURES IN SB 114

...Dyslexia is the most common learning disability; however, many pupils on the dyslexia spectrum struggle every day to read without proper identification and support. By screening all pupils for risk of reading difficulties early, California can help families and teachers achieve the best learning and life outcomes for all pupils and close academic achievement gaps.

On or before January 31, 2024, the state board shall appoint an independent panel of experts for the purpose of creating an approved list of evidence-based, culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate screening instruments for pupils in kindergarten and grades 1 and 2 to assess pupils for risk of reading difficulties, including possible neurological disorders such as dyslexia, pursuant to this section. The state board shall not appoint any person to the panel of experts with a financial interest in the screening instruments under consideration...

...all meetings of the panel are subject to the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act.

On or before December 31, 2024, the panel of experts appointed by the state board shall, at a regularly scheduled public meeting, vote to approve a list of screening instruments pursuant to the review process and evaluation criteria established by the state board... The list shall include screening instruments that are developed both for English-speaking pupils and for non-English speaking pupils, in languages reflecting the primary languages of pupils in the state, to the extent assessments in those languages are available...

Commencing no later than the 2025–26 school year, and annually thereafter, a local educational agency serving pupils in kindergarten or grades 1 or 2 shall assess each pupil in kindergarten and grades 1 and 2 for risk of reading difficulties using the screening instrument or instruments adopted by the governing board or body of the local educational agency... unless the pupil's parent or guardian opts out of the screening in writing.





## Everyone has a dyslexia story. Here's one from Cheryl in Los Angeles:

In kindergarten, my child, who had reached all his other developmental goals on time, suddenly had trouble with reading and writing. Why was he not progressing?

His kindergarten teacher just told me to read to him more... but he already had a great deal of exposure to reading. We wondered if he needed special help. At first, the school said he

didn't qualify for an IEP and so we just got basic literacy support. My child's self-esteem plummeted. He had no progress through 2nd grade. We got him therapy for social-emotional support.

Finally, we paid for an independent reading evaluation from someone outside the school district who was able to diagnose his dyslexia. He was in

he 3rd grade before we understood the source of his problem and began to teach him in ways that enabled him to learn. If we had known the right interventions for my son sooner, he wouldn't have suffered the bullying and torment that he did.

Dyslexia screening means that these kids can get identified – the earlier the better – and get the help they need.

## Rachel's story from San Ramon Valley:

When Rachel's oldest child started kindergarten, he was a nice kid who assimilated beautifully, but Rachel found that what he was supposed to be learning "just wasn't sticking," so she brought it up with his teacher. The next week, her son had been evaluated and qualified as having a learning disability. Years later, Rachel's youngest child – her third – was found to have the same disability, but to a lesser extent.

Rachel's approach to addressing the needs of her own children was to work collaboratively with teachers and administrators. As a PTA leader, she was concerned that some kids' needs weren't being met: they needed meaningful and timely instruction interventions to succeed.

Many members in her PTA community were the parents of children who needed special education services, and so they helped support

each other. It took a lot of trust to negotiate solutions with school district leaders, as opposed to facing one another across an IEP (Individual Education Plan) table as adversaries. But they found this approach helped to smooth the waters, framing the relationship in such a way that the school district wasn't the enemy. The principal and teachers listened.

By the time her third child came through school and didn't qualify for an IEP, a tutoring program from another school was put into place, and this kept a positive relationship with the school (the Barton Reading and pelling Program – a Tier 3 scripted curriculum intervention program). Phonics were emphasized to help children understand basic decoding.

She recommends partnering with your child's teacher, and be open to both your own ongoing learning as well as helping the school team to learn

with you. Doing so is cost effective for schools and aligns well with MTSS (multi-tiered systems of support) principles.

Rachel became an advocate working on behalf of all these kids to build understanding over time. She says it's important to keep in mind that if children are taught with explicit, systematic instruction using evidenced-aligned practices, 95% of these students can learn how to read. She believes that the missing piece now is that California doesn't have data on kids until they've finished third grade and are even a few weeks into fourth grade, so we're missing that window of when we can help them to learn to read. She appreciates that the universal screening legislation just put into place addresses all reading difficulties, not just dyslexia. She urges parents and teachers to develop children's skills as a whole person, and not let their reading abilities define who they are.

# STUDENT VOICE: STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH IS A PTA FOCUS AREA

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By Colin Chia, Student Board Member, BOM, California State PTA

In my freshman year of high school during the height of the pandemic, unbeknownst to me, my close friend was silently struggling with depression and anxiety. Despite this, he was always there for me, always ready to do homework together, and was one of the most compassionate people I knew. However, one day, he took his own life, leaving me and everyone who knew him in shock and disbelief. The loss of my friend has had a traumatic impact on me, making me acutely aware of the importance of mental health.

Unfortunately, this experience is not unique to me. In fact, 1-in-7 young people have a mental disorder such as depression, anxiety, or behavioral disorders that lead to illness and other health issues. Suicide is also the fourth leading cause of death in adolescents. Failing to address these issues in the teenage years leads to future problems in adulthood. California Assemblyman Ted Lieu recognized this and lobbied for President Biden to include in his 2022 Fiscal Year Budget \$1 million in funding for the Beach Cities Health District's allcove Youth Wellness Center in Redondo Beach. (There is also an allcove Center in Palo Alto.)

Originating from Stanford's Psychology Department, allcove supports physical and mental health by providing a safe place for young people, while also lowering the stigma of seeking help. The concept for allcove Beach Cities was a center that was designed with, by, and for youth. By having the same young people who understand and experience identical challenges design the space and offerings, allcove created a service that supports and uplifts the youth in our community. Fortunately, I was selected to be one of eight founding youth advisors to help be this voice and develop the center.

The experience of losing my close friend has propelled me to volunteer in my community to help others who may be struggling too, and I would like to further help bring awareness to our education system. I know that mental health support is a key legislative and advocacy priority of the California State PTA and I believe my experience, passion, and expertise may help further this cause. Although I couldn't help my friend, as a member of the California State PTA Board of Managers I would like to do everything it takes to spread the word about the importance of mental health in schools. I want to help create change and bring awareness to an issue that is plaguing our youth today.

All communities and education systems need more mental health resources and advocates. Remember students are an important piece of the community puzzle. Make sure you are hearing the student's voice and listening to their needs. Learn more about what you can do to ensure Mental Health is a part of the bigger wellness picture by visiting the California State PTA website: <https://capta.org/focus-areas/health-safety/mental-health/>.





# PTA RESOLUTIONS PROVIDE OUR AUTHORITY TO TAKE ACTION

By California State PTA Resolutions  
Committee

“PTA empowers families to advocate for all children, turning potential into reality.”



## A History of Parent Advocacy:

Founded in 1897, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) is a nationwide network of 4 million families, students, educators, and community leaders working at the school site, district, state, and national levels to improve education, health and safety conditions for our children. PTA's mission is “to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.” PTA gives parents a united and powerful voice, a seat at the policy decision-making table, and the tools to influence change that will improve the lives of all children.

## Important guides to PTA Advocacy:

PTA advocacy is led by our members from the local school to the state and national level. Our efforts are guided by PTA authorities, such as resolutions, position statements and legislation platforms that are adopted by either

our national or state organization. For California State PTA that includes our Mission Statement, our Resolutions and our Position Statements.

## Why PTA Members Should Write a Resolution:

PTA Resolutions call attention to a problem and the need for action on a particular issue. They are a major source of authority for California State PTA and its units, councils, and districts to take positions on issues. If a problem or situation has statewide implications affecting children, youth and families, a convention resolution is one way to authorize PTA action. Resolutions, which are created by the membership, are then adopted by a majority vote of delegates at the annual state meeting.

## Proposed resolutions must:

- Be in accordance with PTA purposes and policies

- Be prepared according to criteria specified in the California State PTA Resolutions Procedure Book.
- Follow National PTA guidelines, if a resolution is to be forwarded to the National PTA

Where to start when you believe there is a statewide issue that should be addressed by PTA?

Review the Advocacy section of the California State PTA Toolkit here for details. If you do not see a resolution or position statement on the topic of concern, please contact the Resolutions Committee ([resolutions@capta.org](mailto:resolutions@capta.org)) for guidance.

We look forward to your help in strengthening our voice for the children, youth and families of California.

# REACHING FAMILIES NAVIGATING SPECIAL EDUCATION

By California State PTA Family  
Engagement Commission

“Empowering families in special education fosters inclusion and strengthens our school communities.”

Families whose children have disabilities face a compelling, personal need to navigate the educational system. Their task epitomizes the importance of effective family engagement, which is of course also a PTA priority. Unfortunately, these families often feel that they're in it alone rather than seeing how they fit into our school communities and into PTAs in particular.

California State PTA's Family Engagement Commission wants to help local PTA leaders better connect with and serve these families and share their experiences with everyone in PTA.

The first thing might be to train PTA leaders to better understand the systems that families are navigating and why so many families are still fighting for their children to receive the educational services they deserve under the law.





# “PTA's role is vital in bridging families with special needs to school communities.”



## ACCESSING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES CAN BE COMPLICATED AND STRESSFUL

Children with disabilities often require special services or accommodations to access the educational program. Their families can request an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to determine the services, accommodations, and placement that they need under the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA 2004). Special education services are usually provided to students within a regular classroom setting. If they do not qualify for special education, they may qualify for a 504 Plan.

Most families find these systems difficult to navigate and often feel disenfranchised and disengaged from the school. How can we support families and help them find the tools and resources they need to access public education with equity?

To combat a sense of isolation for families and children with disabilities, PTAs need to ensure that all are welcomed into the PTA community. Erik Carter's twelve dimensions of belonging are a useful gauge to measure your current level of inclusion.

PTAS CAN HELP FAMILIES LEARN AND SHARE THEIR KNOWLEDGE  
PTA leaders should know where families can get reliable information about special education and civil rights law:

- California has seven federally funded Parent Training and Information Centers.
- California also has a network of Family Empowerment Centers, funded by the California Department of Education (CDE) to provide information and support to families navigating the IEP and 504 system.
- There are Family Resource Centers for children with disabilities aged 0-5.
- Disability Rights California has a hotline for parents to call.
- The State Council on Developmental Disabilities has resources for children with developmental disabilities, such as autism and Down syndrome. The Council of Parent Advocates and Attorneys has a list of special education advocates.

Many PTA leaders are unaware of the opportunities that families with children with disabilities have to engage with their district school leadership. Every school district in California is a

member of a Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA), an administration that coordinates special education regionally. The SELPA must have a Community Advisory Committee consisting of 50% parents with children with IEPs. Increasingly some districts also have a district-level special education parent advisory council. A new regulation requires a special education parent on a school district's Local Control & Accountability Plan committee.

These families have valuable experiences to share with your PTA and can be a voice for family engagement in general. Making sure that your school's most active special education families are connected to your PTA is a place to start. Perhaps ask them to join the PTA board, assigned the special task of just reporting on the Special Education and district meetings they attend.

Step number one is to reach out. Ask your school or district administrator for introductions, and talk with families with special needs in your community. Together you can bring these important voices into your PTA, advocating for all children and families.

# WHY PTA?

By Heather Ippolito, President-Elect,  
California State PTA

When people hear that I am involved in PTA, they often ask why. I could easily launch into a talk about our mission and how “positively impacting the lives of kids and families” means so much to me as a mother, an educator, and a person. I could also speak to the many benefits that PTA membership provides - not only our member perks but the resources that are so easy to access. That includes the California State PTA website, National PTA training modules, and the in-person trainings happening across our state right now hosted by our amazing councils and districts.

PTA has inspiring programs like the Reflections art program. We offer grants and scholarships at the national, state, and often at the local levels as well. We help our units, councils, and districts obtain low-cost insurance by pooling our nearly 3000 units together for a robust plan that covers most programming our units, councils, and districts do every day.

But to me, the most significant reason I have stayed active in this organization for nearly twenty years is the system of support PTA offers.

Our local leaders can count on council and district officers for training, help, and guidance. Units are supported by council and district leaders who have been in their shoes. They have been leaders at their school and decided to share their love of this organization at another level. Council and district leaders mentor, train, and support PTA







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"PTA's strength lies in its supportive community, inspiring programs, and empowering resources."

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leaders who have been in their shoes. They have been leaders at their school and decided to share their love of this organization at another level. Council and district leaders mentor, train, and support PTA leaders as well as the site and district administrators who work with them on a daily basis.

Similarly, our PTA districts are supported by our state leaders who meet with them in person at least four times a year. At our quarterly Board of Managers meetings, district leaders work with the state Board of Directors and other leaders from across the state in areas including education, family engagement, health and community concerns, communication, membership, advocacy, and more. These channels of communication and support make our organization unique.

Our Leader log-in site on the California State PTA website offers supports for our local leaders that range from tax support to conflict mediation. These pages can be accessed after creating a simple login using your unit ID (which can be found in your bylaws). They are

full of information that can help make your year go more smoothly. You'll find things like tax filing support (which is supported by an actual staff member who works directly with the Attorney General and IRS) and training modules which can help if you hit any bumps in the road on your PTA journey - but many folks don't realize this resource is available.

Every year at the California State PTA Convention, PTA leaders from across the state participate in the business of our organization, take classes, meet with vendors, and recognize the amazing work we are all doing on behalf of children and families. At convention our leadership team does a stellar job of training all officer positions - giving them tips and tricks to do their job and answering their questions. The support offered at convention is unmatched- and one of my favorite events!

But most importantly, it's the people who are involved in PTA and the support they give that makes our organization different from other

parent groups and keeps me involved. In my twenty years in PTA I've been lucky to be mentored by a PTA leader who has a strong legacy in our council and district. She has been involved in PTA since her now grown children were in kindergarten. I have been trained by some of the finest leaders in our organization both locally and at our state convention. I have been inspired by state leaders who have come to speak to my district or who have conducted webinars and classes that I've attended. The people who love this organization, and who continue to serve in it year after year, make PTA what it is.

I feel so lucky to be a small part of this 126 year-old organization and I hope you take pride in this legacy as well.



# PTA<sup>®</sup> in California

## PTA IN CALIFORNIA

Articles appearing in this newsletter may be reprinted in PTA unit, council and district newsletters. Please credit California State PTA.

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Winter Edition 2023, Official newsletter of the California State PTA, Volume 86, No. 1. Circulation 30,000. ©2023 California Congress of Parents, Teachers, and Students, Inc. All rights reserved. PTA<sup>®</sup> is a registered service mark of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers.